



Synergy

The Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies

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*Academic Articles and
Op-Eds about East,
Southeast, and South Asia*





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of Contemporary
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Letter From the Editor

Dear readers,

I hope this letter finds you well. It is my great honour to present you, on behalf of the Synergy Journal editorial team of the 2017-2018 academic cycle, the third volume of the print edition. Since the beginning of September of 2017, our team consisting of twenty editors, began the operational cycle with excitement and eagerness. I would like to express my greatest gratitude to all Synergy editorial team members for being extremely dedicated and committed to the journal this past year. I would like to especially thank the core executive members who contributed time, energy, and effort during the busy school year on top of their academic workloads.

Based at the Asian Institute, Munk School of Global Affairs, at the University of Toronto, we began working with the supporting administrative and faculty members. Student academic works on Asia-Pacific affairs have a peripheral stage in the community, it was and still remains our mission to provide a stage for student publications on this ever growing region. Founded in the summer of 2015, the journal has gone through three academic cycles, has published over 120 academic articles, op-eds, and event reports. As a part of our annual agenda, we also held an academic panel of “Chinese-Canadian Connections: Investments in Real Estate” in March, 2018. These accomplishments and tasks cannot be achieved by one person alone, but requires the teamwork of a group of passionate and hardworking students. Although there are still many aspects that we need to improve and strengthen, the journal is slowly but strongly expanding and growing. From being an editor in the East Asia section in the founding year in 2015 to leading the journal this past year, I am extremely proud of the progress we have made as a team.

The print volume of 2018 features brilliant student works on Asian affairs, from historically focused research topics to contemporary political affairs in Asia's three main geographical areas: East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The authors who submitted their works include both undergraduate and graduate students internationally who have a voice in Pan-Asia political, economical, cultural, and societal issues. Selected by the core executive members, these articles represent some of the best works published throughout the past academic cycle. You will find topics that not only focus on one geographical region, but contextualizations with the rest of the world, such as urbanization in Mongolia, caste inequality in Kerala, and resettlement policies in Vietnam.

After finishing this volume, if you would like to read further articles published by Synergy Journal, please visit us at utsynergyjournal.org or facebook.com/synergyjournal. I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the featured articles in this year's print volume and share our passion and efforts in continuously supporting student works regarding Asia and beyond.

Sincerely,

Gloria Liu

Editor-in-Chief 2017-2018

Synergy: The Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies

Foreword

In my years at the Asian Institute I have had the pleasure of watching the Institute mature and strengthen. Much credit for the ever-increasing robustness of the AI can be credited to our undergraduates. Their intelligence and unique perspectives are abundantly on display in the pages of *Synergy*.

Like the Asian Institute itself, *Synergy* is international in its contributors and outlook. The journal's students are part of a growing connectedness between North America and Asia, across many diasporas, and amongst persons who call Asia their home.

Instead of isolating, grading, and inserting Asian societies into a teleology of "civilization" or "development," the authors here trouble those frameworks. By keeping power and ideology at hand in their analyses, and by sometimes flagging the politics of representation, they narrate Asia and Asian in new and important ways.

One of the great strengths on display in our University of Toronto students and here on the pages of *Synergy* is a strong desire to build a more just and prosperous future for all peoples in Asia. Our students are not content with platitudes about an Asia that is simply a place of growing wealth and global cities. They have rejected myth-making about "miracles," Tiger economies, the Hindu Mind, or Confucian values: instead, University of Toronto students and *Synergy* contributors are immersed in more nuanced analyses of this massive region and its peoples.

Like its sponsor, the Asian Institute, *Synergy* brings different disciplinary optics to bear on Asia. And many of the authors here are interdisciplinary in method, freely drawing inspiration from "outside" of their primary fields of study. These authors are not invested in bowing before disciplinary forefathers, so much as they are eager to draw from a great variety of scholars, who hail from different times and places and methodologies.

The essays in these pages very much challenge simple attempts to contain and objectify persons and places in Asia. “Asia” and “Asian” were always-already representations fraught with inequality and coercion. Much the same can be said of many ways of knowing and studying the states, nations, ethnicities, and religions of this so-called continent. “Asia,” then and now, has never been contained within its borders. The students here—in their writing and perhaps their ontology as subjects—refute facile ways of splitting Asia from Others and Asians from one another.

Many of these students—in their backgrounds, travels, and cosmopolitan sentiments—surely are subjects who live, as Paul Gilroy might say, more along routes than according to roots. They are, it seems to me, diasporic not only in their movements, but in their ways of seeing Asia and the world. Rather than knowing the world from a privileged and definitive position of authority, these students are part of an emergent scholarship that is feeling out new epistemologies and new subjectivities.

Indeed, instead of writing about the continent from a detached perspective, many of the essays contend with positionality and evince a deep concern for the well-being of Asian peoples. Correspondingly, the essays here implicitly question the assumption that “modernization” will magically trickle down to the poor of Ho Chi Minh City or Ulaanbaatar; nor will “development” inevitably diminish caste inequalities in Kerala or undo the fetishization of female bodies in South Korea. These authors evoke also the plight of the Rohingya and the armed insurgency in the Philippines: there is no neat “end of history.” Instead of writing of a steady march to wealth, human rights, and democracy, these authors present Asia in a more contingent condition.

We are fortunate, at the University of Toronto and on the pages of *Synergy*, to bear witness to and learn from these young scholars. Their own motilities are surely well-suited to ways of understanding an object which is perhaps not an object at all.

Dr. Dylan Clark
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East Asia

1

The Adverse Effects of Rapid Urbanization: A Case Study of Ger Districts in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

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Abstract

This academic article aims to explain the adverse effects of rapid urbanization in the Ger Districts of Ulaanbaatar Mongolia, rooted in Mongolia's unique experience with the collapse of socialism, nomadic migration patterns, environmental pressures, and international aid. *Gers* are traditional nomadic homes that symbolize the rural lifestyle that has recently declined due to harsh climate conditions and Mongolians' search for better education and work opportunities in the city. Urban sprawl in the global south's developing cities gives rise to common experiences related to sanitation related health risks, pollution, inadequate infrastructure, and socioeconomic inequality. Using ethnographic research to understand the issues faced by Ger dwellers, this article aims to understand these problems in the Mongolian historical context and recommends community-led initiatives to alleviate the ills caused by urbanization.

Introduction

Cities across the world are being transformed by the undeniable forces of globalization and concentration of power in urban centres, resulting in a process known as rapid urbanization. In particular, developing countries facing rapid urbanization experience common dilemmas such as poor housing, lack of social services, environmental damage, and social inequality.¹ This research paper aims to examine the unique case of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, where the recent sprawl of Ger Districts on the outskirts of the city have drawn local and international attention to the adverse effects of rapid urbanization. When urbanization occurs in a city, the city experiences increases in density, population, services, diversity, and socio-cultural trends reflecting an increasingly “urban” way of life.²

Internal and external factors such as migration, foreign investment, and the collapse of the Soviet system contribute to Ulaanbaatar’s urbanization.³ In the context of Mongolian culture and history, different views of

studying the city must be employed alongside ethnographic research to understand community needs and identify sustainable solutions and infrastructure developments.⁴ As Mongolia further integrates itself into the global economy, it seeks to better the lives of its citizens in accordance to global standards by cooperating with international institutions and community-led initiatives.

Causes of Urbanization in Ulaanbaatar

The urbanization of cities encourages the development of economic, political, and culturally innovative centres, yet presents a plethora of problems in the context of the developing world.⁵ Many cities in the developing world undergoing rapid urbanization become primary cities of their respective countries, where a large percentage of the country’s population, resources, and capital are concentrated in one urban area.⁶ Ulaanbaatar is Mongolia’s capital city as well as a primary city, since it hosts nearly half of the country’s population and acts as the hub of political and economic activity.⁷

Similar to self-constructed shantytowns, Ger districts are a product of mass rural-urban migration of mostly nomadic people seeking better opportunities in and near the city.⁸ A *Ger* refers to a portable tent-like structure historically used by the nomadic people of Mongolia, often surrounded by a wooden fence.⁹ The explosive growth of these districts since the 1990s are associated with processes such as globalization, centralization, and selective investment patterns.¹⁰

Traditionally, Mongols have lived spread apart on the vast steppes as nomads and herders leading solitary lifestyles with weak community ties.¹¹ Mongolian society was not based on mass agricultural domestication until the Soviet Union introduced new agricultural technologies.¹² This pathway to urbanization differs from the European urbanization model, which was induced by permanent settlements and the “agricultural revolution”.¹³ Therefore, Eurocentric theories of city development that focus on agriculture and colonialism cannot be applied to Ulaanbaatar. This research aims to address the context-specific internal factors such as rural-urban migration and

the collapse of socialism, as well as the external pressures of the global economy as catalysts of rapid urbanization in Ulaanbaatar.¹⁴

International Investment, Aid, and the Collapse of Socialism

The political economy perspective asserts that urbanization is a result of decisions made by powerful stakeholders regarding issues such as international trade, investment, and aid.¹⁵ In the context of Ulaanbaatar, urbanization is associated with economic developments driven by a recently prospering mining industry supported by core nations such as Canada and China.¹⁶ In this way, Mongolia becomes a hinterland for other countries by providing raw materials, thus further integrating into the global sphere. According to world system theory, core nations influence urbanization in peripheral nations such as Mongolia by inducing investment, pushing the rural poor into urban areas for employment, and promoting an export-oriented culture. Furthermore, according to McKenzie’s ecological processes, urbanization is a result

of centralization of popular services and population concentration.¹⁷ The introduction of capitalism after the collapse of socialism prompted new cultural and architectural influences, which shaped the physical form of Ulaanbaatar.¹⁸ Modern condominiums and high-end clothing stores were built across from Genghis Khan Square, indicating the increasing role of corporations in shaping urban space.¹⁹

The new urban order as a result of globalization and external forces seems to be slightly paradoxical, as peripheral countries are both exploited and aided by core nations. International development efforts in Mongolia focused on the adverse effects of rapid urbanization have been in progress since the 1990s. Monetary aid and infrastructure projects have been deployed and funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) (Lawrence). Within this new urban order, the sharp contrast between poorer Ger-dwellers and the inner city rich elite employed in sectors like investment and technology

exemplifies a dual economy.²⁰ Ulaanbaatar's unique city form, moulded by dynamic internal and external factors, is seen in the clusters of tents juxtaposed against modern skyscrapers and condominiums.²¹

Nomadic Migration and Environment Pressures

Ulaanbaatar's relatively better living standards and economic opportunities act as "pull factors" for the mass rural-urban migration of countryside nomads.²² Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the sprawl of Ger districts has occurred rapidly as Mongolia makes its transition to the market economy.²³ Approximately 30,000 to 40,000 people move to the capital every year, with many families arriving from the nomadic grasslands in search of better access to employment and education opportunities for their children.²⁴ This rapid population growth has given rise to an intense housing shortage exasperated by insufficient building materials and skilled construction workers.²⁵ A higher demand for housing has also led to unreasonably high rent prices which many families, especially those from the countryside,

cannot afford, consequently pushing them into peripheral Ger districts where land and housing are inexpensive.²⁶

Furthermore, migration to cities can also be explained by the push/pull pressures of weather and natural disasters.²⁷ In the case of Mongolia, harsh seven-month long winters are difficult for countryside dwellers; the most notable winter of 2010 was known as the “Zud” (“white death”), where millions of herder livestock were killed, pushing families to the city, which had relatively milder living conditions.²⁸ However, unlike the slums or shantytowns in other developing cities, ethnographic research indicates the existence of somewhat mixed incomes within Ulaanbaatar’s Ger districts.²⁹ This occurs due to the significant cultural attractiveness of Ger life, where higher income individuals from the inner city also choose to move into Gers in the summer because they enjoy the space and lifestyle.³⁰ The social constructionist model justifies the popularity of Ger residences, as Mongolian people place great symbolic meaning behind life in a Ger due to its cultural and historical value.³¹ A resident

satisfaction survey found that 69 percent of Ger households enjoy living in a Ger but would want improved infrastructure nonetheless.³²

Adverse Consequences of Urbanization

Ger districts, similar to many other impoverished shantytowns of the developing world, face the detrimental effects of environmental pollution, underdeveloped infrastructure, health problems, and social issues as a result of rapid urbanization.³³ More than half of the residents in cities of the developing world live in poverty, which is exemplified by Ulaanbaatar, where nearly 60 percent of the city’s population lives in the Ger districts.³⁴ Understanding the problems posed by rapid urbanization with an ethnographic approach will help policymakers plan and implement projects specific to community needs.

Environmental

Ger districts, especially in the harsh winter months, experience particular environmental problems caused by household

dependency on coal burning; Ulaanbaatar has the second-worst pollution in the world.³⁵ Due to Ulaanbaatar's particular geographic topography surrounded by mountains, the pollution tends to sit over the city and poses a strong public health risk as evidenced by increasing respiratory illnesses. Furthermore, families must dig latrines near their Gers due to a lack of sewage systems and inadequate waste treatment facilities; high traces of bacteria such as E. Coli give rise to numerous infectious disease cases.³⁶ Therefore, rapid urbanization "without effective urban governance" leads to "high levels of risk from natural and human-induced environmental hazards".

Infrastructure

Rapid urbanization also leads to shortages or inadequate infrastructure, especially in the cities of the developing world.³⁷ The rapid increase in Ger districts has led to a shortage in utilities such as heating, sewage, clean water access, public transportation, and roads.³⁸ For example, the average water supply is located 3.5 kilometers

away from the Ger households.³⁹ Furthermore, the lack of sustainable and affordable energy alternatives leads to the heavy consumption of fuel and coal, thus posing detrimental risks to the environment.⁴⁰ Social services such as health services and education are often located far from Ger districts, thereby adversely affecting resident access. The lack of infrastructural provisions also poses a plethora of other health risks, such as fires caused by faulty electrical wiring and high crime rates due to insufficient street lighting.⁴¹

Socioeconomic

The adverse effects of rapid urbanization on the environment, health, and infrastructure give rise to inequality, high unemployment, and low education rates in Ger districts.⁴² The rural-urban divide seen in many regions of the world prompts high income inequality. 45 percent of Ger district residents are below the poverty line as opposed to 16 percent of residents in apartment areas. Despite moving to Ulaanbaatar for better education, many families are unable to send their children to schools in the city.

Although crime rates in Ulaanbaatar are very low compared to those of other cities in the developing world, they are slightly higher in Ger districts.⁴³

Social stratification in Ulaanbaatar can be explained by certain aspects of the Chicago School theory of urban sociology, which focuses on the physical form of the city and utilizes ecological studies to map out social issues. The concentric model within Chicago School theory divides a city into a developed commercialized core, transition zone, and outward residential area.⁴⁴ This model suits the case of Ulaanbaatar; the core of the city consists of mostly built housing, the transition zone consists of both built housing and Gers, and the outer zone consists of mostly Gers.⁴⁵ Significant socio-economic differences between the outer Ger districts and the inner-city apartment districts exist, as Ger districts on average tend to be younger, less educated, and more dependent on social services. However, despite these detrimental consequences of rapid urbanization, Ger district residents still have a relatively high level of resident satisfaction, and interviews indicate that

residents are hopeful for change to be brought on by the government's development projects.⁴⁶

Recommendations and development attempts

Cooperation between international bodies, the Mongolian government, and community leaders is necessary to achieve and alleviate the adverse effects of rapid urbanization in Ulaanbaatar's Ger districts. By utilizing an ethnographic approach such as surveys, interviews, and community mapping, there has been some improvement in the air quality and waste disposal of Ger districts.⁴⁷ Many of the indicated issues in Ger districts are also targeted by long-term projects such as the Mongolian government's 2030 Master Plan involving urban renewal and housing improvements.⁴⁸

The World Bank has contributed significantly to Ulaanbaatar by introducing a greater number of water pipes and energy efficient stoves in Ger districts. International donors such as the ADB, UNDP, and JICA

exemplify the global effort to alleviate the pressures of urbanization in an increasingly globalized and developing country.⁴⁹

Short-term improvements such as plastic lining of the latrines allows waste to be picked up by disposal trucks, thus providing an increased source of comfort and living standards for residents in Ger districts.⁵⁰ The Mongolian government's 2030 master plan is a \$28 billion attempt to construct 10 regional towns, 3 satellite cities, railway, transit, and other infrastructural improvements.⁵¹ The ultimate goal is to implement "well defined land and housing policies"⁵², to improve resident safety, address environmental concerns, and to move 70 percent of families into modern flats.⁵³

However, this approach to development is highly contested by locals, who must be willing to sell their land and move away from their traditional lifestyles.⁵⁴ Urban renewal focused on "slum clearance" arises due to the view that slums impede investment, yet is not always a successful approach. Post-modernist urbanists stress incorporating, imitating and reusing traditional urban forms and structures.⁵⁵ Yet,

critics view this Master Plan to be unfeasible due to its costliness, preferring small scale infrastructure redevelopments which are quick and cheap.⁵⁶

Installing new infrastructure in informal settlements like Ger districts well after their development is expensive and time-consuming.⁵⁷

According to a survey of residents in Ger districts, their most favoured approach is to develop the countryside by building schools and increasing employment opportunities, thereby decreasing the need for rural populations to move to Ulaanbaatar.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the participation and mobilization of community members in the development of their own neighbourhoods is essential in finding community-specific resolutions. UN Habitat's approach focuses on empowering communities in dealing with settlement and sustainable urban development.⁵⁹ An example of community-led processes in Ulaanbaatar's Ger districts is the use of community mapping for spatial analysis to identify gaps in public services. Mapping helps prioritize resources and investment with community

members and is used to find optimal locations for developments such as water pumps.⁶⁰ Smaller scale improvement projects such as planting trees, communal gardens, and housing upgrades positively influence physical and social conditions within Ger districts.⁶¹

Conclusion

Overarching global trends have influenced and are reflected by the Ger districts of Ulaanbaatar. Residents of these districts face issues common to the city-dwellers of the developing world,

such as environmental destruction, infrastructure inadequacy, and social inequality.⁶² However, a context-specific approach is necessary to understand the unique developments of and rapid urbanization process in Ulaanbaatar, including the collapse of socialism, the boom of the mining industry, and nomadic migrations. An increasingly globalized and developing city with the inability to provide basic services for a significant portion of its population turns to global institutions and ethnographic, community-led strategies to alleviate the adverse effects imposed by rapid urbanization.

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³ Choongik Choi. 2012. "Inexorable rise of Ger in Mongolia: demolition for redevelopment or conservation for improvement?" *International Review of Public Administration*, 17 (2): 121-139; Brian Sinclair. "Ger districts: Chronicles, explorations and considerations of Mongolia's informal settlements." 2008.

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²⁰ Ibid; Hiller.

²¹ Carlos Barria, “Inside Mongolia’s Ger District.” *Reuters*. August 17, 2013. <http://blogs.reuters.com/photographers-blog/2013/08/07/inside-mongolias-ger-district/>

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2

China's Sovereign Wealth Funds: Rule-Takers, Rule-Makers, Rule-Breakers

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Introduction and Outline

At the 19th National Convention of the Communist Party of China, Chinese president Xi Jinping described his vision of a new era for China with the following words: “It will be an era for the Chinese people of all ethnic groups to work together and work hard to create a better life for themselves and ultimately achieve common prosperity for everyone. It will be an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater

contributions to mankind.”¹ Later in his speech, President Xi added that even though China does not pose a threat to any states in this “new era”, “no one should expect ... [China] to swallow anything that undermines ... [China’s] interests”.² President Xi’s three-hour long address left many Western media outlets observing a twofold shift in his narrative, (1) shifting out of the narrative of China as a poor state trying to build itself up from its ashes into the narrative of a strong global player taking part in the making of a “new era”, and (2) shifting

out of the narrative of a leader who is trying to uphold the previously developed visions of previous leaders, into the narrative of introducing a “new era,” ideated and proposed by Xi Jinping himself, like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping had done under their leadership.³

Outside of this grand vision, President Xi’s speech also outlined specific economic policy and development goals, such as “... [to] deepen reform of the investment and financing systems, and enable investment to play a crucial role in improving the supply structure”⁴ and to develop “... new ways of making outbound investments, ... form globally-oriented networks of trade, investment and financing, production, and services, and build up our strengths for international economic cooperation and competition”.⁵ The special focus that international trade and investment received in his remarks was seen as in line with a changing China, a China that is globally-oriented and develops and implements its own policy objectives internationally. While China’s sovereign wealth funds did not receive a specific mention at

President Xi’s address, his mention of the “globally-oriented networks of trade, investment and financing” as well as “reform of the investment and financing systems” alluded to these recently established extensions of the Chinese government. Sovereign wealth funds are state-owned investment vehicles that invest globally on behalf of the state that they are operated by. Their purposes range from stabilizing governments to accumulating savings for future generations, from managing the foreign reserves to offsetting the future lack of valuable natural resources such as oil or gold. With more than a hundred active sovereign wealth funds worldwide, more and more investment professionals call for the establishment of a more robust international regulatory framework with the purpose of streamlining investment decisions of sovereign wealth funds. Currently, the world’s largest ten sovereign wealth funds include three Chinese funds, namely the China Investment Corporation (~\$813.8 billion) at number three, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange [SAFE Investment Company] (~\$441 billion) at number seven, and the

National Social Security Fund (~\$295 billion) at number ten. While most states have one sovereign wealth fund, China currently has more than four, each of which serves a different purpose and acts independently from the other ones.

As seen from President Xi's address, China is espousing the emergence of a new era, a new era in which China is no longer a passive bystander troubled merely by its own socio-economic development but an era in which China is one of the main actors taking full charge in the construction of this new era. Borrowing the terminology first introduced by Hamel, Xi Jinping's address reinstates the notion that China is not merely a rule-taker anymore, but is transforming itself to become a rule-maker instead.⁶ I argue, in this paper, that the state-sponsored development and the diversified utilization of sovereign wealth funds as national investment vehicles is just another step in the Chinese economic statecraft, a statecraft that ultimately aims to stabilize governmental investment and obligations while responsibly managing foreign reserves.

However, to what extent the Chinese sovereign wealth funds are a part of China's transformation from being a rule-taker to a rule-maker is a question that is still yet to be answered within the relevant branches of academic literature. Therefore, in this research paper, I also try to solve the puzzle around how the Chinese sovereign wealth funds fit into China's construction of this "new era," and the consequential transition from being a rule-taker to a rule-maker. In that spirit, I ask the following research question: *is China showcasing tendencies of a rule-taker, rule-maker or a rule-breaker when it comes to China's deployment of state capital through its sovereign wealth funds?* What does the Chinese sovereign wealth funds tell us in terms of China's self-espoused transformation from a rule-taker to a rule-maker? This mostly descriptive analysis is trying to recognize common and divergent patterns across Chinese sovereign wealth funds to see whether the current policies and practices are best described as conforming to the definition of a rule-taker, a rule-maker, or a rule-breaker. My interest is ultimately to get to the core of whether China is a

challenger to a rules-based order through its sovereign wealth fund industry, and if that is the case, why there may or may not be a variation in regards to its approach to its sovereign wealth funds.

To sufficiently respond to the questions posed, I first present a concise literature review on sovereign wealth funds, Chinese political economy, and the rule-maker/rule-breaker/rule-taker framework. A multitude of competing theoretical approaches to classifying states like China regarding their deployment of state capital through sovereign wealth funds are explicated and contrasted. Through reviewing the sources of existing secondary literature, my contribution to the existing literature is positioned appropriately. Following the literature review, I define the concepts of a “rule-maker,” “rule-taker,” and “rule-breaker,” along with an explanation of the rules themselves, in this case the Santiago Principles that are meant to be guidelines that sovereign wealth funds voluntarily choose to follow. Lastly, the three aforementioned major sovereign wealth funds are investigated in more detail in terms of their

purpose of establishment, investment practices, and investment returns, and how they are aligned with the international rules and legislation regarding sovereign wealth funds, namely the Santiago Principles. Annual reports of the China Investment Corporation (CIC), the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE), and the National Social Security Funds (NSSF) from the years of 2015 and 2016, are investigated to gather evidence around the ways in which these three Chinese sovereign wealth funds may be using their investments in line or outside of the Santiago Principles. The investigation is concluded through reinstating that the evidence that has been analyzed in the previous chapter shows that China is predominantly a “rule-maker” with occasional tendencies of a “rule-breaker” when it comes to its sovereign wealth funds. The systematic analysis throughout the paper will be overlaid with statements from Chinese state-employees in terms of what they see the role of sovereign wealth funds to be in the evolution of modern China.

It is my hope that the qualitative analysis of primary sources

interwoven with international relations literature will ensure the inclusion of metrics, which are hard to quantify, and produce a significant contribution to the literature on sovereign wealth funds, and Chinese political economy at a unique cross point that unfortunately has been repeatedly neglected in the present literature.

Literature Review

Alhasel's literature review of sovereign wealth funds conclude that the main investment interests of sovereign wealth funds are economic rather than political. Included in that literature review is Balding's investigation of whether the accusations that sovereign wealth funds are foreign investment tools that destabilize certain markets, harm certain governments, and politically disrupt weaker economies hold true.⁷ He concludes his investigation through stating that for the time being there is not sufficient evidence to support such claims that sovereign wealth funds are purposefully trying to distort financial markets. He argues that sovereign wealth funds do not yet

have enough weight in the market to make massive impacts that are truly observable, and that they seem to be acting as rational economic agents according to the present investment summaries and financial data points.

In his Harvard Business Review article, Hamel first introduces the rule-taker, rule-maker, and rule-breaker differentiation, in his attempt to describe the roles corporations play in competitive markets. Hamel argues that institutions constantly transition between these three categories; when they start off as being merely rule-takers, they may transition to break those rules when they find an opportunity to do so, followed by actually starting to establish their own rules.⁸ Wang argues that China as a rising power is no longer a rule-taker; it is somewhere between a rule-maker and a rule-breaker, as it supplies incremental reforms to international institutions. His argument is positioned as an explanation of increased Chinese influence over international political and economic institutions, but does not particularly focus on sovereign wealth funds.⁹

Similar to the rule-maker/rule-taker/rule-breaker framework in business literature, international relations literature includes Organski's power transition theory, in which he distinguishes between revisionist states and status quo states. According to Organski's analysis, a revisionist state is one that is dissatisfied with its status quo in the present international system, and is working hard to revise that status quo. Status quo states in the meantime are the powerful and influential nations who have significantly benefited from the emergence of western liberalism at a large scale, and view the current international law and free market economics as integral parts of the international order that must be upheld. Following Organski's categorization, Chin argues China is a revisionist state when it comes to its approach to money in the global financial system. He examines the specifics of China's call for a global systemic reform to establish an "*actual* multi-centered and diverse monetary system" and argues that while China's first response into its integration to the global financial infrastructure was to abide by the established system to comprehend its intricacies and

established hierarchies, a later response involved actively pushing for the revision of these established hierarchies to bring RMB as close as possible to the status quo of USD in the global stage.¹⁰

Kastner, Pearson, and Rector used a similar framework to Hamel and Organski, this time to describe China's approach to international governance institutions. Under the framework of invest/hold-up/accept, they question the conditions under which China chooses to build its own international governance institutions and actively lobby many nation-states to join them in these creations (investing), chooses to accept international governance institutions' already established regulations and participate in them (accepting), or chooses to complicate the workings of currently established international governance institutions by attempting to leverage its influence to actively reorder existing arrangements (holding-up). Chow exemplifies my instances of China choosing to hold up with the purpose of accelerating its own rise as a global economic power. He emphasizes the policies that

undermine the competitiveness of foreign-owned multinational companies operating within China.¹¹ The undermining of the foreign-owned multinational companies at homes goes hand-in-hand with another hold-up strategy of giving China's own state-owned enterprises an advantage when they choose to expand their investments abroad, particularly in the developing world.¹²

Outside of theoretical frameworks, Norris, in his investigation of Chinese political economy, focuses on China's sovereign wealth funds. He argues that Chinese sovereign wealth funds pose strategic concerns for countries like the United States, where the Chinese investment goals are implemented. In line with Chow's observations about China's "hold-up" strategy at limiting the competitiveness of investment at home, Norris argues that China's investments in the United States exploit the absence of robust regulation which typically forbids foreign states from asserting too much influence in domestic affairs through the governance of certain key corporations. Liew and He, on the other hand, extend

an argument about how the institution of Chinese sovereign wealth funds were aimed at instituting a "harmonious society" through economic empowerment and independence. They argue that the creation of the CIC, China's largest sovereign wealth fund is a direct result of the power struggle between the People's Bank of China and the Ministry of Finance in asserting more influence over macroeconomic policy and fiscal affairs. They mention that Chinese officials do recognize that China's sovereign wealth funds could easily end up as an instrument for domestic industry support when needed as well as an instrument for investing state savings in productive domestic and overseas endeavors. Therefore, both investigations of Norris, and Liew and He argue that Chinese sovereign wealth funds are not merely following internationally determined implicit norms but are utilized to further Chinese strategic interests at home and abroad when needed.¹³

Having paraphrased a significant portion of the research that investigates the Chinese sovereign wealth funds, it is clear that my research intervenes

within the current literature through combining the literature around China being a rule-taker, rule-maker, or a rule-breaker along with the literature around sovereign wealth funds. The rule-taker/maker/breaker framework has not been used to analyze sovereign wealth funds in academic publications at this point in time, so I utilize the rule-breaker/maker/taker framework to (1) highlight that there are written rules around sovereign wealth fund management that China may explicitly abide by. However, there also exists an alternative set of ambitions, not in line with these written regulations, that China pursues, and (2) that the Chinese sovereign wealth funds are able to explain a portion of China's transformation from being merely a rule-taker to being somewhere in between a rule-maker and a rule-breaker. It is the conviction of this research project that the rule-maker/taker/breaker framework is able to add a new dimension to the existing literature around sovereign wealth funds. Also, it is implied that a robust discussion of sovereign wealth funds as a case study of rule-maker/taker/breaker literature surrounding Chinese political economy is able to

strengthen the claims of China's transformation as espoused by Xi Jinping's speech in the 19th National Convention of the Communist Party of China. China is, now, somewhere in between a rule-maker and a rule-breaker, and its sovereign wealth funds are no different in that respect.

Rule-Taker/Maker/Breaker Framework

Before pursuing a fully-fledged analysis of how Chinese sovereign wealth funds contribute to China's economic transition on the world stage, I will first discuss why I chose the rule-taker/maker/breaker framework over other similar frameworks developed by different scholars. Then, I will move on to explain what rule-taker, rule-maker, and rule-breaker specifically means, and what evidence from the sovereign wealth funds front would constitute evidence that a particular country is acting in accordance with the definition of one of these categories.

The reasons behind why I chose to construct this investigation

using the rule-taker/maker/breaker framework are threefold. First and foremost, when compared to the invest/hold-up/accept or the revisionist/status quo frameworks, the rule-taker/maker/breaker is the most business-appropriate.

Considering that sovereign wealth funds are more similar to independent business and mutual funds in nature than sovereign states in their role and function, this framework seems to be the most applicable. Secondly, rule-taker/maker/breaker framework allows for a rather effortless transition between different categories; it is not merely an action that a state takes, but a rather fluid state that the institution finds itself at. Thirdly, unlike the other two theoretical approaches, the rule-taker/maker/breaker framework reaches a normative conclusion that “strategy must be revolution”, advocating the most ideal strategic position for a company to be at as the spot between a rule-maker and a rule-breaker.¹⁴ This normative conclusion seems to be more in line with China’s ideal way to be, its own ideated normative conclusion.

For the purposes of this investigation, we follow Hamel’s descriptions of the three categories. Therefore, a rule-maker would be defined as an incumbent that built the industry in the first place, a rule-maker is the creator and protector of the industrial orthodoxy, a part of the established oligarchy.¹⁵ A rule-taker is an institution that follows the paths that have been charted by these incumbents that built the industry in the first place; a rule-taker pays homage to the incumbents. A rule-taker does not challenge the status quo in any way besides inserting itself into the status quo, following the incumbent’s strategy, and through hard work and diligently attempting to overpower it. The last category, a rule-breaker, is an institution that is set on overturning the pre-established order. It does not merely want to carve a space for itself, but wants to overturn the entire space so that it can carve a larger space, while the incumbents get to cover smaller ones. The rule-breakers are the revolutionaries, the radicals, and the malcontents.¹⁶ It is important to note at this point that the definitions outlined above differ significantly from Wang’s

definition of what a rule-maker and a rule-taker means in his investigation of China.¹⁷ According to the set of definitions that he employs, a rule-maker promotes global reforms of existing arrangements, while a rule-breaker creates its own arrangements.

Therefore, in this investigation, the evidence of sovereign wealth funds would be contrasted against the backdrop of the definitions of rule-maker, rule-breaker, and a rule-taker originally provided by Hamel. If a Chinese sovereign wealth fund has been among the ones who have established the current status quo, that fund would be a rule-maker; if the fund has been accepting the status quo without having had a contribution in its generation, the fund would be a rule-taker; and if the fund has been constantly attempting to overturn the pre-established order through deviating from the previously agreed practices and regulations, the fund would be a rule-breaker. Considering that the fund is state-owned, and is closely aligned to the interests and needs of the Chinese state, the categorization of the sovereign wealth fund would provide evidence about the potential

categorization of the Chinese state itself.

Generally Accepted Principles and Practices - “The Santiago Principles”

Upon establishing the definition of a rule-taker, a rule-maker, and a rule-breaker, it is important to now define the “rule” that the agent makes, takes or brakes. In other words, what is the rule that this investigation is testing China’s act of taking, making or breaking against? Considering that the emergence of sovereign wealth funds is a relatively recent phenomenon, even when considered under the scope of the short history of modern finance, there really is not a multitude of competing organizations or alliances on the ground. However, there exists a single membership-based organization that some sovereign wealth funds choose to take part in, the International Forum on Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSWF). Boasting more than thirty current members, IFSWF was initially founded out of an IMF working group in 2009 with the intention of establishing

a voluntary organization whose members are committed to working together and strengthening the community through dialogue. The forum provides a set of guidelines that all members have voluntarily endorsed, known as the Generally Accepted Principles and Practices (GAPP) or “the Santiago Principles,” which are aimed at providing guidance on accountability arrangements, the appropriate conduct of investment practices, and the conditions necessary for the promotion of cross-border investments and openness. The 24 principles are based on the four principles following *guiding principles* of the sovereign wealth funds:

- i. “To help maintain a stable global financial system and free flow of capital and investment;
- ii. To comply with all applicable regulatory and disclosure requirements in the countries in which they invest;
- iii. To invest on the basis of economic and financial risk and return-related considerations; and

- iv. To have in place a transparent and sound governance structure that provides for adequate operational controls, risk management, and accountability.”¹⁸

While the guiding principles listed above assign an existential purpose to the sovereign wealth funds, the Santiago Principles offer practical advice about the management, investment style, risk analytics, logistical support, and upkeep needs of any sovereign wealth fund. Some select examples from the twenty-four can be found below:

“GAPP 7. Principle. The owner should set the objectives of the SWF, appoint the members of its governing body(ies) in accordance with clearly defined procedures, and exercise oversight over the SWF’s operations.

GAPP 11. Principle. An annual report and accompanying financial statements on the SWF’s operations and performance should be prepared in a timely fashion and in

accordance with recognized international or national accounting standards in a consistent manner.

GAPP 15. Principle. SWF operations and activities in host countries should be conducted in compliance with all applicable regulatory and disclosure requirements of the countries in which they operate.”¹⁹

Considering the rather structural and specific nature of the 24 principles, the analysis conducted in this paper will concentrate on the alignment of Chinese sovereign wealth funds with the four guiding principles established as the basis of the Santiago Principles. While Santiago Principles are only applicable to whether a sovereign wealth fund is a rule-maker, a rule-taker, or a rule-breaker, the guiding principles that form the basis of the Santiago Principles in the first place carry significations with themselves that are transferrable to the Chinese state itself. A sovereign wealth fund that does not abide with the

purpose of a sovereign wealth fund established through the principles, is a fund that breaks the rules; a fund that built those purposes in the first place is a fund that can be considered a rule-maker; and a fund that operates mostly in line with the expectations of these four guidelines is a true rule-taker.

CIC and SAFE: Chinese Sovereign Wealth Funds as Case Studies

In this part of the investigation, two Chinese sovereign wealth funds, CIC and SAFE will be investigated as case studies. The following discussion will be mostly based on the policies and practices outlined in their annual reports, as well as some opinions and reflections expressed by their management teams. First and foremost, one can claim that the Chinese state took on the role of a rule-maker, as CIC was not only one of the founding members of the IFSWF, but also one of the co-drafter of the twenty-four Santiago Principles. As detailed on the 2016 annual report of the CIC:

“To assure countries and markets that sovereign wealth funds were well-organized to invest as economic and financial entities, sovereign wealth funds with over \$500 million of assets came together and established the International Working Group on Sovereign Wealth Funds in April 2008. With the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), they drafted the Santiago Principles. As one of the drafters, CIC was involved in all the discussions and revisions of the Santiago Principles. The Santiago Principles were released in October 2008, and the International Working Group was renamed the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds in April 2009. CIC was a charter member and then-CIC Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Jin Liqun was elected as the IFSWF’s First Deputy Chair.”²⁰

As seen from the passage above, together with other sovereign wealth funds, CIC was one of the rule-makers in the sovereign

wealth fund industry. It was one of the major incumbents that participated at the literal legislation of the principles that will guide the industry in the many years to come. They, establishing the status quo along with other founding members of the IFSWF, worked hard at promoting public understanding of sovereign wealth funds and their investment activities, implementing the Santiago Principles, and buttressing the IFSWF. CIC hosted the 3rd annual meeting of IFSWF and led the development of the Beijing Declaration that was released shortly after the annual meeting. The Beijing Declaration “urged countries to work together for global economic recovery and stabilization of the financial market, and to help develop an open, fair and non-discriminatory investment environment for sovereign wealth funds”.²¹ At the very same meeting, Mr. Jin Liqun from the CIC was elected Chair of the IFSWF. In March 2016, CIC continued to support the making of regulations about sovereign wealth funds through attending the legislative meeting at Baku. At the March 2016 meeting, participants designed working guidelines on knowledge-sharing

and on improving the IFSWF's internal research capability. To this day, the CIC seems to be continuing to make the rules of the sovereign wealth funds industry. At the time of the writing of this article, the home page of CIC presents the following news:

“On November 9th, Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, and Donald Trump, the President of the United States of America attended a ceremony of utmost importance. In this ceremony, Tu Guangshao, President of the CIC, and Lloyd Blankfein, Chairman and CEO of the Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. established the China-US Industrial Cooperation Partnership, L.P.. This partnership is intended to establish a fund, funded by CIC's investments with a broad mandate to invest in American companies that have developed or can develop material business connections to China. CIC's website says that the fund's intention is to “develop a

stronger China-US trade and investment relationship.”

The agreement described on CIC's is particularly remarkable as it is a public-private international partnership established by a sovereign wealth fund, with the goal of developing stronger connections between Chinese and American companies. From the remarkable agreement reached with the American bank Goldman Sachs, one can see the ways in which CIC is stepping beyond the established four guidelines of the Santiago Principles. CIC, showcases through this deal, that it is not merely using its investments as a tool to generate investment income, but also as a state-owned vehicle of constructing linkages between Chinese and American firms, assuming the role of a facilitator of trade with and investment in China. On this topic, the CIC 2016 Annual Report stated the following priorities:

“Focusing on special regions and industries from the China angle, we helped Chinese companies connect with foreign companies and facilitated investment

cooperation. We also accelerated CIC's overseas institutional development, employing foreign investment and multilateral fund operations to complete high-profile direct investment projects in several major countries.

Also, in 2016, CIC Capital increased investments in infrastructure, particularly high-quality core infrastructure assets. It collaborated with peer institutions, asset managers, sector investors and other like-minded partners, and carried out landmark projects in ports, railway, pipeline and telecommunication in Europe, Oceania, and Latin America.”²²

The aforementioned priorities further confirm CIC's role as a rule-breaker in the sovereign wealth fund industry, as they approach the role of a sovereign wealth fund not solely from an investor standpoint, but also as an investment cooperation and collaborator standpoint. While the Santiago Principles aim to position sovereign wealth funds

solely as investment entities, CIC's practices depict that what CIC sees itself as accomplishing is much farther than that. However, the Former Chairman and CEO of CIC, Ding Xuedong, argues “First, as a financial investor, we should pursue reasonable commercial returns as a primary objective”.²³ His statement seeks to affirm CIC's commitment to the Santiago principles, but also leaves open an arena of possibilities for a second and third order of objectives as well. A further indication of CIC's trade facilitator, negotiator, and collaborator vision of itself can be seen from the commitment below:

“CIC is committed to mitigating the negative impact of investment protectionism and fostering an open, fair, and nondiscriminatory environment for international investment through open and honest dialogues. In 2015, senior executives of CIC visited government agencies and business partners in many countries and regions and were invited to a series of important bilateral and

multilateral conferences and dialogues, including the China-US Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade, the China-UK Business Summit, the China-Russia Investment Cooperation Committee, the French Strategic Investment Attractiveness Council, and the China-Japan CEO and Former Senior Officials' Dialogue."²⁴

What about the goals and objectives that the Chinese sovereign wealth funds point on explicitly in these reports? In its extensive 2016 annual report, SAFE lists a variety of its goals very clearly. Among them are the following:

- "to study and propose policy suggestions for reforming the foreign exchange administration system so as to prevent balance of payments risks and to promote an equilibrium in the balance of payments;
- to study policy measures to make gradual advances in the convertibility of the RMB under the capital account and to cultivate

and develop the foreign exchange market;

- to provide suggestions to and a foundation for the People's Bank of China
- to formulate policy on the RMB exchange rate."

In contrast with SAFE's variety of foreign-exchange policy formation priorities, the principles that underlie CIC's investment activities can be seen as distinct yet more parallel to the underlying guidelines of the Santiago Principles. As a non-member of IFSWF, and as an entity that did not endorse the Santiago Principles, SAFE is able to completely divorce its vision of itself from the internationally accepted regulations. Hence, even among its two largest sovereign wealth funds, China could be seen as playing the role of the rule-maker with CIC and the role of the rule-breaker with SAFE at the same time. Four principles that underlie CIC's investment activities are as follows:

- "CIC invests on a commercial basis. Its objective is to seek maximum returns for its shareholder within acceptable risk tolerance.

- CIC is a financial investor and does not seek control of the companies in its portfolio.
- CIC is a responsible investor, abiding by the laws and regulations of China and of recipient countries or regions and conscientiously fulfilling its corporate social responsibilities.
- CIC pursues investments based on in-depth research within an asset allocation framework to ensure a prudent and disciplined approach in both decision-making and investment activities.”²⁵

One can easily spot the ways in which CIC’s principles are devised in parallel terms to the guidelines underlying the Santiago Principles. Even before the mention of a “new era” by Xi Jinping, the Vice Chairman and President of CIC, Tu Guangshao talked about a “new state of play” and a “new normal” to describe the state of China in 2016; “Despite the new state of play in the global market, and despite China entering a ‘new normal’

phase with new responsibilities engendered by the state-owned enterprise reform, we succeeded in overcoming all the tests and trials in achieving the goals our Board of Directors set at the start of the year.”²⁶ Tu Guangshao might be seen as implying that CIC has a role to play in this “new normal” that the Chinese political economy found itself in.

The 2016 annual report of CIC also includes a special mention of the importance of socially conscious investing and green investing. While these conversations are starting to be increasingly popular among personal and corporate investment entities, the conversation has not yet trickled down to the concerns of the sovereign wealth funds with the same speed. They are largely absent from the Santiago Principles as well. One, however, can observe CIC to be positioning itself as a responsible investor, investing at causes that alleviate the negative consequences of climate change, and provide assistance to the underprivileged and the poor. Taking on the position of a rule-breaker, CIC explains its priorities about

responsible investing in the following way:

“Combating climate change and achieving green and sustainable development are closely linked to the well-being of a country’s people, and sovereign wealth funds, including CIC, are paying more attention to both. As a member of the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSWF), CIC works with other sovereign wealth funds to find ways to fulfil its corporate social responsibilities. Given its concern for global well-being, CIC has pledged support for IFSWF’s climate change working group, contributing as a responsible investor to addressing climate change.

Based on its business portfolio, CIC capitalizes on its resources to work with the relevant government authorities in mobilizing private funding to help the poor and underprivileged. Through creative use of public-private partnerships, industry funds, bond issues and public listings, we have

explored ways to alleviate poverty, and in doing so, accrued enormous corporate goodwill.”²⁷

Last but not least, one should take notice that Tu Guangshao, Vice Chairman and President of CIC, chose to conclude his opening statement of both 2015 and 2016 annual reports through quoting a Chinese poem. On one occasion, he quotes “Honing gives a sharp edge to the sword, bitter cold adds fragrance to the plum blossom,” and in another instance he says, “constant dripping wears away a stone, and persistence and hardship are but a way of life.”²⁸ This trend in quoting Chinese poetry to conclude a statement, not only is a long-standing norm in many governmental and academic opening statements in Chinese landscape, but also can be seen as fulfilling the purpose of introducing Chinese classical poetry into the world of finance. It may be sending the strong message that in this “new era” espoused by Xi Jinping, communication norms are also being altered and revised by the Chinese state. Once again, the sovereign wealth funds are interlinked and encompassed within the changing narrative of

China, as the Chinese state slowly moves and constructs the “new era” for itself.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted above shows that the actions of Chinese sovereign wealth funds can be described as fitting to the rule-maker and rule-breaker categories within the contemporary landscape of the sovereign wealth funds industry. The role of Chinese sovereign wealth funds acting as rule-makers and rule-breakers can further be extended to the Chinese state itself, as it has previously been established in the paper; the sovereign wealth funds are merely institutional extensions of the Chinese state’s monetary ambitions. The palpable evidence discussed above that integrated the annual reports of CIC and SAFE along with statements provided by both of their managers showcase the ways in which China established a set of rules for the entire sovereign wealth fund industry and after a certain point in time started breaking those rules explicitly and implicitly as its foreign policy and economic needs necessitated. In that way,

China utilized its sovereign wealth funds in line with the ways in which Xi Jinping envisioned the “new era” to look like: ideated and constructed by China in collaboration with other nation states, to be partially lead and ultimately disrupted by Chinese creativity and influence. Therefore, the China that used to be the rule-taker, necessitated by its needs to grow and stabilize itself socio-economically at the time, is now both a rule-maker and a rule-breaker. Even though the research question posed at the beginning of the investigation has been answered, the research conducted here could be extended and further analyzed to answer similar yet unanswered questions. A comparative approach in which China’s sovereign wealth funds were contrasted with American or European sovereign wealth funds would be an intriguing addition to observe the differences of the Chinese funds when contrasted to other rule-maker funds and their owner states. Furthermore, a study on a larger number of sovereign wealth funds with a more in-depth historical analysis could also be conducted to further validate the findings of this research and explore the particular nuances of each

Chinese sovereign wealth fund and its respective contributions to China's transformation to a rule-maker and a rule-breaker. Ultimately, Xi Jinping's address was concrete enough to provide a set of general guidelines for the Communist Party members but also vague enough for the implemented and to-be-implemented visions to be predicted by further academic

inquiry in political economy literature. If China succeeds in building the promised "new era," the implications of a multi-centered world would reach far beyond the confines of the sovereign wealth funds. For now, however, China is far from fully realizing that multi-centered "new era" in all realms of the political economic order.

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² Ibid

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⁵Ibid.

⁶ Gary Hamel. 1996. "Strategy As Revolution." *Harvard Business Review*, no. July-August: 69–82.

⁷ Bader Alhashel. 2015. "Sovereign Wealth Funds: A Literature Review." *Journal of Economics and Business* 78: 1–13.

⁸ Gary Hamel. 1996. "Strategy As Revolution." *Harvard Business Review*, no. July-August: 69–82.

⁹ Zhaohui Wang. 2017. "The Economic Rise of China." *Asian Survey* 57 (4). *University of California Press Journals*: 595–617.

¹⁰ Gregory T Chin. 2017. "True Revisionist: China and the Global Monetary System." In *China's Global Engagement: Cooperation, Competition, and*

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¹¹ Daniel C. K. Chow. 2017. "Rising Nationalism: China's Regulation of Investment Trade." In *China's Global Engagement: Cooperation, Competition, and Influence in the 21st Century*, edited by Jacques DeLisle and Avery Goldstein. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press), 67-90.

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¹⁶ Gary Hamel. 1996. "Strategy As Revolution." *Harvard Business Review*, no. July-August: 70

¹⁷ Zhaohui Wang. 2017. "The Economic Rise of China." *Asian Survey* 57 (4). *University of California Press Journals*: 595–617.

¹⁸ International Working Group of Sovereign Wealth Funds. 2008. "Sovereign Wealth Funds Generally Accepted Principles and Practices, 'Santiago Principles.'" *International Working Group of Sovereign Wealth Funds*, 4.

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²⁰ China Investment Corporation. 2016. "CIC Annual Report 2016," (Beijing), 56.

²¹ Ibid 59.

²² Ibid, 10; 43

²³ Ibid, 3.

²⁴ Ibid, 43.

²⁵ Ibid, 23.

²⁶ Ibid, 5.

²⁷ Ibid, 19.

²⁸ Ibid, 2.

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3

Ethnographic Account of Empowerment, Liberation, and Revolution in the “White-Haired Girl”

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Introduction

“The north wind blows, the snowflakes whirl. A flurry of snow brings in New Year.” Zhao tearily sings along to the lyrics of “North Wind Blows” from the Chinese opera *White-Haired Girl* that was propagated during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as one of the revolutionary “model plays” (*yangbanxi*). Sitting on her kitchen chair, she, a sixty-year-old Chinese-Canadian, tells her story of experiencing the revolution to me during an

interview. She is a thin and petite Beijing local with large and round eyes, defined cheekbones, and grey hair. I chose her as my interview subject because of the drastic effects the Chinese policy change of the revolution had on her life. The influences of the revolution on her life do not stem materialistically, but instead she carries the experience emotionally with her every day. The play *White-Haired Girl* still emotionally influences Zhao because of her personal and multidimensional connection to the main character, Xi'er, in

experiencing the Cultural Revolution that empowered, liberated, and revolutionized her. These micro influences were caused by the macro structural forces and the propagated opera of *White-Haired Girl* was able to narrate these individual stories. The play, as one of the only two model plays that featured a female lead, carried the same views as Zhao of aspects of family, hardships, symbolic materials, and feminism, from the revolution to today, in which I will discuss in four separate sections. I initiated the interview for the purpose of a broad picture of the Cultural Revolution; however, her narrative mostly focused on the *White-Haired Girl* and thus led to the synthesis of this profile. This ethnographic account will proceed as the same order as the interview chronology; the full name of the interviewee will not be used to protect privacy.

The *White-Haired Girl* Background

The *White-Haired Girl*, originally written by Ding Yi and He Jingzhi, was incorporated into the “Eight

Models of Modern Revolutionary Art” along with the *Red Detachment of Women*.¹ As the model plays were high regulated, they told stories to show the drastic difference of China pre- and post-liberation in order to glorify the close connection between the People’s Liberation Army and the “common people”.² These models were played out in all institutions, including schools, factories, and agriculture.³ Almost every Chinese man, woman, and child had watched at least one of the model plays and because of the relatability of the plays; the commoners were able to contextualize their life story to the plots of the plays.⁴ Through the purposive model play, the whole society can be mobilized and educated in the same dimensions.

Family

Paternal Relationship

In the closing scene of the *White-Haired Girl*, Xi'er and the villagers sang “Red Sun is Chairman Mao. Red Sun is the Communist Party”.⁵ This is to enforce the hit-home message of the Communist Party’s positive

influence that was able to free the villagers from suffering, similar to the singing of “East is Red” by the Chen villagers of Guangzhou.⁶ Zhao enjoyed singing revolutionary songs because it created a sense of closeness to those around her: the only time Zhao had heard her father sing was at Tiananmen Square when he also sang “East is Red” among the crowd. When the entire country was apprehensive about the future and the overall atmosphere was tense, music allowed people like Zhao to experience some relaxation, as “sounds amidst the fury”.⁷ Musical plays are important tools to “revolutionize, nationalize, and popularize” the propagandist film, according to Premier Zhou Enlai.⁸ Zhao explains that every time she hears the song “North Wind Blows” she will immediately tear up since she reflects on the past decade of her immigration process to Canada and connects this period to the time when she watched the *White-Haired Girl* during the revolution. More importantly, with the death of her father, she will now reflect the memories she has shared with him during the song. The song provides a tunnel through which

she can view her life comprehensively, seeing her revolutionary years through contemporary lens. The generation has moved on but Zhao’s sentiments toward this song have not. The play carries the significance of her suffering across the Atlantic Ocean; the new meaning behind the emotions she feels toward the play does not rest on a Cultural Revolution political context anymore but rather fluctuates with the status quo around her.

Spousal Relationship

The *White-Haired Girl* is also a signifier of what spousal relations looked like during the revolution. When Xi’er reunited with Dachun in the mountains near the end of the play, they maintain an “asexual distance” because they are reconciled as neighbours and comrades, not as lovers despite the fact that he was her fiancé.⁹ The writes did not provide a love story, and instead of being romanticized, the connection between Xi’er and Dachun resembles that of a family – the big family of the revolutionary because of the mutual “class feeling” (*jieti ganqing*) that bring them closer.¹⁰

Zhao says she does not call her spouse “husband” (*laogong*) but instead they call each other by their full names and during the years of revolution, they referred each other by “comrade” (*tongzhi*). This term was used commonly regardless of “social standing, status, age, sex, or relation”.¹¹ Although many couples a decade younger than Zhao and her husband display signs of affection, Zhao remains emotionally neutral.

Hardships

Hunger and Thriftiness

The hardships Zhao experienced due to the revolution led to the formation of her strong work ethic and her thrifty spending habits, even with financial stability. The opera *White-Haired Girl* opens with Xi'er's monologue on New Year's Eve, as she waits for her father to return.¹² As a filial daughter, Xi'er made some flour cakes for him to eat when he comes home; she sings that he will bring some food back with him and they will enjoy the New Year holiday together.¹³ The play, by connecting with the commoners' holiday of Chinese

New Year, allows the audience members to relate their personal lives to it, even before the plot introduction. This is Zhao's most memorable scene from the play. Zhao recalls sitting in front the grain cabinet in the family courtyard, spending hours guarding it to ensure no thieves would take their family's grain rations while waiting for her father to return from work. The nation suffered from severe food shortages in the years of 1959-1961 during the Great Leap Forward; both rural and urban grain ration declined from 203 kg in 1957 to 163.5 in 1960.¹⁴ Hunger was not rare; Zhao valued rice and flour the most during these years and “having a full stomach was world's best feeling”, and was only obtained when Zhao's father returned home with food.¹⁵ This has also led to her habit of thriftiness today in Canada; she despises luxurious goods and lives a minimalistic life – her wardrobe was plain and outdated; her home was not close to lavishly decorated. Although her family is financially well-off, her old consumption habits and mentality of saving and sacrificing have not taken a back seat.

Sent-down Youth Years and Work Ethics

Moreover, Zhao's work ethic resembles those of Xi'er because of her tireless working habits and the pain during the sent-down youth years. During the interview, Zhao started to prepare for dinner. She ran to the backyard to extract home-grown green onions and proceeds to explain that most of the knowledge she has on growing food organically came from the sent-down youth period. Zhao was sent down to the countryside to "learn from the peasants" by doing manual labour.¹⁶ During the decade of the revolution, 18 million urban youths were sent down to "reduce disparities in opportunities" between the city and rural areas¹⁷ Mao believed that the future of China were in the hands of young people as they are the most "active and vital force in society".¹⁸ Instead of choosing to complete high school education, Zhao went with her close friend at the time to the countryside to experience class struggle and have "close contact with the masses of workers and peasants".¹⁹ The heavy manual labour she committed herself to was apparent seeing her quick and

smooth preparation of dinner ingredients. In the *White-Haired Girl*, Xi'er did not prioritize education after she returns to the community from years spent in the mountain cave. She joins the revolutionary force first. To Zhao, Xi'er was not an educated woman but was a "physically competent" or *nenggan*, empowered, and revolutionary one.

"Eating Bitterness" (*chiku*)

Although she did not enjoy the blood, sweat, and tears shed in rural China, she thinks that the younger generations of Chinese lack experiences of "eating bitterness" (*chiku*), which decreases their work efficiency. During the years spent in the countryside, Zhao had to endure her severe menstruation cramps and stand barefoot in the freezing water in order to farm. Zhao feels a connection to Xi'er as her hair has all turned grey in less than five years because of high stress of settling down in a new country. The revolutionary spirit in Xi'er is parallel to the one Zhao expresses in her everyday life and particularly in relation to her immigration experience: Zhao moved to Canada with her two children by herself in 2008 and

has built a “home” in a foreign place. Overcoming language barriers, discrimination, and lack of social networks, Zhao has managed to purchase a house and lives with stability. She felt helpless in the first week after she landed in Toronto and she was determined to move back to Beijing because of the overwhelming unfamiliarity and culture shock. The character Xi’er underwent severe poverty, rape, abduction, maltreatment, and humiliation but she persevered until the very end: “There is nothing one cannot overcome”, Zhao says.²⁰

Symbolic Materials

The *Little Red Book*

For Zhao, the *White Haired Girl* is connected with the *Little Red Book* because they were introduced to her simultaneously and reinforced one another. To Zhao, the play did not end when Xi’er joined the Liberation Army forces.²¹ Zhao imagines Xi’er having children with Dachun and the entire family reading the *Little Red Book*. The *Little Red Book* was seen as a weapon of mass instruction and “a source of

strength and a spiritual bomb of infinite power”, one that imperialists did not have.^{22 23} Zhao remembers watching the film in the audience with many others who were all holding a copy of the book in their hand; sounds of weeping and sobbing were widespread when Xi’er was liberated. Zhao remembers the *Little Red Book* as the only textbook studied in her elementary school; however, she cannot recollect the content of Mao’s quotations in the book.

Similar to peasants in *Chen Village*, both literate and illiterate people around her had a copy of the book and “vigorously waved these on cue” during various political and social events.²⁴ The significance of the book does not exist solely in the meanings behind Mao’s words, but also the *act* of reading it. These actions are spread from top to down because the central authority of the Chinese Communist Party during the revolution: officials including Premier Zhou Enlai and Defense Minister Lin Biao were photographed pledging loyalty to Mao by waving the book.²⁵ Especially after the endorsement of the *White-Haired*

Girl play by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou in 1967, the connection between the *Little Red Book* and the play became only clearer for Zhao since she read the book and watched the play countless times simultaneously.²⁶ The two are inseparable as the plot of the play demonstrated the perfect example of revolutionary spirit, which the *Little Red Book* emphasizes. The meanings and intentions behind the book and the revolution itself not only influenced people on the surface, but rather “touches people to their very souls. It also touches the essence of... deepest point of their world outlook... touches the roads one travelled and those one will experience in the future, and touches the entire history of China’s revolution”.²⁷

Female Liberation and the Participation in Formal Labour Force

The Cultural Revolution also brought along the liberation of women as Mao encouraged women to “join in productive activity” and that they must receive equal pay for equal work.²⁸[28] Zhao was certain that if this story was true, Xi’er would

be a working woman actively taking part in the labour force and contributing to the revolution.²⁹ During the revolution, a large number of urban women entered “heavy industry, including the fields of iron and steel, construction, mining...broke the traditional employment pattern of female concentration in light and service industries”, including Zhao.³⁰ When Zhao returned to the city of Beijing from being sent-down, she was allocated to different work units under various industries. Since it was the sole responsibility of the government for “employment and job assignment”, what her work entails and what she would be doing ten hours a day completed depended on the needs of the Party.³¹

It is not coincidental that Mao and Zhou endorsed plays with female leading characters, as they intended to encourage women to dominate their own lives, as well as to utilize their labour ability to the fullest. The character of Huang Shiren, the cruel landlord, has said at the beginning of the musical that “women are cheap as dirt”.³²[32] However, he was at the end publicly denounced at a mass peasants’ meeting – a subtle

message here is that those who do not respect the equality between men and women will face negative consequences. Thus, although the musical desexualizes Xi'er into a revolutionary hero, her status as a woman was nonetheless empowered due to the revolution and Mao's message of gender equality.³³[33] Zhao knew that she was stratified and restrained in society but did not understand the full extent of it until she watched the "feminist" model play of the *White-Haired Girl*. Understandably, the only other piece of media resource Zhao mentioned during the interview was the *Red Detachment of Women*, which is the other female-led model play.

Conclusion

The "north wind" has sent Zhao through numerous Chinese policy changes as well as overseas to Canada. Despite how severe this flurry of the "north wind" may blow, Zhao continues to embrace Xi'er's revolutionary spirit. Zhao has developed a deep connection to Xi'er and this play was present in shaping her paternal relationship, spousal relationship, lifestyle, and work ethic. In experiencing the Cultural Revolution that empowered, liberated, and revolutionized her, Zhao internalized the macro structural forces into her personal life. One can speculate that, of this particular generation, Zhao was not the only one so drastically influenced by the *White-Haired Girl*; there are still many stories that are left untold and unheard.

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4

The Transformation of Women in Views of Socialist Japan

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Abstract

The unity of the themes of gender and class have always been a point of friction in Marxist thought but are nevertheless key. This essay examines the social history of women who have been liberated from traditional responsibilities by socialist movements in Japan and discusses the seemingly contradictory point of the mass mobilization of women in the socialist movement with respect to primitive accumulation in capitalist system. In general, the fundamental difference lies in the way that each system defines the responsibility of women.

Keywords: Japan, Marxism, Women, Social Movements, Liberation

Introduction

The Marxist theory proposes that despite the overthrow of the feudal state by the rise of the bourgeoisie and a transition to capitalist era, in the end, there will be a communist epoch dominated by the proletariat. However, in

between, a socialist state is the prerequisite for this ultimate blueprint envisioned by Karl Marx. Moreover, different crises fermented under the capitalist system in history seems to confirm the inevitable flaws in such a system, as Marxist theory suggests. For instance, the

economic development brought by Meiji Restoration left vast space for debate on Japanese capitalism. Confronting the crisis of capitalism, Marxist scholars embrace a unique critique of class relations under the capitalist system. This essay focuses on analysing the transformation of women's role in Japanese society using a Marxist approach, as they were part of the auxiliary forces of socialist ideas which challenged traditional social relations in Japan. The socialist movement in Japan unfettered women from their traditional responsibilities in feudal or capitalist societies, resetting social and gender relations. In the socialist perspective, the transformation of women's roles from mothers and wives to a separate structure in the workforce denies their dependence on men.

Women in Socialist View

Women have been portrayed as an exploited group throughout history. The study of gender and class are not conspicuous in all aspects of Marxist thought, but nevertheless appears to be important to some Marxist

scholars. For instance, in "*Women: The Longest Revolution*," Juliet Mitchell discusses the function of women in capitalist society, as represented by the bourgeoisie family. According to the author, the situation of women is more complicated than any other social group, as they are marginalized in economic, social, and political aspects but at the same time they are also fundamental to human relations.¹ Based on Marx's preliminary framework, later scholars often centre on the issue of the oppression of women to conduct the analysis of the economy under capitalism. Mitchell uses Engels' theory as an example, as he once declared that the inequality of sexes was parallel to the development of monogamous marriage.² This gender-based oppression lies in women's physiological weakness, and through the development in the marriage system, women become private property for men. Engels sees "the ability of work" as key to bringing about their liberation, since an equal relationship cannot be built if women are limited to housework instead of socially productive work.³ That means, in a traditional sense, women are

bound by complicated economic relations -- only in socialist theory can they be deemed physically and psychologically independent. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels gives insight into the problem of women's oppression, claiming that the "the first premise for emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry... [This] demands that the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished".⁴ It seems that a socialist perspective automatically assumes women in capitalist societies are a type of private property, whereas socialism equalizes family responsibilities.

The Transformation of Women in Socialist Japan

Having opened the discussion of women as an oppressed group that highlights the problem in capitalist society, this essay will further examine the transformation of women in socialist Japan by looking at three different aspects that existed in

Japanese history. The first is the conversion of women from peasant family members to reform activists through marriage with Marxist supporters. Japanese scholar Mikiso Hane has compiled a book with very compelling diaries, memoirs, and testimonial accounts to show what ordinary Japanese people went through when the country experienced economic growth due to the development of capitalism. Among the figures that appear in her book, most of them come from lower-class backgrounds that scatter Rhubarb Shoots), records women's hardships in their lives on a farm during the prewar period. Tomoe married a Marxist labour organizer and had been imprisoned for five years when Marxist over the rural area. For example, Yamashiro Tomoe, the author of *Fuki no To* (Bog ideology was considered "dangerous thought".⁵ After the war, she devoted her time to participating in agrarian reform, anti-war movements and writing stories to reveal the privation of women based on real experiences. In the story of *Fuki no To*, Tomoe depicts a girl who spent her entire life as an exploited woman, from her early years serving as a maid

to her role of being a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, which exemplifies the hardship of women during that time. While such difficulties were not restricted only to women, many men also became Marxist agrarian reformers because there was an overall belief that the peasants were being exploited by the urban capitalist class. Tomoe's experience is a sufficient example to reflect the situation of rural women in this period. Through their marriage with supporters of Marxism, these women also embraced its ideas in the hopes of liberating themselves. Given the historical context, Germaine A. Hoston examines the rise of the dual economy and the revolution in the Japanese countryside. She suggests that the period in which the development of capitalism was hitting its stride in cities coincided with the remarkably backward countryside.⁶ The extreme poverty and hardship created the conditions that fuelled peasants' anger and brought about growing acceptance of Marxist economic theory among rural communities. While men tended to be the protagonists of the agrarian reform, women in the countryside were also

undertaking the campaign against capitalism, particularly because of their marital relationship with supporters of Marxism. Whether such cases should be deemed another patriarchal influence on women is beyond the scope of this essay.

Second, the shifting conception of reproduction and contraception could be seen as another type of evidence for the transformation of women in Japanese society. As Juliet Mitchell states in her book, it is fundamental and revolutionary that a woman can bear a child only if she can do so completely voluntarily; it is essential for women to have other options instead of elevating procreation to women's paramount task.⁷ Therefore, the contraception policy might have challenged the traditional relationship between women and the state in capitalist society. In her article discussing socialist women in Taisho and Early Showa Japan, Vera Mackie reveals the struggle of women confronting their traditional feminine responsibilities imposed by the state and men. She introduces Nakasone Sadayo, a member from the Sekirankai (Red Wave Society), who was arrested

due to her participation in a political demonstration. Such an incident demonstrates the resistance of socialism to a capitalist society, particularly in relation to childbirth, considered by many conservatives to be women's primary role. While there had always been supporters stressing the importance of motherhood and rejecting contraception and abortion, many women during this time argued that women should not be forced to fulfill such responsibilities, especially to give birth to children in unplanned situations (Mackie, 78).⁸ The female socialist Sakai Magara appeared in Mackie's article, denying the nobility of motherhood, which she defined it as a creation of capitalist society: "When there is a war and there are not enough soldiers, there are calls to bear children and to multiply. In such times, mothers with children will be given financial assistance. Does this also come under the name of respect for motherhood, and protection of motherhood?"⁹

From the quote above one can see that Sakai Magara reveals an underlying contradiction between the promotion of motherhood in pre-war Japan and the

encouragement of conscription during wartime. Both serve the interest of the state but are given euphemistical names in different situations. On the other hand, the debate over the legalization of abortion in Japan demonstrates the existence of entrenched interest groups in the capitalist society. The social phenomenon described in Christiana A.E. Norgren's book, the promulgation of legal abortion, implies the intersection of national and profession interests (Norgren, 36).¹⁰ It was during the post-war reconstruction period for Japan in which society was endangered by a series of economic crises. According to Norgren, the country experienced a dramatic increase in population, eleven million people, from 1945 to 1950, that resulted from repatriation of soldiers and civilians from the former colonies and the baby boom.¹¹ This placed a great amount of pressure on Japanese society and resulted in the final legislative process of the Eugenic Protection Bill. Aside from the national perspective, private groups also gained economically from the enforcement of laws that allowed abortions, mostly in the form of private clinics. This example

supports my point that Sakai Magara's argument on the relation between motherhood and the state, as the issue of contraception and abortion in the context of Norgren's book, is different from what female socialists such as Magara are striving to achieve. The case discussed by Norgren is more about the politics concerning reproduction in postwar Japan, while the point involved in Mitchell and Magara's comments are the transformation of women in socialist perspective, which aims to overcome the obstacles in capitalist society.

The most important and effective way to achieve transformation of women was the mobilization of women which turns this group into the auxiliary forces of the socialist camp in Japanese society. The two aspects discussed in the previous paragraphs are embodiments of the third point. Guided by the Marxist scheme of women's liberation, women in the industrial workforce and their efforts to create organizational structures give them a greater participation in social labour and political affairs. Since the 1920s, the socialist movement employed

various strategies to organize proletariat women. The first stage was through socialist propaganda with particular contributions by female intellectuals to bridge the gap between women socialists and uneducated working women. In another book of Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900-1937*, she provides the statistic that nearly one third of women were classified as having a position in "gainful employment" and most of them engaged in agriculture work.¹² However, Mackie considers another rising problem as the high proportion of women workers in agriculture had not helped carry out socialist expectations. The second highest proportion of women were factory workers and home servants, but stereotypes often applied in gender segmentation according to industry.¹³ The mobilization of women in the public workforce with the infusion of socialist ideology laid the foundation for shifting women away from their traditional roles, though at this stage the ingrained gender segmentation revealed the fact that women's interests were often neglected by men in Japan's society. Rodger Swearingen

explained this in a book co-authored with Paul Langer. Even though the communist propaganda in Japan had always prescribed the “liberation of women from their feudalistic bondage,” the percentage of women in the Japanese communist party until 1945 was still small.¹⁴ It was partly because of the inferior social status of Japanese women and the militant characteristics of the party that prevented women to gain a voice in an essentially male-dominated party. In my opinion, such a case does not prove that women did not play a role in socialist movements, as Marx and his disciples all recognized the importance of women emancipation. Rather, one should look at the problem with respect to the setting of Japanese norms and culture. Although many socialist conservatives did not pay much attention to the struggles of women, the enthusiasm of Japanese women has granted them more power to affect the political discourse. For instance, the year of 1946 witnessed the historical moment in which Japanese women went to the polls for the first time and presented a surprisingly heavy proportion of votes in the election.¹⁵ With the

effort of suffragettes, women had the opportunity to voice their opinions and demand actions to improve the well-being of proletariat women, ranging from the abolition of the household head system to the implementation of a standard living wage regardless of sex or race.¹⁶

While the socialist movement liberated women from their traditional responsibilities, some also suspect that it is an alternative of primitive accumulation, which forces a large group of women to join the workforce, ultimately benefitting the capitalists. I think there is a fundamental difference in the starting point of mobilizing women into the public workforce. Silvia Federici considers housework under capitalist household as “a labour of love” and argues that capital has been very successful in defining housework as an act of love.¹⁷ Although workers receive wages from the capital, Marxist scholars calculate the hidden unpaid work that contributes to profit. The story written by Yamashiro Tomoe in Hane’s book provides us the most intuitive way to understand the

difference. The oppressed woman in the story was simultaneously asked to work hard for the sake of their families without any rewards, and for the peasants in general; their accumulative discontent has given rise to socialist beliefs. In addition, the socialist movements which appear attractive to most of the proletariats are attractive because of their utopian vision that denies the privatization of property and favours state-owned enterprises to secure people's basic living. It is hard to distinguish whether this echoes the primitive accumulation in capitalist society, as it requires further investigation into the economic structure in Japan during this period. Since, in the current model of socialist society the most ideal conditions will not be achieved, I think the emphasis should be on the working-class women's consciousness of what they are

doing, as they are the socialist upholders and they should choose what best serves their interests.

Conclusion

In summary, Juliet Mitchell's work is an inspiring source for me to examine the transformation of women's role with a Marxist approach, and my argument is supported by different cases and historical events in the prewar and postwar periods. Although many controversies remain in the study of gender and class, there is no doubt that the issue of women is very important to Marxist thought. The mobilization of women into the workforce enables women to deviate from their traditional, domestic responsibilities and to form a separate work structure which helped them gain their rights.

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- ³ Ibid.
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[Op-Ed] More than Skin Deep: South Korea's Plastic Proliferation

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In the olden days, being beautiful was like winning a biological jackpot. Modern technology, however, has levelled the playing field: anyone can physically alter their body if they are willing to pay the right price. Seoul Touchup estimates that an entire face makeover can cost between \$25,000-55,000.¹

South Korea is one of the world's cosmetic capitals. The International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS) estimated that South Korean plastic surgeons performed over one million surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures in 2015. This number has decreased over the years, but it still places

the country third only to the United States and Brazil² - countries that exceed South Korea's population by at least a factor of 4.³ Some estimates state that up to a third of Seoul's population has undergone a cosmetic procedure, and a BBC poll estimates a staggering fifty percent of women in their twenties have received plastic surgery.⁴ It is even common for South Korean parents to give their children plastic surgery as a high school graduation present.⁵

People attribute South Korea's heightening beauty standards to several factors. Many point to plastic surgery proliferation as evidence of Western influence on

South Korean beauty discourse. Procedures like blepharoplasty (eyelid creasing), rhinoplasty (nose reshaping), and zygoma reduction (facial contouring) can be seen as an exchange of common Asian facial features for Westernized ones.⁶ Additionally, K-pop plays a major role in popularizing plastic surgery. Stars are known not only for their singing or dancing skills but also for their dazzling facial features and perfect physique. Korean actors and singers set the standards and trends for physical beauty, and very few have opted out of cosmetic surgery.⁷

More nuanced approaches study the historic contours of South Korean beauty. Such scholars point out that some current beauty standards - such as flawless, white skin - have been around for centuries.⁸ Some trace high Korean beauty standards back to the early twentieth century Japanese occupation of Korea. After this period of oppression, Korean people sought to physically distinguish themselves from the Japanese. The opportunity came when, during the Korean War, American Dr. Millard introduced plastic surgery

to minimize soldiers' scars.⁹ Beyond history, there is an economic side to this coin. Many South Koreans view plastic surgery as a practical investment. Physical beauty is an important asset in both the job and romance markets; in a highly competitive society, plastic surgery is often deemed necessary to increase the odds of success in one's career or marriage.¹⁰

The South Korean plastic proliferation is not without consequences. Plastic surgery is a risky procedure that does not always yield the expected results. In a Korea Consumer Agency survey, almost a third of South Korean patients surveyed were unhappy with the surgery's results, and approximately 17 percent experienced negative side effects.¹¹ Some patients are going so far as to sue their cosmetic surgeons over undesirable results.¹² Beyond the physical consequences, there is evidence that raising the beauty bar has psychological repercussions. These rising standards can be linked to eating disorders and body dissatisfaction among South Korean women.¹³ Additionally, as plastic surgery becomes increasingly common, teenagers

may feel pressured into competing with friends who have received procedures.¹⁴ Though it is difficult to deny that beauty standards within the South Korean community are changing, this change is not always positive.

In the midst of the raging debate, two important questions come to mind. Firstly, what is beauty? And secondly, is beauty detected by the eyes alone?

A study of history seems to support the idea that beauty is anything but monolithic. Trends that horrify us today - such as Chinese foot binding - were once the hallmarks of beauty. However, in past societies there was also the sense that a beautiful face should be paired with beautiful character. For example, in Korean societies past slanted eyes were viewed as a sign of propriety.¹⁵ In a sense, I don't think this has entirely gone away.

Though people may no longer link specific physical features to corresponding character traits, many people have an innate understanding that a truly beautiful person is beautiful both without and within. A person's personality can increase their beauty. So maybe a better question is this: if beauty is a matter of both looks and character, how is this reflected in our society today? Are we the kind of people with the courage to face not only our outward flaws, but our inward ones also?

Physical appearance is important - there's no use denying it. There exists plenty of evidence and a plethora of reasons that beauty standards are rising, for better or for worse. Yet in a society where physical standards fuel self-consciousness and in some cases self-hate, perhaps it is time for a deeper look beneath the skin.

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⁶ Wang, Yuqing. *Behind South Korean Cosmetic Surgery: Its Historical Causes and its Intertwined Relationship with Korean Pop Culture*. Diss. University of Delaware, 2015. Web. Accessed 10 Oct 2017. 22, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

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South Asia

6

Configuring Foreign Policies For Small States: A Case Study of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Despite a wide array of foreign policy strategies employed by small states, there has been little academic treatment of the subject. This article represents a preliminary attempt to address this lacuna. It traces the rivalry between two Asian giants – India and China – and delineates why navigating the anarchic world in such a climate is challenging for a small state. Summing up concerns and variables that influence Sri Lanka’s foreign policymaking, the paper contextualizes the extant foreign policy under the country’s *Unity Government*. Following a cumulative linear progression of argument, where different foreign policy options are examined, the paper comes to the conclusion that a *balanced approach* is the most utilitarian for Sri Lanka in the present milieu.

Keywords: *Sri Lanka, Foreign Policy, Small States, Foreign Policy Decision Making, Indo-China rivalry*

Introduction

Asian states - both big and small - are witnessing the genesis of a global geopolitical transformation. An 'Asian Century' engineered by the region's powerhouses - India, Japan and China - have forced small state leaders to recalibrate their foreign policy trajectories. Unsurprisingly, their mutually-exclusive and competing regional visions have led to the rise of *realpolitik* and power balancing dynamics. In this backdrop, as an island positioned in a critical geo strategic location straddling the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka is caught in the epi-center of a growing Indo-Chinese strategic rivalry.

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) states do not savor a multi-lateral security order. Bi-lateral security relationships are often favored over multi-lateral security arrangements. Added to this dynamic is the fact that most IOR states impute Non-Alignment as their main policy plank. Prevailing policy discourses in the region are also underpinned by the need for economic diplomacy; albeit to what degree this takes the form of a sustained

multi-lateral cooperation is a moot point.

Most analysts agree that the highly populated Bay of Bengal region carries significant economic promise. It boasts a combined Gross Domestic Product approximating USD2.7 trillion. South Asia alone is home to over 1.7 billion people and by 2020 the Asian Continent is expected to account for 35 per cent of world trade. Despite the region's potential for macro-diplomatic cooperation¹, prevailing trust deficits coupled with competing Chinese and Indian regional visions, make the IOR a hotbed for geopolitical rivalry. Beijing and New Delhi's jockeying for bases or logistical support centers in the region and the Doklam crisis is a notable cases in point.

So then, what must small states do in these testing times? A great deal of ink has been spilt over the foreign policy options open to great powers, but the choices available to small state leaders continue to remain understudied, particularly those in South Asian states. Undeniably, the success of a small state's foreign policy hinges on its ability to harness

geopolitical vicissitudes for its benefit. This success is also contingent on the ability to at least, preserve sovereignty and territorial integrity in times of great power conflict. But what is the approach small states should follow to meet these ends? Is there a universal policy or strategy that should be applied or should states keep their options open?

This is the puzzle undergirding this study. Neo Realism, an often-used theoretical perspective in the domain of small state foreign policy, adopts a binary view of small states foreign policy avenues. For example, they should either *balance against* a threatening hegemon or *bandwagon with it* in the hope of gain. The latter option is preferred when a threatening great power is geographically closer to a small state. Not only is this binary perspective inherently reductionist, it also fails to capture the range of options which small states adopt in the face of great power rivalries.²

This paper attempts to fill a perceived gap in the existing literature on small state foreign policy in the backdrop of great

power competition. Existing investigations on the subject have a tendency to be deficient and often suffer from a fallacy of composition.³ Attempts at a more comprehensive assessment of small states foreign policy options in the backdrop of great power competition, must be taken with due humility given the myriad factors in play. This paper, therefore, chooses Neo Classical Realism as the most suitable theory to unlock the variables which determine the selection of a particular foreign policy option.

Analogous to other East Asian states, Sri Lanka occupies vital sea lanes for global commerce and communication and is therefore inherently susceptible to geopolitical changes and security challenges. The military buildup in East Asia is also comparable to that in the IOR. However, literature on East Asian small states generally agree that their *modus operandi* is to hedge between the United States and China. Does Sri Lanka engage in hedging or does it employ a different strategy?

What is the optimal security strategy for small states in the battleground of two great powers?

Is it *bandwagoning with* one, *balancing against* the more threatening great power or espousing a neutral position? Are there alternative options in a small state's foreign policy tool box? This study aims to unpack such options, delineate the current strategy pursued by Sri Lanka, and outline the best possible approach for Sri Lanka, after weighing the pros and cons of each option.

In order to tackle these questions, tracing how the island perceives the two powers is also important. Do Sri Lankan statesmen see New Delhi and Beijing as a source of pivotal support, a source of concern, or both? Moreover, what kind of image does the island want to cultivate in the eyes of the regional powerhouses? Will Sri Lanka be forced to take sides if a conflict erupts? These subsidiary questions are also raised in this paper.

The article unfolds as follows. I begin by discussing the theory of Neo Classical Realism, exposing the varied factors which come into play when a state implements its foreign policy decisions. Next, I study the prevailing strategic competition between India and

China in South Asia, as the latter increases its footprint in the region. The fourth section takes stock of the post-2015 foreign policy of Sri Lanka under the Presidency of Sirisena. The subsequent section looks closely at the varied options Sri Lanka can adopt and the advantages and drawbacks of each choice. A caveat, however, is that the options discussed in this final section are not exhaustive, but instead considers only the most common foreign policy strategies that small states adopt.

Neo Classical Realism

Neo Classical Realists posit that the policy option selected by a country is driven first and foremost by the country's relative material power. Neo Classical realists contend that a state's foreign policy making is shaped by its power capability because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables. In that sense, the anarchic international system "influences foreign policy, as states must tailor their policies to respond to the threats and opportunities it provides."⁴ Consequently, intervening factors play a significant role in the

eventual strategy pursued by the state because policy choices are not conceived as a direct product of systemic stimuli.

According to this school of thought, intervening factors include “leader images, strategic culture, state- society relations, and domestic institutions”.⁵ *Leader images* relate to the beliefs and values of a state’s Foreign Policy Executive (FPE). A FPE generally comprises the President, Prime Minister and key cabinet members. FPE’s personality and character may influence a state’s response to external stimuli and therefore, investigating such factors is critical to analyze how systemic pressures impinge on FPE’s decision.

The *strategic culture* of a country is the entrenched beliefs and worldviews of the society as a whole. Such beliefs and notions are significant as they have bearing on the FPE’s preference. This is also because the final choice of a FPE has to be one that is acceptable for the public at large. The third factor relates to the degree to which “society defers to state leaders on foreign policy matters”.⁶ If for example, a

large part of society is suspicious of the FPE’s desires, it will be challenging to carry out a FPE’s decision. This was clearly visible in the case of the proposed Indo-Sri Lanka ETCA agreement driven by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, which was ultimately stonewalled owing to strong public opposition.

The last intervening variable is *domestic institutions*. The routines and processes followed by such structures, and the degree of power concentration in the executive’s hand as against the legislature falls under this category. Sri Lankan policy makers for the most part do not have to bargain with the legislature on foreign policy issues and the FPE is therefore; less constrained when taking action on issues pertaining to the foreign policy of the country.⁷ Although a Ministry of Foreign/External Affairs (MFA/MEA) could play a role in foreign policymaking in some countries, this is not the case in Sri Lanka. The strongest impression the Sri Lankan MFA makes is that of policy recommendations to the FPE and even then, this has a high tendency to be dismissed if it is

contrary to the FPE's outlook. As a result, the MFA's role is redundant in this analysis.⁸

Chinese inroads into India's 'backyard'

South Asia is a fast-emerging theatre of Sino-Indian rivalry. Despite moments of conciliation, India's relations with China remain tense, a trend unlikely to reverse anytime soon. Beijing has not eclipsed New Delhi in South Asia yet, but its influence in areas such as trade and investment cannot be understated.

Between 2005 and 2013, Chinese assistance to Sri Lanka amounted to "US\$5.664 billion, out of which 98 per cent was in the form of loans".⁹ This prompted Sri Lanka to elevate her ties with China to a "*strategic cooperative partnership*" in 2013.¹⁰ In Bangladesh, "Chinese firms have invested heavily in power and infrastructure projects such as in the development of Chittagong harbour and in road links to improve connectivity".¹¹ In 2015, China and Pakistan launched the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), one of the largest projects in South Asia, costing close to USD46 billion.

This initiative combined with others persuaded Pakistan to characterize her ties with China with phrases such as "*iron-brother relationship*" and "*all-weather friends*". By the end of 2016, symbolizing the crystalized bond between the two countries, close to 30 percent of Pakistan's imports came from China.

South Asian states are also a significant market for China's weapons exports. By 2015, Pakistan received 35 per cent of China's arms exports, while Bangladesh received close to 20 per cent.¹² Maldives and Pakistan have already signed Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with China, whilst Sri Lanka is currently negotiating a FTA with Beijing. This brief synopsis demonstrates China's inroads in South Asia. Without doubt, such developments directly impact New Delhi's foreign policy calculus.

In June of 2017, a tense military standoff took place between Indian and Chinese troops when Indian soldiers entered the Doklam plateau, claimed by both China and Bhutan, to halt the construction of a road project by the Chinese Army in a disputed

border area. People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) modernization schemes along with the overseas military base in Djibouti are touted to have direct implications on the maritime security and overall stability of the Indian Ocean. Arguments such as China's 'tyranny of distance' to the Indian Ocean can also be called into question ensuing Beijing's *String of Pearls* strategy in South Asia.¹³

Do these developments make China a disruptive force in South Asia? China's defense budget is estimated to be nearly four times bigger than that of India's. Indian officials and security experts tend to perceive the expansion of China's presence in South Asia, in a strategic rivalry lens. Tensions between the two states have also been simmering in recent times. Beijing barred New Delhi from becoming a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, "blocked India's attempts to list Masood Azhar as a terrorist at the United Nations, and even routed its energy pipelines through disputed territory in Kashmir showcasing scant regard for India's calls for the pipelines to be re-routed".¹⁴ Parsing through these events suggest that a degree

of rivalry already underpins Sino-Indian relations in the 21st century.

Sri Lanka's post 2015 Foreign Policy

2009 ended for President Rajapakse on a high note. Sri Lanka's Armed Forces routed L.T.T.E separatists in the North-East of the island and despite excessive government spending on defense, a sizeable portion of the public was firmly behind the military offensive. Pressure from the West, however, was mounting. The 2009 'crowning success', though hailed by some, was mired in controversy.

Rajapakse was progressively alienated on the international stage, most notably, in the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo which the Prime Ministers of Canada, India and Mauritius boycotted. Repeated UNHRC resolutions called on the Rajapakse Government to investigate allegations of human rights violations and initiate a credible reconciliation mechanism. The West also cut off aid and assistance to the island, including GSP+ facilities Sri

Lanka had hitherto enjoyed from the European Union. Allegations of Human Rights violations continued to be brushed aside by the populist leader as an indication of foreign interference.¹⁵

Facing a diplomatic onslaught from India and the West, Rajapakse began to seek comfort from Moscow and Beijing. Having visited China seven times during his first nine years in office and received a large amount of Chinese loans, elevating Sri Lanka's ties with China was axiomatic to Rajapakse.¹⁶ In an obvious tilt towards Beijing, Rajapakse began constructing a motley of projects using Chinese loans.¹⁷ China's Export-Import Bank alone is reported to have invested USD1.6 billion in more than 20 projects, mostly involving shipping and transportation.¹⁸ By 2014, Chinese nuclear submarines were also making port calls in Sri Lankan harbours, much to the ire of New Delhi.

Once the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe Unity Government came to power in January 2015, promises were made of a more equidistant approach. In an interview to the

Hindustan Times, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe declared, "We will improve relations with India. But that doesn't mean we will be hostile to China."¹⁹ A former Sri Lankan economic affairs spokesperson, Dr. Harsha De Silva, also went on record stating that the Government intends to have "a balanced approach between India and China, unlike the [previous] regime, which was antagonizing India almost by its closeness to China."²⁰

The Unity Government consists of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (headed by the President) and the United National Party (led by the Prime Minister) which were until then, the fiercest of rivals. Once the 'Unity Government' came into being, the United National Party (UNP) gradually took over the task of managing foreign relations. The extant foreign policy decision making structure remains largely unchanged since 2015, as the UNP party leadership still guide's foreign policy, but with a greater input from the President since early 2018. The core FPE includes the President, Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and a few selected Ministers, with the ambit of

power concentrated around the Prime Minister.

The post-2015 foreign policy, unlike previous administrations, has not been guided by the Government's ideological posture.²¹ This has allowed the regime to forge stronger ties with New Delhi and Beijing devoid of any prejudice or partiality. A month after the Unity Government came to power, the President undertook a state visit to neighboring India. This was followed by Prime Minister Modi's visit to Sri Lanka in March. President Sirisena then went on a four day state visit to China at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. By September 2015, Prime Minister (PM) Wickremesinghe followed suit, undertaking an official visit to India at the invitation of Prime Minister Modi and then later visiting China.

The year 2015 also saw constructive engagement with the West. The then US Secretary of State, John Kerry, came to Sri Lanka, followed by Ambassador Samantha Powers in November. The following year, Hugo Swire, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom

undertook an official visit to Sri Lanka. These bilateral exchanges signify the effort taken by the new administration to enhance Sri Lanka's image as a state that seeks to be 'friends with all'; all the while bearing cognizance of the security interests of the two Asian giants. For example, unlike Rajapakse, deference is now given to India's security concerns. This was displayed when a Chinese submarine was refused to dock in the Colombo Port in 2017; in contrast to the 2014 decision to allow a Chinese nuclear submarine to dock in the same port.

As an intervening variable, *Leader images* consider the FPE's ideology and the impact this may have on foreign policymaking. Despite emerging from opposing political parties, the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration is not fixated on a distinct ideological camp.²² The case of PM Wickremesinghe visiting China despite his party's traditional alignment with the West is a clear illustration of this. Thus, *leader image* comes into play only in terms of the FPE's (both the President and PM's) desire to welcome investments

and other economic linkages from both India and China.

The government's conduct on international affairs has traditionally been less central to people's day to day concerns. Nevertheless, enmeshments with China are being watched today with hesitant eyes. Clashes in Hambantota in 2017 and the debt owed by the island to China are causative factors for the public's sense of apprehension. Therefore, a balanced approach between India and China resonates more than the previous Pro-China policy of Rajapakse.

Even if equanimity is ubiquitous, this does not imply that the present day FPE has a free hand in deciding matters pertaining to foreign policy. The public's outcry against the Indo-Sri Lanka ETCA agreement exhibited FPE's constraints when it came to execute a decision not favored by the public.²³ The China-Sri Lanka FTA currently under discussion has not drawn similar censure from the masses. Optics has therefore, become imperative, not only on the international front, but also to garner domestic support for the regime.

The Unity Government sees India and China more as opportunities that remain to be harnessed, than threats that need to be feared. In an interview to *Bloomberg*, Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary claimed that "Sri Lanka will 'redouble' efforts to strike a free trade deal with China and conclude an expanded trade pact with India as part of the island nation's strategy of becoming an Indian Ocean hub".²⁴ The island, whilst welcoming and indulging both, has also sought to remain disentangled from their bilateral disputes. For example, Colombo remained mum over the Dokhlam crisis²⁵ and has sought to alleviate Indian and Chinese concerns by welcoming their investment projects with open arms.

Although geographically tied to the Indian Subcontinent, Sri Lanka has not sought a security alliance with India, nor has she chosen to linkup with China against India. Instead, the administration jumped on board the Chinese BRI while retaining her traditional 'friends and neighbours' like Japan and India. Engaging with New Delhi and Beijing, without availing on either for security guarantees has enabled the Sirisena-

Wickremesinghe administration to chart an independent course in the hope that Sri Lanka can rise alongside her regional economic powerhouses without being tied down by either. This is not a case of *balancing*, *bandwagoning* or *hedging*. Rather, the extant foreign policy denotes an unimpeded and *balanced approach* to harness the opportunities presented to the island by both powers without being overly acquiescent to either.

Strategizing Foreign policy options for the island

Which foreign policy option for Sri Lanka is the best going forward? *Balancing* or *bandwagoning* continue to be unrealistic. “Both options involve choosing one party over the other, something Sri Lanka is not in a position to do. To emphasize this point a simple example suffices: Sri Lanka’s largest portion of FDI in 2017 came from China followed closely by India. Conversely, Chinese tourist arrivals account for 13 per cent of total tourist arrivals to the island. This is second only to India.”²⁶ The risks of provocation and/or

abandonment remain high if Sri Lanka *bandwagons with* or *balances against* New Delhi or Beijing. Moreover, the trade and economic benefits Sri Lanka hopes to accrue from both powers would also diminish in size if the island draws closer to one at the expense of the other.

Hedging, as applied to East Asian states, typifies an act of enhancing trade opportunities with China whilst maintaining a vibrant security relationship with the United States against a possible threat from Chinese expansionism. Despite China’s growing imprint in the IOR, Beijing does not pose any imminent security threat to the island. Neither does India, which has sought to display itself (particularly under the Modi administration), as a benevolent regional ‘brother and benefactor’. Hedging, therefore, loses value in such a permissive environment.

Neutrality remains ideal only in the case of a major confrontation between the two powers because this avenue limits more robust forms of engagement in times of peace. David’s theory of Omni-Balancing is another approach that can be used to study foreign

policy making of third world states. His theory assumes that decision makers make foreign policy judgments with an eye on ensuring regime stability. In that sense, foreign policy is shaped by a desire to counter internal and external threats to the regime. His insights help explain why a balanced approach towards India and China could have positive ramifications for the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe regime. However, as David ascribes to the balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy in his theory, it falls short in explaining the present administration's approach towards India and China and the tangible benefits that this policy accrues.

According to Schweller, *under-balancing* takes place when a state does not balance or does so inefficiently in response to a dangerous aggressor.²⁷ As the island does not see New Delhi or Beijing as revisionist in nature,

the island's contemporary foreign policy is not illustrative of *under-balancing*. Moreover, Sri Lanka does not wish to remain on the sidelines and/or buck-pass when non-traditional security threats emerge in the IOR. Consequently, *under-balancing* in the contemporary milieu lacks merit and as a result, is no sensible recourse.

Thus, Sri Lanka's foreign policy is shaped chiefly by the country's limited power potential, and the regime's desire to maintain a granular equidistance between India and China. By welcoming both powers to invest and trade with the island, the political administration hopes that Sri Lanka's economy would grow alongside theirs so that the Government's vision to make Sri Lanka into an 'Indian Ocean hub' and link up with global production networks reaches fruition.

¹ For an explanation on Macro-Diplomatic Cooperation see Sun and Haegeland 170.

² This is best argued by Cheng-Chwee.

³ A fallacy of composition is to assume that what one actor can do in a given set of circumstances must also be within reach for an indefinite number of actors to do simultaneously.

⁴ Ripsman, Norrin M., et al. 2

⁵ Ripsman, Norrin M., et al. 9

⁶ Ripsman, Norrin M., et al. 71

⁷ Ripsman, Norrin M., et al. 76

⁸ The MFA plays a minor, if not inconsequential role in foreign policy decision-making, although most routine operations (or standard operating procedures) are handled by it. This deduction is based on a series of confidential interviews carried out with retired and serving Sri Lankan diplomats.

⁹ Sultana 246.

¹⁰ For more on the Sino – Sri Lanka relationship see Ayres and Anderson.

¹¹ Wagner 313.

¹² For detailed insight into China’s weapon exports see Mollman.

¹³ There are two main schools of thought with regard to Chinese activity in the IOR. One idea is that Beijing seeks to “dominate” the Indian Ocean region. Others maintain that China is simply following its growing trading interests and seeking to secure its supply lines against disruption. For more information see Cooper.

¹⁴ Silva

¹⁵ At the time, atrocities purported to have been committed during the final phase of the military campaign were not the only charge leveled against Rajapakse by the West. The wave of repression directed at political opponents, the lack of willingness to reach out to the Sri Lankan Tamil minority coupled with an implicit support to extremist nationalist groups operating in the island were other reasons for Western political pressure.

¹⁶ This can be loosely viewed as a case of *balancing against* the West and India by allying with their political rival - China.

¹⁷ These included among others, the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant, Mattala International Airport, Katunayake Airport Expressway, Moragahakanda Irrigation Development Project, the Southern Expressway, Hambantota Port, the Lotus Pond (Nelum Pokuna) Performing Arts Theatre and the expansion of the Colombo Port.

¹⁸ On Chinese loans to Sri Lanka see Feng.

¹⁹ As quoted in Sundarji.

²⁰ As quoted in Ellen.

²¹ Uyangoda was among the first to purport this view.

²² A major challenge to the continuance of this *balanced approach* lies in the political makeup of the regime. The power struggle brewing between the President and Prime Minister, particularly since March 2018, manifests a personal bitterness which may hinder policy implementation in the coming years. Added to this is the possibility of the PM and President indulging in populism to shore up their positions ahead of the next presidential election. Limited cooperation and consultation, between the two, could make co-habitation within the Unity Government less tenable. If this is the case, it would undoubtedly have major ramifications on the foreign policy of the country notwithstanding the existing consensus for a '*balanced approach*'.

²³ Despite opposition, Sri Lanka's PM has not given up on finalizing this agreement. For more on this see Kleiner.

²⁴ See Marlow and Ondaatjie; For more on the Government's vision to transform the island to a Maritime/ Global Logistics / Financial Hub see: the Government's 2025 vision accessible from:
http://www.treasury.gov.lk/documents/10181/66400/Vision_2025_English.pdf/8d93e8db-2c3a-4e15-9ab2-fc619817e6fd

²⁵ For a detailed account on the Dokhlam crisis see Usman.

²⁶ Silva

²⁷ See Schweller for more on the theory of *Under Balancing*.

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From Encounter to Exodus: History of the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar

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Abstract

According to the United Nations, the Rohingya are amongst the most persecuted minorities in the world. The Rohingya Muslims of Burma have been victim to ethnic cleansing and genocide for decades. Although Islam is practiced by four per cent of Myanmar's population (most of these Muslims identify as Rohingya), the Rohingya Muslims have been deprived of citizenship rights and are denied recognition as a 'national race' based on their alleged "immigrant status". The institutional and systematic discrimination of this population has raised concerns of how to best provide aid to this group. We intend to dig deeper and explore the intricacies of the complex history of this population, and trials that have arisen due to state prejudice. This essay analyzes this political puzzle through examining themes of Western intervention with Burma, processes of democratization, isolationist state practices of Burma, global norms and anti-norms of Islamophobia, and the capitalistic efforts to open Burma's doors to trade regardless of human rights abuses.

In tracing the plight of the Rohingya people, one comes to understand that their presence in Burma came to be due to a number of complex historical trajectories. A key part of the narrative spun by the military, ethnic extremists, and Buddhist fundamentalists amongst others is that the Rohingya are illegal immigrants, and thus have no right to exist in Burma. In almost every Burmese media outlet and official issued statements by the government, they are termed as illegal “Bengali” immigrants and never referred to as “Rohingya”.¹ The answer to how this situation came to be partly lies in the history of the Arakan region itself.

The Present till Now: A Brief History of Discrimination

According to Human Rights Watch, Muslim traders first came into the Burmese region in the eighth century.² Their local dynasty was seated at Wesali, not far from contemporary Mrohaung in Arakan – where the Rohingya were once counted a part of. Due to the close proximity, Arakan saw a greater influx of Muslim sailors during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and migrants from neighboring Muslim Bengal. Looking back at that period in time, there are records of Buddhist Mrohaung kings using Muslim court titles alongside traditional ones. Indeed, being inclusive of ethnic minorities and religious officers in courts was a

common practice in this Southeast Asian sub-region.³

The first wave of exodus occurred after the Burman King Bodawpaya conquered and incorporated the Arakan region into his kingdom of Ava in central Burma in 1784, consequently leading to a high influx of refugees pouring into British controlled Chittagong in East Bengal.⁴ After multiple insurgencies and Chin Bya’s failed attempt at recapturing Arakan back from King Bodawpaya in 1811, many Rohingyas were forced out of their homes, and thus settled in the area of Cox’s Bazar and became integrated with the local community there.⁵

Moving forward in time to the beginning of 1824, the British

colonized Burma in a series of three wars. The British administered Burma as a province of India, resulting in much fluid migration. Though it was all considered internal movement then, the Burmese government still identifies any migration that took place during the British rule as illegal.⁶ It is on this basis that the Rohingya are denied citizenship and are considered illegal “Bengali” immigrants though they had a well-established presence dating back to the twelfth century.

After Japan’s invasion of British controlled Burma, communal violence erupted targeting those groups that had benefitted from British colonial rule.⁷ A violent clash between Buddhist villagers and Rohingya Muslims in Arakan resulted in some 22,000 Rohingya crossing the border into Bengal.⁸ Although some of the displaced returned after a British offensive drove out the Japanese in 1945, tensions between the Buddhist individuals and Rohingya Muslims lingered. Immediately after independence, tensions escalated to the point where Burmese immigration authorities imposed limitations on movement of Muslims, treating them as

illegal immigrants.⁹ Since they were denied the right to citizenship, the Rohingya were also barred from military service and other civil jobs. To date, the Burmese government restricts Rohingya from traveling from within Arakan, to other parts of the country, and abroad:

A valid permit allows a Rohingya to travel for up to forty-five days.¹⁰ A copy must be submitted to authorities upon departure and arrival at the destination. Should a Rohingya wish to stay overnight in a village within the township, a similar permit must be procured and then presented to the headmen of the home village and the village visited. Heavy fines of up to 10,000 kyat (twenty-nine US dollars) and detention have been imposed on those violating the requirements.

This set of stringent rules and regulations associated with travel have only exposed the Rohingya

to further systemic exploitation by corrupt officials. Furthermore, the Burmese government reserves secondary education only for citizens, leaving the Rohingya without access to state run schools beyond primary education. With little education and limited mobility, they are forced into labour by local government authorities with little to no pay whatsoever.¹¹ This leaves them vulnerable to acts of extortion and theft, including instances whereby the army arbitrarily confiscates personal property of Rohingya.¹² They have faced brutal torture, and inhumane treatment from their own government and military officials. These acts of impunity serve to strip the Rohingya away from everything the own, leaving them helpless and vulnerable to further abuse.

In 1977, Operation *Nagamin* was put into place; a military operation attempting to register citizens and expel any foreigners prior to a national census, from which the Rohingya were excluded. Mass arrests, forced evictions, torture, and widespread army brutality in the following year caused more than 200,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh,

only to be sent back after the Bangladeshi government requested repatriation.¹³

The years 1991 and 1992 were when the most outflow occurred from Arakan into Bangladesh, leaving approximately 250,000 Rohingya refugees displaced.¹⁴ Forced labour, limited mobility, rape, and religious persecution at the hands of the Burmese army and Burmese nationalists left the Rohingya no other option but to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh.

Over the past year, military operations against the Rohingya have become so intense and cruel that many protesters warn of an unfolding genocide. When asked about the ethnic cleansing brutalities in Burma, Burma's leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi denied any such claims. She too, like the military, identifies the Rohingya as illegal immigrants propagating terrorism in the Arakan region.¹⁵

Local Rohingya insurgent groups have existed for decades, fighting for their rights and protecting their people with limited resources. They often use home-made weapons such as sharpened bamboo sticks, machetes, and

knives.¹⁶ But in 2013, following the 2012 Rakhine state riots, their resistance created the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). ARSA is active in the Northern Rakhine state and is declared as a terrorist group by the Central Committee for Counter-Terrorism of Myanmar.¹⁷ On August 25th, about 200 Rohingya ARSA militants attacked a police post killing nine border officers and four soldiers. Since then, a military crackdown has been enforced causing almost 650,000 Rohingyas to flee from undeveloped and overpopulated refugee camps from Myanmar into Bangladesh.¹⁸ Although there is no firm evidence to validate this claim, the Burmese government continuously alleges that ARSA is involved with and subsidized by foreign Islamists. This claim was refuted by Ata Ullah, the current leader of ARSA. Time and again they reinstate their ideology of an ethno-nationalism and deny being a jihadist group.

The capabilities of ARSA however, do not compare to that of the Burmese military. On September 10, 2017, Amnesty International and Bangladeshi

government sources accused Burmese authorities of laying landmines at border crossing used by fleeing Rohingya.^{19 20}

With the Rohingya people living in such dire conditions, a health crisis is underway. And with their own government ostracizing them, turning to international aid organizations appears to be their only option. While Myanmar's consistent rejection of international assistance makes it harder for organizations to interact with this population, concerns about the best forms of aid provision have emerged in the past decade. In this essay, we hope to explore the various obstacles to aid provision for the Rohingya Muslims of Burma. In analysing this complex case of mass ethnic cleansing, we shine light upon themes such as Burma's Isolationism and the motivation for some of its policies. Furthermore, in analysing normative international phenomena such as Islamophobia and Western intervention in Burma, this essay attempts to question the existing status quo and analyse the future of the state and specifically, the Rohingya Muslims.

Burma in Isolation: State Policy

“Burma was the quintessential neutralist nation” says David Steinberg²¹. After studying the complex interactions and political manifestations that have been taking place between states on the world stage, he argues how Burma’s actions, in the past two decades, point more towards isolationism than taking a neutralist stance.²² Steinberg’s claim, made in the past tense, refers to multiple actions taken with great care and attention by Burma to maintain this neutralist stance. For instance, to ensure its sovereign autonomy, Burma forfeited its Commonwealth membership in 1948, after gaining independence from the British.²³ During this time, Burma sustained cordial relations with its Western counterparts, China, and Russia. It was also the object of much foreign aid, partly designed to win friends, and from an American vantage point to deny Communist China and the Soviet Union a foothold in Southeast Asia. Although Burma and China enjoyed good relations for the most part, one major exception is during China’s cultural

revolution, when the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) troops fled to Burma after the People’s Liberation Army infiltrated the Yunnan Province.²⁴ Plagued by two communist insurrections as well as major ethnic revolts causing an internal civil war, the fledgling Burmese nation struggled to keep its balance between survival and political stability. Surreptitiously backed by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the incursion of Chinese Nationalist forces in north eastern Burma brought about the banning of all US aid programs in Burma.²⁵ This act of denying aid still reflects existing sentiments in the Burmese political system and also the lack of attention the Rohingya Muslims have received.

Steinberg states how following the coup of 1962, Burma’s isolationism slowly became more evident: “The Burmese felt insecure. They believed foreigners were unsympathetic and their views antithetical to the foils of the society, which were both Buddhist and socialist and therefore outside of the Western mainstream”.²⁶ Within a year of the coup, the government drastically restricted international

travel, as well as domestic travel. Gradually, Burma was cut off from the outside world as most media outlets were managed by the state; only to be slipped off the news radar screen.²⁷

Soon after independence, Burma had an ongoing civil war crisis. The root of that conflict can be best explained in Martin Smith's words "dilemmas of unity in a land of diversity."²⁸ This refers to the backlash the Burmese government faced from its ethnic minorities. As Burma became more isolated from the outside world, the ethnic minorities in the "Frontier Areas" came in closer contact with the outside world. The majority Burmese were located well within state boundaries, but Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen, and Mon peoples all had relatives across the arbitrary boundaries of Burma. The Rohingya Muslims resided in the northern Arakan region of Burma, which borders Bangladesh.²⁹ Furthermore, some Christian minorities were also in touch with international Christian movements. All these factors came into play, increasing the isolation and creating a sense of conflict. The impending threat against the Burmese military, by

both minorities and foreigners, soon became a central concern for the government.

The 1988 uprising was another turning point for Burma's political position, another step closer to becoming a strict isolationist state. The massacre of thousands of protesters followed by the nullification of the election result were some things that stood in stark contrast to America's fundamental diplomatic goals of democracy and human rights.³⁰ Thus, downgrading the US representative in Burma from "ambassador" to "charge d'affaires" was an occurrence that only made the Burmese-US diplomatic fallout more evident.³¹ The troubles in the relationship were exacerbated by the imposition of a broad range of sanctions imposed by the Clinton and Bush administrations respectively. Furthermore, President Obama made sure to renew these sanctions after he assumed office in 2009.³² It can be said that through these sanctions, the US government intended to pressurize Burma to follow the path to democratisation.³³ A former Burmese foreign minister chastised this western approach,

saying that Myanmar was not a donkey, and that a “carrots and sticks” approach to relations was not appropriate.³⁴ Some argue that these sanctions have not only been failed, but are indeed counterproductive as they have largely neglected the country’s multiple ethnic and armed conflicts as well as its pressing humanitarian challenges.³⁵ Furthermore, in his testimony Thant Myint-U analysed logically why the American sanctions failed. According to him, firstly, sanctions weakened the very forces that supported the democratic reforms “reinforcing isolationist tendencies, constraining moves toward market reforms, and decimating the position of the Burmese professional, managerial, and entrepreneurial classes. Sanctions and related divestment campaigns, and campaigns to minimize tourism, have drastically reduced chances for the emergence of new and outward-looking economic forces.”³⁶ Second, the sanctions strengthened the military forces. He pointed out that “The political economy, which has emerged under sanctions, based on a few extractive industries and trade ties with a handful of regional

countries, has proven particularly easy for the incumbent regime to control. Aid restrictions, restrictions on high level contact and travel by senior Burmese officials, and embargoes on trade and investment all had the direct if unintended consequence of reinforcing the status quo.”³⁷

Professor Wang Zichang explains that within international relations, as a policy, sanctions mean tightening the policy choices of the government being sanctioned, to the point where there is no other option for the government except surrendering or impoverishing the people of his nation to that degree that there is no other choice but to overthrow the present government.³⁸ According to Professor Wang Zichang, to achieve this policy objective, all other states must impose strict sanctions against the targeted state. Second, the targeted state has very few resources. In the case of Burma, neither of these prerequisites apply.³⁹ Firstly, Myanmar has abundant national resources such as oil, gas, and jade. Secondly, Burma’s neighbouring states, such as China, India, and other ASEAN countries have not imposed sanctions on Burma. In

fact, having previously vacillated between friendships with US and China, the tense relations with America provided an opportunity for Burma to form closer ties with China. China, thus, became the prime source of support and protection in the international community.⁴⁰ Burma being a nation rich in natural resources like timber, oil, and precious gems, it opened a new possibility for bilateral trade between Burma and China. Soon after that, China became Burma's major supplier for military equipment and training.⁴¹ Thus, Burma's foreign trade not only flourished during the years of US sanctions, but also worked to increase the metaphorical distance in the US-Burma relations.⁴²

With Burma pursuing the goals similar to that of an isolationist state, it was evident that the nation's ongoing ethnic crisis only exacerbated over time. Although many may argue this label, especially after Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to power, the intricacies of the Rohingya Muslims' plight only reinstates Burma's rejection to Western intervention. In March 2017, the UN Human Rights Council decided to launch a review into

the allegations and reports of abuses of the Rohingya Muslims in areas of Rakhine.⁴³ This US endorsed EU probe was immediately rejected by Ms. Suu Kyi, saying it would "divide communities in the troubled western state of Rakhine."⁴⁴ During the military regime, the censor had control over all media outlets.⁴⁵ It filtered almost all important information in the media regardless of whether it was true or not, as long as the information supported the military leadership, it was circulated and advertised. However, since the new government took power in 2011 and the censorship board was then abolished, the media landscape has been substantially transformed.⁴⁶ Some may argue it even has had a positive impact on democratization in Burma in many ways. All of this is irrelevant when it comes to reporting the mass genocidal activities taking place in Burma. Leaders and news outlets still disseminate retrograde-sounding opinions and sometimes outright denial of any claims of such atrocities.⁴⁷ Furthermore, a commission appointed by Suu Kyi concluded that "there were no cases of genocide and religious

persecution in the region”, despite there being copious amounts of evidence into mass killing of Rohingya Muslims.⁴⁸ In an effort to muzzle reporting, Myanmar’s government has barred independent journalists from the region, and dismissed reports of abuses of power as “fake news”.⁴⁹ To go one step further, the state counsellor’s office, Ms. Suu Kyi’s office, emblazoned the words “Fake Rape” on its website to discredit reports that troops had committed sexual violence.⁵⁰

If the human rights abuses are ‘non-existent’, then there’s no need to provide aid, and so the prevention of international aid from entering Burma becomes legitimized. Up until February 2014, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) had six primary care clinics, 20 malaria clinics, and three HIV/AIDS clinics in Rakhine State, until they were ordered by the government to suspend all activities.⁵¹ This left a large health-care void for those Rohingya dependent on MSF as their sole provider for health care. Only after nine months of suspension, MSF was allowed to return to Rakhine State. A presidential spokesman from Burma, Ye Htut told a local

newspaper that MSF’s contract would not be extended any further as it hired “Bengalis” and because it lacked transparency in its work.⁵² This nine-month suspension of MSF is one of many examples of the Burmese government induced restrictions to aid provision for the Rohingya minority, showcasing an attitude of isolationism that prevents other nations from intervening.

There is a lack of summative data about the Rohingya population in any stream of academic literature. Assessments of health, nutrition, and human security provide insight into the needs of vulnerable populations. Collection of data about the Rohingya population is made extremely difficult, because the Myanmar Government does not recognize the concept of the Rohingya people as a distinct and legitimate group, let alone as citizens. With the lack of recognition and acknowledgment of this issue, it serves to completely neglect the plight of Rohingya Muslims. Moreover, government induced restrictions on aid and a lack of data makes it difficult for aid organizations to reach their target audience. These acts tie together to further

deteriorate the conditions of the Rohingya, while providing an image of an unfavourable future for this ostracized population.

Instead of pursuing the identity of a strict isolationist state, modernized Burmese neutralism or equilibrium could be the most effective policy for Burma, to balance foreign pressures and relations. Whether that government will comprehend and consider the implications of its own beliefs and domestic policies, however difficult as in the case of Rohingya, for its foreign affair is yet to be determined.

A Fatal Myth: Democratisation as Remedy

Nearing the end of the Cold War, this essay suggests that Western intervention in Burma became core to the West's promulgation of democracy. Burma and the West held fairly distant relations until the marked uprisings and riots that emerged on August 8, 1988, upsetting the West's understandings of Burma's political strife.⁵³ Following the atrocities of civilians injured and dead at the hands of military forces, the

perception of Burma contorted to clash against the idyllic international relations the democratic West strove to achieve.⁵⁴ The United States, specifically, spearheaded sanctions against Myanmar to encourage a process of democratization to ensue.⁵⁵ This however, did not gain traction in its early stages. Particularly, in 1990 Myanmar held its first elections, in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won eighty percent of seats in the *Pyithu Hluttaw*⁵⁶. The military junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), however, would not cede power.⁵⁷ With the rise of militaristic authoritarianism, and growing adoration of Aung San Suu Kyi—leader of the NLD, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and political prisoner—Pederson argues that the West began to view Burma's politics as a “one-dimensional” issue.⁵⁸ This one dimension was thus thought to be absolved with a symmetrical one dimensional solution: democracy.

This perception can be viewed as paternalistic and dismissive of human rights abuses in Myanmar. In pursuing democracy, the West's backing of Aung San Suu

Kyi and the NLD overlooked Azeez's affirmation that in these elections both the SLORC and NLD were arguing for the expulsion of the Rohingya Muslims from the north of the Rakhine province.⁵⁹ In working to achieve democracy, the West allowed for the indirect dismissal of racist views both parties carried and in doing so, allowed for the rights of an ethnic minority to remain unaddressed, further imperilling the population to a state of genocide. This mind-set is very much embodied by Senator Mitch McConnell's statements of Suu Kyi as follows:

*"She could have chosen the route of Gandhi and just been an icon...Instead she chose the route of Margaret Thatcher by accepting responsibility by bringing along a country that was essentially in the dark ages"*⁶⁰

This description of a country in the "dark ages" can be suggested to denote an ingrained mind-set of civilizational standards that is held against countries in the

Global South deemed primitive and 'backwards'. These perceptions date back to colonial understandings of non-European races and cultures, and as Kennedy explains creates a 'White Man's Burden' in the attempt to civilize.⁶¹ This is also evident in Huntington's thesis in his notorious work *The Clash of Civilizations*. He argues that the West's system of democracy is inherently incompatible and at odds with systems found in the East.⁶² However, when further analysing the work, it becomes evident that Huntington's assumptions and classification of the East lack nuance and cultural relativism. Furthermore, the idea of civilization in the West dismisses centuries of slavery and human rights abuses conveniently to form his thesis. In the West, civilization is suggested to take the route of democracy. Mitch McConnell's opinions, much representative of the overarching American congressional view of Burma at the time, deems a symbol of peace and tolerance is not enough like that of the South Asian figurehead of Mohandas Gandhi⁶³. Instead, McConnell draws a distinction between a leader many deemed to be the impetus of India's independence

to a Western leader. Margaret Thatcher has a notorious history for being on what many would argue as the wrong side of history when speaking to issues of race – especially considering her involvement in pro-South African stances during its era of apartheid⁶⁴. Yet, McConnell finds her a stronger leader, which can be suggested to be rooted in Eurocentric understandings of leadership and further emphasize the simplistic notion with which American officials analysed Burmese politics at the time.

One may argue that human rights is also a Western norm championed across the world, but the West's ideational commitment to democracy overshadowed the possibility of considering a second dimension to Burmese politics.⁶⁵ Assuming democracy allows the promulgation and development of human rights in the future can be argued to diminish the value of lives in the Global South as simply 'part of the process'. This can be said to be attributed to the atmosphere of islamophobia, and orientalist perspectives that disregard the rights and freedoms of those who do not live in the West, as can be analysed above by

Senator McConnell's commentary.⁶⁶ As a consequence of this mode of thinking, Burma today is the only country where the UN's priority is attaining democracy, and thus, receives less international assistance than any other least developed country.⁶⁷ Ultimately, the West's complicity in exacerbating the persecuted condition of the Rohingya peoples lies in its inability to gauge Western society's altruism in the case of Burma.

Present Western intervention in Burma however exists, but this essay suggests the aid is insufficient, endangering the lives of countless Rohingya Muslims fleeing from Myanmar. During the Obama administration, with Secretary Clinton leading the agenda for Foreign Affairs, the country was promised reduced sanctions conditional upon the follow-through of democratisation of the state.⁶⁸ With the extension of Aung San Suu Kyi's party into the political sphere, this slowly became a reality. There still exists tensions between the military and the ability to govern, but many of the sanctions imposed on Burma have been reduced.⁶⁹ According to the

2015 United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Report on Religious Freedoms in Burma, the United States has officially recognized the injustices the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar have faced.⁷⁰ This action, after centuries of conflict, is core to advancing human rights in the region. However, the only follow-up is through one specific sanction restricting arms trades with Burmese military forces. In contrast to the various sanctions placed upon the military dictatorship that ruled Burma for decades when the setting was conducive to American politics to promulgate ideologies of democracy and freedom, the action depicts an imbalance of action. These choices suggest America's commitment to democracy can be understood to be dependent upon its expected gain in the American value dissemination in Burma – whether or not it actually helped minorities as they so believed it would.

With these perspectives in mind, however, addressing the rights of the Rohingya Muslims does not simply categorize itself within the confines of Western altruism.

Burma has been subject to economic sanctions since the 1970s and 80s, especially after 1988 as previously mentioned.⁷¹ Transnational boycotts were enacted against large corporations such as Union Oil Company of California (UNOCAL), an American organization that had a partnership with the Burmese military regime and used forced labourers to enact their work.⁷² John G. Dale argues in his work *Free Burma* that the political consumer is capable of shedding light on issues of unethical consumerism through articulating claims clearly and with a specific point and call to action⁷³. Furthermore, these messages gain traction when there is a collective trans local identity acting against a transnational corporation. These protests against UNOCAL occurred in Massachusetts showcasing a trans local attempt at solidarity. A few months after these protests, the US Congress authorized the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 1997 imposing sanctions on Burma “until such time as the President determines and certifies to Congress that Burma has made measurable and substantial progress in improving human rights practices and implementing

democratic government.”⁷⁴ This law called for the president to develop a “multilateral strategy”—calling for cooperation of members of ASEAN and Burma’s other major trading partners in the region to hopefully ensure an improved state of democracy.⁷⁵

Famously in 1993, Aung San Suu Kyi herself stated:

In Burma today
[,] our real malady is
not economic but
political... Until we
have a system that
guarantees rule of
law and basic
democratic
institutions, no
amount of aid or
investment will
benefit our people.
Profits from our
business enterprises
will merely go
towards enriching a
small, already very
privileged elite.
Companies [that
trade in Burma]
only serve to
prolong the agony
of my country by
encouraging the
present military

regime to persevere
in its
intransigence.⁷⁶

With this in mind, Western governments ensured that corporations attempted to mitigate the exploitation of Burmese citizens’ rights. The role of sanctions was to ensure that democracy could be laid as a foundation prior to capitalist ventures undermining the ability for human rights to establish themselves in the state.

When examining these sanctions, however, there is an opportunity cost for American corporations to profit from cheap and forced labour. Under the Obama administration, sanctions were reduced against Burma, so long as promises of democratisation were achieved.⁷⁷ Recognition of abuses against the Rohingya have been made, but sanctions to ensure the human rights of this group have not been pursued. The question poses itself then, as to why this corporate loophole emerges – whereby human rights are still on the line but now companies can profit from them. For example, Japan was a former imperial power over Burma, but imposed various sanctions in conjunction

with the United States in a display of partnership. Now, however, with the ostensible rise in democratisation in the state, Japan has dramatically increased its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the country⁷⁸. These ties have slowly allowed for Japan to gain access to Burma's markets but also their raw materials and the ability to compete with "an economically expansive China"⁷⁹. This is deplorable considering that within the Burma's boundaries, only the military and elite capitalists will benefit. Furthermore, this splicing of Burmese markets will only further exacerbate ethnic conflicts in the region.⁸⁰

There is more at play in the politics of addressing the ethnic conflict in Burma than what meets the eye. Sanctions may be removed for democratisation, but unless this is fully fledged and consistent with protecting the rights of the marginalised Rohingya Muslims in the state, there is no guarantee for an improvement in the situation.

Muslims on the Margins: A Global Culture of Islamophobia

These roots in determining a clash of civilisations can also be traced to a culture of Islamophobia that can be suggested to be present in Western nations today.⁸¹ Presently, the current United States' President Donald Trump's repeated attempts to enact travel bans barring Muslims in Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States for fear of terrorism. This is indicative of the nature of Islamophobia taking root in international relations. The stigmatizing notion that Islam is monolithic in representing a population of extremist radicals challenges the ability to create empathy for any Muslim population—including the Rohingya. This is crucial to determining that aid cannot be provided when there is not enough public outcry to validate or catalyse aid provision.⁸²

This sentiment can also be found in President Barrack Obama's actions during his control of the Oval. Although it is often cited that Obama inherited the previous administration's inadequate policies with regards to the Middle East and Asia, Bush was responsible for 42 predator drone strikes while Obama initiated over

300 in the region.⁸³ Although the Bush administration very much destabilized the region and caused many of the disturbances in the Middle East, the Obama administration has done little to quell these tensions. In fact, Rubin discusses further that Obama's policies in the Middle East ultimately have redefined politics in the region from being rooted in 'Arab Nationalism', which has been its framing since the 1950s, to a new conception of roots in Islam and fundamentalism.⁸⁴ Finally, George W. Bush allowed for a large misperception of Islam which contributed to the marginalization of Muslim people in America. Kumar argues that since the events of 9/11, the range of debate on issues pertaining to Muslims or Islam has narrowed to a point where "Orientalist modes of thought" are dominant once again.⁸⁵ The "Clash of Civilizations" thesis disdained by the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations, was adopted by George W Bush's government which journalists reported upon with a tone of a political climate of fear. This portrayal of Muslims acquired the status of "common sense," framing the lives of Muslims across the world normatively.⁸⁶ In combining

terrorism and Islam, the past three American governmental administrations have contributed to the normalisation of dehumanising Muslims. Ultimately, these policies have shaped the lens through which Muslims are viewed and thus, undermine the role they can play in norm dissemination for the human rights of Rohingya peoples. This trivializes the creation of solidarity, which in turns questions the impetus for action to follow to ensure aid provision for the Rohingya. This again is a reframing of Islam as the ultimate enemy, clashing against democratic Western ideals. This cosequently hurts the Rohingya, in lessening the opportunity to garner compassion and Western altruism, if they are deemed part of a primitive group not worth assisting. As a Muslim minority, the Rohingya are hurt not only because of the racial prejudice they face as "Bengalis" in that they are referred to as non-natives to Burma, but that they are also of a minority religious background. They are both minorities in Burma, and also the global stage, where Islam – through these continuously imperialistic means of framing minorities – is still very much

misunderstood and so, Muslims continue to be misunderstood too. If a population is misunderstood and deemed to be a threat or ‘the Other’, it is difficult to engender compassion without striking fear or prejudice as well. In the context of aid, where funding often relies on the compassion of Western masses to donate, the Rohingya are at odds with the ability to foster empathy for their plight, because of their identity.

It is also further important to note, the lens of modernity that the issue of the Rohingya Muslims is viewed through. Al Jazeera’s extensive journalism in the region has found numerous examples of cultural and physical genocide against the Rohingya enacted on behalf of the Burmese government. The 1982 Citizenship Act that prevented Rohingya Muslims from attaining citizenship on the basis of identifying them as of *Bengali* ethnicities, was that had far reaching effects on their integration and participation into society and into government structures and institutions; they effectively became a stateless population, with limited and differentiated access to healthcare, education and other

social services⁸⁷. Without citizenship came obstacles to attaining work, food rations, access to the legal system and government services. Further restrictions were implemented to discourage the growth of the Rohingya population by adding taxation measures for foundational social practices, including taxes for marriages and taxes for each child born into a family⁸⁸. An investigation by Al Jazeera also uncovered secret memoranda passed within government that explicitly stated intent to diminish and bar the growth of the Rohingya peoples⁸⁹. These institutional acts have taken place alongside years of physical violence and destruction. This includes the case of the 2012 uprisings where the Na Sa Ka (or military forces) were allegedly responsible for the burning and destruction of Rohingya homes, and the rape and murder of Rohingya Muslims peoples. The riots displaced thousands and allowed the government the means to restrict the mobility rights of many Rohingya by placing them in makeshift refugee camps. Furthermore, one can compare the acts taking place in Burma with already existing

international law surrounding genocide:

The Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention outline that genocide is:

any of [these]... acts committed with intent to destroy... a ... group...:

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group⁹⁰

Considering the circumstances outlined above, the killing of the members of this ethno-religious group, the trauma caused by sexual violence and forcible displacement, the governmental action that made it extraneous to grow the population, and further action are all indicative of genocide. These acts highlight several problems – mainly that

there is evidence of state-sponsored genocide and that nothing is being done to fix it.

When addressing global Islamophobia it is important to note that Burmese nationalism that evokes hatred against the Rohingya Muslims has Islamophobia at its core. Peter Cooclanis writes that in all of Burma's independence struggle, there was a strong sentiment of Buddhist promulgation that came with it, especially in seeking independence from the British⁹¹. Furthermore, in the era of anti-government uprisings in the 1980s in Burma, much of the protests included what Cooclanis calls a "Buddhist renewal movement" that combined "Buddhist religious fanaticism with intense Burmese nationalism and more than a tinge of ethnic chauvinism."⁹² The antagonisms between Muslims and Buddhists is not simply a military-Rohingya, state-Rohingya, or international relations-Rohingya issue. It is a civil Burmese society-Rohingya issue as well. With no support internally due to the religion of the Rohingya, Islamophobia has been pertinent to their disappearing from Burmese society.⁹³

Burma has enjoyed the support of the West for decades, but this has never helped the Rohingya Muslims. With Aung San Suu Kyi now at the helm of government, this complicates the attempt to address the human rights abuses in the country when a seeming champion of human rights denies the injustices the Rohingya have faced. This is ironic, but to assume that Aung San Suu Kyi is not willingly complicit in the genocide of a minority Muslim population is dismissive of the history of Burmese politics and her role within them. It is arguably ignorant to assume that because an individual shares the title of Burmese in the international community, that they will thus share that title internally is dismissive of ethnic tensions in the region. The Rohingya Muslims for centuries have existed on Burmese land, prior to British colonisation, but have repeatedly been labelled Bengali.⁹⁴ They have been victim to decades and centuries of attempts to be forcibly removed from society and the state as a whole.⁹⁵ The lens of modernity, that assumes a leader believing in democracy to spearhead government will thus result in the inclusion of Rohingya human

rights showcases a structural dismissal of Islamophobia and other factors addressed in this essay.

Institutional Failures and Counter Revolution: What Next for the Rohingya?

After calls of ‘never again’ post-Holocaust were enshrined within the Genocide Convention of 1948, international law failed to prevent the horrific act in several circumstances. This is evident after the Rwandan genocide and after the massacres at Srebrenica.⁹⁶ When legality came at odds with the politics of the international system, countless lives were lost. More importantly, these lives were already marginalized and not paid heed to on the international stage to begin with. The ongoing case of the persecution of the Rohingya population in Burma is a very real and current example of the failure of international legislation to protect vulnerable populations. It can be suggested that the modernist and Orientalist views of claiming these populations as “Other” to the West have perilous ramifications throughout history.

In drawing these distinctions between the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’, it is important to distinguish that the international system is failing. Ultimately, some populations have been deemed worthier than others in the Western public sphere of assistance. We see that again and again, it is people of colour and Muslims, as evidenced in the case of Rwanda, Bosnia and now Burma, that are dismissed and not worthy of timely aid. This has direct links to the culture of Islamophobia developed for the past few decades as mentioned earlier in this essay.

The dismissal of the Rohingya Muslims within the sphere of Western aid and politics can be proven when compared to the case study of the Free Tibet Movement. Stephen Noakes argues that norms “provide a principled basis for advocacy network formation, aiding in the creation of identities and preferences” core to transnational advocacy.⁹⁷ He goes on to determine that “to the extent ... networks manage to sustain themselves and ... influence national priorities, the normative commitments underpinning their formation and mobilization are treated as fairly static.”⁹⁸ If norms

are core to the ability to advocate for people, and a norm of Islamophobia has been static within Western society for decades, there is evidence that there is difficulty to engender altruism for this group. In the case of Tibet, there is a global network of some 170 organizations providing financial and diplomatic resources to further the cause of independence⁹⁹. More importantly however, the stateless Tibetan people had the support of the American Whitehouse at the time:

“Beginning in the 1980s, an effort to raise the profile of the Tibet issue in congress and the White House was taken up by the prominent DC law firm of Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering, which was registered with the US Department of Justice in 1985 as an agent of the Tibetan government-in-exile. Its message found particular resonance with members of the house of representatives, who, already upset with China over a host of other matters ranging from trade to arms sales, voted in June 1987 to approve an amendment to the foreign

relations authorization act specifically denouncing what it called human rights violations in Tibet and the illegal occupation of the region by the Chinese"¹⁰⁰

With the common enemy of the Chinese, the US had strategic and ideological agendas aligned with the desire to assist the Tibetan people. The Rohingya Muslims do not have a common enemy to share with America. If anything, Aung San Suu Kyi was a proud ally of the United States for decades. Furthermore, the Rohingya are a Muslim population. They do not hold any power in the world stage that can come as a result of their identity. Noakes argues that these early successes of US support, alongside other large parties including the British and Russians, are what allowed the Free Tibet Movement such momentum¹⁰¹. The Rohingya lack this expediency or transnational advocacy due to their existence as stateless Muslim peoples – ultimately holding back the ability to assist.

As of September 2017, further media attention has gained traction after violent uprisings

came to the forefront of global politics, shining a spotlight on Rakhine State. Sparked by military attacks against the Rohingya minority in remote villages, pleas for help have begun to be recognized. The difference at this moment however, in Western recognition of the atrocities occurring in Burma, are not a direct result of the magnitude and vivid horrors of actions that have ensued, but rather because they have occurred under the watch of Aung San Suu Kyi. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate is facing condemnations for her ignorance towards the actions of the Buddhist majority and her continued assertions that there is fear on both sides.¹⁰² In an interview in 2016 that is gaining traction in media today, Suu Kyi asserts that she will not speak against the “ethnic cleansing” of the Rohingya population because there is not enough violence enacted against them.¹⁰³ Sources such as The Guardian, the New York Times, and politically satirical television shows such as the Daily Show with Trevor Noah have all addressed the recent escalation in violence in relation to Aung San Suu Kyi and thus question not the illegitimacy of the human rights violations, but

their illegitimacy under the watchful eye of a Nobel peace prize laureate.

Distinct within this situation, are the analyses drawn in relation to Trump. The left wing of the political spectrum has been of late under stressful circumstances due to a communal disbelief of the leader's policies and subsequent repercussions worldwide. Social movements have emerged to challenge Trump's views and political assertions, through the Women's March, the March for Science, protests against anti-immigration reform, and solidarity amongst Black Lives Matter groups, marginalized and racialized groups. Pride marches have shown more political backing due to the circumstances regarding the vulnerability of queer populations under a Trump administration.¹⁰⁴ It is in this regard, that the left is beginning to step forward and address injustices that are occurring worldwide, with a stark distaste for anything remotely reminiscent of Donald Trump.

Although there are movements promulgating views of Islamophobia, take for example by the Neo Nazi march in

Charlottesville, there are similar movements attempting to promote a counter perspective. During the Miss America Pageant for 2017, a nationwide broadcasted event with millions watching, Ms. Texas asserted in relation to right-wing violent protests, that President Trump's inability to address domestic terrorism was wrong and that the fault being on the side of white supremacists was "obvious".¹⁰⁵ With these clashes of political viewpoints and leanings at play, there is understanding that a social wave of altruism is possible to emerge as well. Finnemore and Sikkink argue that norm entrepreneurs are responsible for disseminating an idea to be a standard of expected behaviour.¹⁰⁶ Once this idea has achieved a critical mass of followers—whether this be in numbers or the power of the few who follow who are considered to be global leaders, this norm reaches a norm cascade becoming an ingrained standard that slowly comes to be taken for granted.¹⁰⁷ Anti-islamophobia views stand is questionable in terms of this process. However, it is crucial to discern that hope for the Rohingya is not lost. Aung San Suu Kyi, having been analysed in comparison to President Trump in

her belief that there is fear on both sides of the physical violence occurring in her country—even though it is proven that the Muslim minority has faced a much larger extent of persecution in terms of physical, sexual, and psychological harm—proves to be a target of disdain by the left. As a very politically mobile group, this indicates that there is political consciousness among the left surrounding the human rights violations of the Rohingya. Since Aung San Suu Kyi is now questioned as categorically similar to Trump, anti-Trump sentiment can potentially be used to mobilise pro-Rohingya rights movements and attitudes. Anti-trump views allow for a lens to analyse global affairs, working to effectively explore the issue of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Drawing these parallels is crucial to understanding that there is the possibility of global norm shaping processes to ensue. This would allow the protection of the rights of the Rohingya Muslims through current reactions to the climate of xenophobia, Islamophobia, and alt-right messaging.

In order for the Rohingya crisis to be addressed and resolved, institutional action is required.

Time and again, from Rwanda to Srebrenica to Venezuela, the bureaucratic nature of international political agenda-setting intertwined with capitalist gain has allowed for the loss of life in exorbitant numbers. Genocide continues to be committed against those in the world with the least political representation, while those with the most remain idle. Systems such as the United Nations were created for purposes such as these, but their lack of democracy within the decision-making process, and ability to act promptly within emergencies has served as the organization's downfall.

In the present situation, recognition is key. Western media has begun to cover the story of the Rohingya as that of ethnic cleansing, although this essay goes on to use stronger language of genocide. It is crucial that Aung San Suu Kyi admit to this circumstance and allow for the United Nations to carry out probes, investigations, and further measures to ensure the protection of human rights in the region. This includes culturally relativistic data that analyses the state-sponsored oppression and violence enacted against the

Rohingya and analysing further structural violence committed in terms of lack of mobility rights, or the ability to seek justice for crimes committed during the civil war.

The status quo has been upheld for far too long. To ensure that this crisis is ended and to prevent history from repeating itself, it is necessary that the focus of the human rights and collective rights of the Rohingya are recognized, protected, and fought for. Furthermore, these rights must be mobilized actively in contrast to

the circumstances of Western sanctions being uplifted and the ability for corporations to further exacerbate the situation in the state. It is the continual dismissal of human value for those of broader institutions and organizations such as the state or corporations. In this quest, one often forgets that the thread that holds this fabric together is each individual human life. Without recognition for such lives, society cannot function. Thus, without the active recognition of the Rohingya Muslims' rights, we as a global society cannot function.

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8

Navigating Caste Inequality in Kerala: Caste as Present, Hidden, and Denied

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Introduction

It was the morning session at the Centre for Research and Education for Social Transformation (CREST) in Calicut, Kerala. The courtyard buzzed with the sound of 30-odd postgraduate students talking animatedly in small groups. All hailing from academic backgrounds in the sciences, the students were trying something a bit different today. Saima had given them 30 minutes to put together short plays to present to the class.¹ The topic could be anything, so long as the students

exhibited creativity and comfort playing a role in front of the class. As we all settled back into our seats after the allotted time, the first group got into character and prepared to begin their skit. Students laughed watching their classmates fumble with props and talked amongst themselves, but when the acting began, the room fell quiet. The play recounted the story of an alcoholic man who beats his wife and kids. The wife pleads with her husband to stop drinking, but each day he goes out with his friend and comes back drunk. In the evenings, the children look on from the next room, where they try to do their

homework alone while listening to their parents argue. One day, the husband's friend overdoses and dies. The husband, traumatized by what he has witnessed, comes home and pledges to never drink again. The play concludes with a happy ending.

The play was met with thunderous applause from the class. Saima commended the students for telling a story with such an important message. "Alcoholism is a big problem in many tribal communities", she says. After class in the halls, many students come up to Ajit, the student who played the role of the husband, and congratulated him for his emotional and convincing performance. One of the other students who was in the play explained proudly that Ajit came up with the concept himself. Everyone was very impressed. At the end of the day, Ajit and I sat on the steps outside the school and spoke privately. I echoed the enthusiasm expressed by others for his talent. "You wrote the play about your family, didn't you?" I enquired. Ajit nodded and said, "yes". "I like the ending" I said. He smiled.

CREST is an autonomous institution launched by the government of Kerala in 2008 to improve the employability and social mobility of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and other marginalized groups. The institution runs a variety of programs that help students "gain confidence, build competence and achieve excellence in all spheres of human endeavour for their social, cultural, and economic development".² Over the course of seven weeks in July and August of 2017, I had the opportunity to intern at CREST in its Post Graduate Certificate Course for Professional Development (PGCCPD) while doing ethnographic research through the Anthropology Department at the University of Toronto.

I open with the story above because of its usefulness in illustrating several themes that emerged during my time at CREST, also to be discussed throughout this paper. The aforementioned play may be viewed as a snapshot of the circumstances familiar to some (though not all) of the students who come to CREST. The alcoholism depicted in the play is

a result of many intersecting factors such as economic deprivation, social exclusion, caste discrimination, and lack of access to education and good-paying jobs. Conditions at home also have ramifications for children who must go through school with little to no assistance from their parents, while studying in a poor learning environment.

The play was also the most explicit discussion of caste inequality I observed during my time at CREST. While CREST works with lower-caste students its programming, direct discussion of caste is almost non-existent. Instead, CREST follows a deliberately individualized curriculum, promoting personal self-improvement over discussion of systemic casteism. The teachers at CREST seek to provide underprivileged students them with the “soft skills” needed to succeed in a competitive job market. The exercises of writing and play performance in English is one small piece of a broader curriculum intended to improve English proficiency, communication skills, confidence, and self-presentation. Thus, the play is symbolic of what CREST is seeking to transform.

The play also revealed an interesting puzzle. Ajit, the student playing the lead role, chose to keep his tribal status a secret from his peers at CREST. It is not surprising that a tribal student outside the institution would harbor shame over one’s identity, but this presents an issue in the context of CREST. While Ajit has achieved many of the markers of social and cultural development that CREST seeks to cultivate in its students, he continues to lack the confidence needed to embrace his own tribal identity, even within a school intended to build confidence in SC/ST students. Throughout the discussion that follows, I will return to these issues and depict the varying ways in which caste is present and absent in the lives of the students and in the institution. I focus in particular on three dimensions of caste: caste as present, caste as hidden, and caste as denied. First, some background on Kerala and theories of social and cultural capital is warranted.

Beyond the “Kerala Model”: Theories of Social and Cultural Capital

Kerala is a southern state in India known for its impressive social development, greatly exceeding other parts of the country. The state of Kerala has drawn interest among social scientists for its relatively low Gross Domestic Product yet simultaneous significant human development marked by near universal literacy, low infant, and mother mortality, and life expectancy far beyond that of any other state in India.³⁴ Commonly known as the “Kerala model”, this success has been linked to the state’s unique political history of elected Communist leadership and its extension of public services.⁵ While absolute deprivation has been eliminated among the vast majority of the population, vulnerable groups in Kerala continue to experience social and economic inequality. In particular, SC/ST populations experience disproportionate poverty and lower educational achievement.⁶ This disparity is tied to colonial processes of land dispossession, and has been further intensified through neoliberal policies of privatization.⁷

Bourdieu’s seminal piece “The Forms of Capital” offers a useful

theoretical framework with which to discuss persistent inequality in Kerala. Bourdieu expands the traditional notion of economic capital to argue that capital, and by extension power, also exists in social and cultural form. Social capital refers to the networks from which an individual can draw, and one’s membership in particular groups. Cultural capital is further divided into three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital refers to “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”, such as mannerisms, conversational style, and other seemingly automatic characteristics of thought and behaviour cultivated over time, otherwise known as *habitus*.⁸ Objectified cultural capital refers to “cultural goods” such as books, musical instruments, or clothing, which exemplify status. Lastly, institutionalized cultural capital generally refers to educational qualifications as well.

Caste as Present: Tribal Identify and Forms of Capital

Within the SC/ST category, there is significant diversity among the

experiences of CREST students with economic, social, and cultural capital, as evident through my interactions. While some students from wealthier family backgrounds did not view caste as a dominant feature structuring their lives, others described numerous experiences of both caste-based discrimination and lack of opportunity. Ajit is a useful example worth discussing in detail.

Ajit is ST, falling into the minority among the mostly SC cohort at CREST. He is from the district of Wayanad, known for its dense forests and high tribal population. His parents have a limited primary education and work in agriculture. Ajit and his siblings grew up poor. While he was going through primary school, there was no electricity at home and often not enough money for a nutritious diet, owing to the poor wages his father earned working on a plantation. Furthermore, his father was an alcoholic and would often beat his mother and siblings. While some wealthier families choose to put their children in private English medium schools for primary education, Ajit went to a public school where English

was not taught. Once in high school, however, English became mandatory in all subjects. Ajit struggled to keep up with many of his classmates. Ajit recounted instances of humiliation by teachers who chastised him for his “poor learning”. Moreover, Ajit dreaded writing his surname (which contains his colony name) on documents and receiving the government stipend for SC/ST students, because these processes unfolded as a public display that made his tribal identity visible, often resulting in ridicule from his peers at school. In the fifth standard, Ajit joined a program in Wayanad aimed at empowering tribal students in school. Ajit credits the resources and guidance he received there for helping him pursue higher education. Ajit explained that his situation improved significantly once in college, because he was living in a hostel rather than at home, with access to college resources such as computers and libraries. Moreover, he was better equipped to present himself socially because he was “more balanced emotionally”, better-dressed, and more proficient academically and in English communication than had been the case during his years in primary school. Still, Ajit noted

to me that he and his tribal student peers were “not much brilliant” compared to their “brilliant” upper-caste classmates.

Bourdieu’s insights on forms of capital can explain some of the disparities Ajit experienced. In the case of education, Bourdieu’s argument articulates the existing intersections between all three forms of capital. The lack of economic capital in Ajit’s family resulted in a poor learning environment at home and may have also contributed to his father’s alcoholism. The tight economic situation also meant that Ajit’s parents did not have the time to help him with school work. Thus, the limited economic capital of his parents resulted in their inability to cultivate institutionalized cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications for Ajit. Even if Ajit’s parents had time to assist him, their own limited primary school education made them ill-equipped for this task. Ajit has elder siblings who may have been better suited to this, but their own obligations towards their parents meant they were often too busy helping with agricultural work to mentor or encourage Ajit. The lack of economic capital in Ajit’s

family also lowered the affordability of English medium school. This multitude of factors resulted in Ajit’s lack of access to cultural capital, placing him at a disadvantage when he entered his English-speaking high school. While more privileged students benefited from a conversion of economic and cultural capital through investment in private education, Ajit’s lack of one form of capital blocked access to another. This also had repercussions in the realm of social capital, as Ajit’s situation resulted in ridicule at school by both teachers and his peers, separating him from the social network of upper-caste students.

The program Ajit joined in Wayanad helped fill some of these voids, and granted him new opportunities to access and cultivate forms of capital. Ajit explained that the program gave him access to computers and libraries, resources not otherwise available due to his family’s lack of economic capital. The centre also gave students opportunities to practice “mingling”, thus helping tribal youth develop a form of embodied cultural capital that more privileged youth might gain through their families’ social

networks. The program staff members themselves also had knowledge pertaining to academics, college admissions, and proper etiquette that others within Ajit's immediate social network lacked. Thus, the connections Ajit made with the program staff broadened his social network to include those who had social and cultural capital. As Bourdieu notes, the volume of social capital held by an individual depends on both the size of the network of connections (which Ajit was able to expand), as well as "the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected".⁹

Ajit also explained that the staff at this program were instrumental in his application and acceptance to college. This comment reflects the notion of "capacity to aspire" coined by Appadurai (2004) and closely related to Bourdieu's discussion on capital. Appadurai describes the "capacity to aspire" as a navigational capacity, which "thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation."¹⁰ One dimension of this capacity is the access of privileged youth to the

experiences and lessons of their parents. Upper-caste parents with college diplomas, for instance, are able to guide their children through the process of applying to college. They are also more capable of recognizing and cultivating the prerequisite actions and qualities required to gain admission. While Ajit's parents' lack of social, cultural, and economic capital meant that they were not in a position to offer Ajit this navigational guidance for his college applications, the staff at the Wayanad program were. The program also served to disrupt what Smith (2011) calls a "transgenerational family script". Coming from a family where nobody held a post-secondary degree, the default plan for Ajit's personal journey did not include going to college. The program he participated in helped interrupt and redirect this "script".

While the Wayanad program was hugely beneficial for Ajit, it did not entirely erase the impacts of his lower-caste background. As Ajit explained, it was evident in college that the tribal students were not as "brilliant" as the upper-caste students. The abilities of upper-caste students are the result of their previous and

current access to various forms of capital. As Bourdieu notes, “ability or talent is itself the product of an investment of time and cultural capital”.¹¹ Ajit’s family did not have the time (as a result of limited economic capital) nor the cultural capital to invest in him to the extent that upper-caste families often do, resulting in Ajit and other tribal students appearing and even feeling intrinsically less “brilliant” in college.

A secondary form of caste-discrimination emerges from efforts aimed at addressing discrimination. As noted above, Ajit was often ridiculed by classmates for receiving the government stipend given to SC/ST students. The stipend served as a marker of his tribal identity, making him an easy target. It also did not help that students at Ajit’s school were called up to the front of the class to receive the stipend, making a spectacle out of something that could have otherwise been done privately. Thus, the stipend, as well as the method of its distribution, makes SC/ST identities visible, potentially reinforcing negative stereotypes of laziness and deficiency

attached to this demographic. As Shah and Shneiderman (2013) note, in the eyes of upper-castes, reservations may be seen as unfair or viewed as rewarding typical lower-caste deficiencies. Indeed, this sentiment was expressed by one of the teachers at CREST, who claimed that the students only want government jobs because it is an easy route to a good salary and little work. He elaborated on this to me privately, explaining that the students are accustomed to being handed things to them through reservation, resulting in their tendency to want “rights but no duties”. The teacher couched his criticism in the language of reservations, but inherently, he was reiterating tropes of lower-castes being both lazy and undeserving.

Caste as Hidden: Invisible Chains of Capital and Passing

Thus far, I have outlined ways in which intersecting forms of capital can create deprivation that falls along caste lines. For Ajit, the presence of caste was visible through his experiences of poverty, discrimination, and lack

of opportunity. There are other cases, however, where caste is not as visible. Sometimes, caste may be either deliberately hidden as an identity marker, or its presence as an agentive social structure can be obscured. I will discuss the latter first as it is tied to the preceding discussion on forms of capital.

Economic capital is the most visible form of capital. For students like Ajit where economic capital was lacking, it was easy to observe and describe processes of inequality. Other students at CREST, however, had ample economic capital but still lacked capital in other realms. When asking these students about their experiences with caste, the most common response was that they were not affected by it. Several students noted that their parents' generation experienced caste discrimination and economic deprivation, giving examples of poor work conditions and low-wages as employees of upper-caste-owned plantations. They insisted, however, that because this was no longer the case, and caste did not apply to them. Such comments ignore how the experiences of their parents have implications on their own generation.

The same students that denied the relevance of caste also noted that the most important factors in their employment prospects are personal connections and self-presentation. One student explained that with good connections, one can get a job without writing the prerequisite exam required for most jobs. She explained that on several occasions where she had interviewed for a position and did not get the job, she later found out it went to someone who had not written the exam. Access to "connections" is no accident. It is a form of social capital accumulated over time and across generations. Parents of upper-caste students who were not working on plantations in the previous generation were developing important connections in government and corporate sectors, which later helped their children bypass steps in a competitive job market - such as writing an exam. Moreover, "self-presentation" is not an innate quality, but rather a form of cultural capital. It is taught and cultivated by parents and others in an individual's immediate social network. Good mannerisms, conversational style, etiquette,

and knowledge of appropriate interview protocol are all qualities that upper-caste students are more likely to possess due to greater cultural and social capital. The impacts of caste emerging from a lack of social and cultural capital may be difficult to observe, because they are often manifested as a lack of advantage, rather than as explicit negative discrimination or poverty. Thus, lower-caste students at CREST who claim caste does not affect them may not have experienced the same overt discrimination as Ajit, but these students are still affected by the inaccessibility of opportunities presented through good “connections” or “self-presentation”.

Another hidden dimension of caste is the deliberate obscuring of markers of lower-caste identity, otherwise known as passing. Erving Goffman’s discussion on stigma and social identity in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman distinguishes virtual social identity from actual social identity. The former refers to the character imputed on an individual based on assumptions about the category to which he or she belongs, and the latter refers

to the attributes possessed in reality. Stigma is the special discrepancy between these two types of identities, an attribute that is “deeply discrediting”.¹² In some cases, the discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity is immediately apparent. For example, an individual with a missing limb or a physical disability is in most situations clearly identifiable. This person is thus already “discredited”, and their task in social situations is to manage the subsequent tensions that inevitably arise. In other cases, the differentness of the individual is not immediately apparent. This person is not discredited but rather “discreditable”, and may live in fear of being “found”. Thus, such individuals do not manage existing tensions, but rather manage the “undisclosed discrediting information” that could make their social stigma apparent.¹³ It is this managing of information that, when successful, can result in the discreditable individual “passing” as normal.

This latter case of management is what may occur in the case of caste as a social stigma. A low-caste person in a high-standing social position (for example,

being a top student or having a good job) embodies a tension between virtual and actual identity. The virtual identity of being high-caste is the assumed attribute of anyone in a reputable position, while one's actual identity may be of a low-caste. Ajit has often found himself in this situation. By the time he was in college, Ajit was a top student, now having obtained two master's degrees and intending to pursue a PhD. He is also fairly light-skinned, making his tribal identity less obvious based on appearance. Given these characteristics, Ajit has discovered that it is possible for him to pass as upper-caste, or at least not tribal, sometimes even without much deliberate effort on his part. For example, Ajit explained that when he was growing up, he was sometimes mistaken as not from a tribal background, simply because of his skin colour. Once, he was invited into the home of an upper-caste person who did not realize Ajit's tribal identity. Later, when the upper-caste lady discovered his tribal demographic marker, Ajit was not re-invited and was instead treated poorly in further interactions. This situation is described by Goffman as

“unintended passing”, a prerequisite experience that prompts the stigmatized individual to learn to “pass” deliberately, (hopefully) not being quickly discovered of one's identity, as was the case in Ajit's unintended passing. This example also points to the importance of (in)visibility in passing. In the case of Ajit's skin colour, this attribute helps make his stigma less immediately visible.

In high school and college, Ajit began making deliberate efforts to pass. Part of this process involves hiding what Goffman calls “stigma symbols”, referring to signs that “[draw] attention to a debasing identity discrepancy, fragmenting what would otherwise be a coherent overall picture”.¹⁴ One symbol of stigma clearly associated with tribal individuals is having red-stained teeth from the habitual chewing of a plant found in Wayanad. Ajit was able to easily eliminate this symbol from his identity and further aid the process of passing. Another sign that helps an individual pass is a “disidentifier”. This refers to a sign that tends to “break up an otherwise coherent picture but in this case in a positive direction desired by the

actor, not so much establishing a new claim as throwing severe doubt on the validity of the virtual one".¹⁵ In Ajit's case, his ability to speak English, a quality he began improving upon through the program in Wayanad and even more so at CREST, serves as a useful disidentifier.

Passing is not always easily achieved, and can also create negative experiences for the individual who passes. Documented identity, for example, is much harder to hide. As Goffman notes, "biography attached to documented identity can place clear limitations on the way in which an individual can elect to present himself".¹⁶ This is the problem Ajit encountered when he wrote his surname on forms. Another possible side effect of passing is ambivalence towards the group of stigmatized individuals to which the passing individual belongs. As Goffman outlines:

[T]he stigmatized individual may exhibit identity ambivalence when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a

stereotyped way, flamboyantly or pitifully acting out the negative attributes imputed to them. This sight may repel him, since after all he supports the norms of the wider society, but his social and psychological identification with these offenders holds for him to what repels him, transforming repulsion into shame, and then transforming ashamedness itself into something of which he is ashamed. In brief, he can neither embrace his group nor let it go.¹⁷

Ajit exhibited identity ambivalence when describing his own community to me. He lamented the fact that many follow what he considers to be primitive spiritual practices. He also expressed annoyance that tribal people speak a variety of different traditional languages, rather than simply adopting Malayalam. Throughout the discussion, Ajit conveyed his embarrassment and shame over

tribal traditions that he felt were characteristic of “bad culture”, the same attributes for which he was shamed himself. Instead of disparaging the ways in which upper-castes inflict shame, he disparaged the shamed characteristics themselves.

Ajit has learned methods to help him pass in social situations involving upper-castes, but he also chose to do this at CREST. At the school, although all students are from lower castes, an inter-caste hierarchy between SC/ST students persist. Ajit was very aware of this dynamic, even if it has never manifested itself (to my knowledge) as discrimination between the students. It is troubling that an institution dedicated to increasing the confidence of lower-castes and facilitating their social mobility has not managed to imbue enough confidence in Ajit to stop concealing his tribal identity within the school. Goffman notes that it is not uncommon for stigmatized individuals who have learned to pass to subsequently feel that they are above passing and embrace their identity wholeheartedly. It may be overly optimistic to expect five months at CREST to help a student like

Ajit unlearn years of concealment and exhibit a complete transformation. However, the institution can serve an important role in instigating such processes. Instead, CREST engages in an odd denial of caste. I suggest that this is tied to CREST’s deliberate approach of tackling caste inequality solely through targeted and individualized processes of self-improvement. This pedagogy as a form of denying caste-based differences is discussed below.

Caste as Denied: Curriculum and Students

CREST shares its campus with another government organization, the Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS). On the premises, KIRTADS runs a small museum with tribal tools, artifacts, and models on display. The main museum is inside a building adjacent to CREST, but some models are on display outside. The museum had not been discussed by anyone I spoke to at CREST. When I asked one of the staff members about it, his response was to immediately

explain emphatically that the museum is casteist and that I should not go inside. He did not elaborate on how or why this is the case, merely stating that the existence of such a museum is in itself casteist. Later that day, I was interviewing Ajit and asked him for his opinion on the museum. Based on the staff member's comment, I was expecting him to find the museum offensive. To my surprise, he was not offended by it at all. Instead, my question prompted him to start telling me about tribal huts in his colony that were similar to the models on display. This was a rare moment when he seemed proud talking about his tribal identity. I did not end up entering the museum, but I still found the discrepancy in reactions between the staff member and Ajit my question to be telling.

In her discussion of a similar institution for lower-caste students in Kerala, Lukose (2006) explains how caste is deflected or flattened in an effort to promote an environment of equality. My interaction with the staff member about the adjacent museum points to a similar situation at CREST. Throughout its curriculum, CREST highlights the importance

of personal dedication, resourcefulness, and hard work. Students are taught that with enough effort, anything is possible. What students are not taught is how caste inequality is actively produced and reified in society. They are also not taught to be critical of the underlying conditions that enable one's attendance at a school like CREST, or the requirements of becoming polished while others appear to simply possess these traits, recalling the "brilliant" upper-caste students described by Ajit. The path to equality outlined by CREST is essentially a denial of caste-related issues.

The denial of caste was made more explicit in a conversation with a "Personality Development" teacher at CREST. When asking her about a lesson on proper table etiquette and interview protocol, she became defensive to my questions, quickly noting that it is not casteist to teach this. She went on to say that she would teach any student these skills, as everyone in Kerala lacks practice with Western mannerisms such as handshakes and cutlery. When I asked her how she had acquired these skills, she explained matter-of-factly that her situation was

different, having gone to a prestigious college in Mumbai and grown up surrounded by people familiar with proper etiquette. Thus, the teacher's default assertion of equality reflects a discrepancy with her own experience, in which she herself benefited from access to resources not afforded to her lower-caste students. Returning to the example of the aforementioned museum, a similar "flattening" of caste helps explain the staff member's response. For him, promoting caste equality was akin to denying caste differentiation. Thus, he found the tribal museum casteist simply because of the attention it draws to tribal differences.

The denial of caste by teachers at CREST also impacts the ways in which students conceptualize caste. Earlier, I noted that some students do not feel that caste personally affects them. This sentiment extends further, as some students expressed that caste is not only irrelevant to them, but to everyone in Kerala. In an online conversation, one of the students explained to me that "in the early times it [caste] was very crucial. But nowadays it is not a problem". As a student about to

complete a five-month course intended to address the marginalization of lower-castes, it seems problematic to declare that caste is no longer a problem.

This issue is fundamentally tied to CREST's pedagogical approach. The drawbacks of CREST's pedagogy with regards to caste inequality are exacerbated when contrasted with the benefits of its unofficial approach to gender inequality. While the topic of caste is rarely explicitly noted by the teachers to the students, several female teachers did talk openly about gender equality and women's oppression. It was also common for teachers to make explicit reference to how gender roles are taught and socially constructed. For example, one teacher told the story of Cinderella, but with the gender roles reversed. This unfolded into a discussion on how the stories told young girls raise them to believe they need to be saved. The same teacher who denied the relevance of caste in her familiarity with table etiquette also frequently talked to the students about gender. On one occasion, she recounted an experience with a potential male boss who attempted to assault her.

She was forthright in discussing the prevalence of gender-based violence and encouraged the students to think critically about how harmful views of women are reproduced in social interactions, giving rise to said violence.

The result of these discussions was positive. After the teacher recounted the story of Cinderella, some male students decided to rewrite a play they were creating in another class to give the female lead more agency. Moreover, at the end of my time in Kerala, many of the female students expressed to me how CREST has helped them see that women and girls can be strong. Deesha, a married student, told me with confidence how she intended to challenge her mother-in-law's sexist views on the role of a wife. Her mother-in-law did not want her to leave the home if she managed to get a government job in another district, but Deesha explained that if she did get a job, she had every intention of working. "I don't want to be just a housewife", she said. While there are certainly many unresolved issues pertaining to gender, the critical discussions that unfolded on this topic pushed the conversation about gender

forward, especially when compared to CREST's approach to the issue of caste inequality. Many female students left CREST with a sense of pride for their identity as women and a renewed conviction in their abilities, but students like Ajit continued to harbor shame over his tribal identity.

There are a few factors that may have influenced the diverging approaches to gender and caste inequality at CREST. To start, the female teachers have a personal stake in the issue of gender inequality but not in caste inequality, as they are all upper-caste themselves. To my knowledge, the discussions that ensued on gender were not an official part of the CREST curriculum, rather something the female teachers chose to include themselves. They talked about gender because it affects them personally, thus making it not possible for them to deny its relevance. It is also possible that this divergence is reflective of and influenced by trends in broader state-sponsored and media discourse. Attention to gender equality is commonly perceived as a sign of development. It is also often evoked as a key feature of

the praised Kerala model.¹⁸ By contrast, caste is often construed in Western media as a marker of backwardness and underdevelopment, despite the presence of similar, though not institutionalized, hierarchical class and race structures in the West. CREST's critical attention to gender but not caste follows these broader patterns.

I want to be explicit in stating that I am not arguing against a skills-based approach to overcoming inequality. Rather, I seek to draw attention to problems in an exclusively skill-based curriculum. As Delpit (1986) notes, minority students need to be taught skills in order to succeed in society, but this must be couched "within the context of critical and creative thinking" if it is to bring about meaningful and impactful change.¹⁹

A useful starting point in addressing this aspect of CREST's educational approach might be to employ teachers who are themselves from lower-caste backgrounds. Their insights from lived experiences with caste inequality, as well as their ability to help infuse critical discussion on caste as the female teachers did

in the case of gender, would be a positive addition to CREST's pedagogy. Still, it is important not to place all responsibility of critiquing casteism on lower-caste staff. CREST as an institution must also find ways to critically examine systemic issues of casteism among its students, and work to resolve instances where casteism may be perpetuated by its own staff.

Conclusion

Caste presented itself in varying ways in the lives of the students at CREST, and in their experiences at the institution. For students like Ajit, caste was clearly manifested in experiences of poverty and lack of access to opportunities. Economic, social, and cultural capital intersect in lower-caste social positions to create situations of deprivation that subsequently reproduce themselves across generations. In other cases, where economic capital is ample, chains of social and cultural capital may be less apparent, making the effects of caste hidden. Caste may be also deliberately hidden for an individual to pass and avoid the humiliation and discrimination associated with a lower-caste

identity. This is the approach that Ajit adopted both prior to coming to CREST and during the program. It is possible, however, for stigmatized individuals to eventually discard performative tactics of passing, and to undergo the more transformative and political journey of embracing one's stigmatized identity. This is not a process encouraged or supported at CREST. While CREST certainly helps its students learn and implement "soft skills" that will aid them in navigating a competitive job market, the school does not encourage assessment of caste as

a systemic and structural issue, an alternative approach that could lead to a more critical examination of power relations. There is promise, however, in the unofficial emergence of critical discussions on gender, spearheaded by female teachers at CREST. Applying a similar approach to caste would help CREST instill a deeper, more political understanding of inequality in its students. This process will help students enact more transformative changes in their personal identification and relationship to caste, and in their future impacts on society.

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9

[Op-Ed] India's Soft Power: Prospects and limitations

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Scholars of International Relations define power as a state's ability to influence the behaviour of other states to its advantage. Hard power implies the use of military and economic means to influence other states or political bodies; it is explicitly coercive and works best when applied on states with comparatively less military or economic power. In contrast, soft power is decidedly non-coercive, and it works through culture, foreign policies and political values. States wielding soft power do not bludgeon their opponents into submission by virtue of their military might, rather, they are able to attract and co-opt their competitors.

The concept of soft power was first propounded by Joseph Nye

of Harvard University in the book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990), to describe inveiglement not overtly based on force. Since then, the term has found wide currency in international affairs. Joseph Nye further developed the concept of soft power in the book – *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004). The current understanding of soft power is that it is the ability to influence, change, or control social and public opinion through diplomacy, strategic communication, foreign assistance, economic reconstruction, lobbying or branding.

Soft power is not a normative concept but a descriptive term. As

such, there is no universally agreed upon method for measuring it. Some observers and analysts of international affairs have attempted to gauge the soft power of various nations through indices and country rankings. Soft power is more than simply influence or persuasion: it is the attraction that leads to acquiescence. It is partly generated by governmental policies and public diplomacy. Popular culture and mass media are also sources of soft power. The success of soft power depends on the state's reputation. Cultural intangibles like the persuasiveness of brands, favorable coverage in the international news, and goodwill are all measures of soft power. The meaning of the term 'soft power' has been considerably expanded – to the point where it is routinely used in a socio-cultural context to include such diverse elements as cinema, sports, cuisine, art, and religion.

Soft Power in the Indian Context

India, along with China, is one of the ascendant economic powers of the 21st century, so it is only

natural that attention is paid to its soft power potential. India's demographic evolution – a predominantly young population, its widespread diaspora, rapid economic growth, and its increasing military strength have all been cited as reasons for its emergence. India is home to very diverse cultures, languages, climates, and landscapes. Moreover, it is one of the oldest countries in the world and has a rich syncretic religious heritage. All of these factors are potential soft power resources.

Post-Independence India enjoys a reputation of being benign, non-violent, and fastidiously democratic. In recent times, the Government of India has made concerted efforts to capitalize on its reputation to make India an attractive investment and travel destination. Some of the efforts that have focused on enhancing India's international brand image – such as the creation in 2006 of a public diplomacy division within the Ministry of External Affairs, the worldwide expansion of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Ministry of Tourism's 'Incredible India' campaign, and the work of the Ministry for Overseas Indians.ⁱ

Certain characteristics of Indian culture, such as yoga and Ayurveda, have progressively gained western attention and the same is now being aggressively marketed by the newly created Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) of the Government of India. New-fangled mega-corporations like Patanjali Ayurved Limited and non-governmental organizations like the Isha Foundation and the Art of Living Foundation are also prominent in this regard. Upwardly, mobile India has been experiencing a resurgent, overtly militant, consumption-based religiosity for some time, as can be seen from the mushrooming of millionaire ascetics and sundry God-men. In addition to the niche markets within India and among the diaspora, Hindu 'spirituality' has become a high-value product primarily aimed at European and American markets. Due to its popularity, it may be considered a soft power resource.

India has a large literate population and historically well-established literary traditions in English and many Indian languages. It also has a fair degree

of mass media penetration with innumerable daily and periodical news and literary publications. In addition to the state-owned radio and television services, there are thousands of entertainment and news channels in virtually every Indian language. All this allows for a unique opportunity to present India to the world in flattering terms. Still, for all its plethora of print and television programming, hardly anything registers outside the country and has not anything like the same standing as BBC, CNN, or the New York Times.

Among the BRICS nations, India has the most developed and globalized film and television industry. Increasingly, the Government of India, as well as many Indian corporations, deploy the power of Bollywood in their national and international interactions. In terms of films produced every year, Bollywood outdoes Hollywood by a considerable margin. To an extent, the rising cultural influence of all things Bollywood has served to change Western perceptions of India as the land of snake-charmers and it has become a legitimate mode for transporting the Indian brand to a global

audience. However, for most international viewers Bollywood is synonymous with Indian cinema. Bollywood's brand success has had the very negative effect of marginalizing the linguistically diverse film-making traditions in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and many other Indian language.ⁱⁱ

India has always been a popular travel destination. As such, the country has significant possibilities of cultural diffusion by way of tourism. In recent years, the government has sought to market the so-called Buddhist circuit and generally play up India's tourist potential through the 'Incredible India' campaign. However, considering most tourists that visit India stick to certain well-known travel destinations, the number of Western visitors is rather small, and travellers from Africa, South America, and China are almost entirely absent from among the tourists that visit India every year. Further, most archaeologically and historically significant monuments have been perpetually neglected. India is also not known for its museums, historical or otherwise. The badly planned and haphazardous conditions of

Indian cities also make them particularly unattractive travel destinations. These factors limit India's potential for cultural diffusion through travel.

Actualizing the Possibility

The usage of 'soft power' has evolved over time and these days one speaks of 'smart power'. Present usage of the term has evolved to encompass perception management at an international level. In this context, given its vast and ancient cultural heritage, it stands to reason that India has tremendous soft power potential.ⁱⁱⁱ However, chronic under-investment in infrastructure, health-care, and education are severe impediments to actualizing India's soft power potential.

In the first place, the Indian republic is marked by clear and present strains of anti-intellectualism and sectarianism which endanger the democratic ethos of the country. Worse still, these trends find a pride of place in the ruling disposition. Far from capitalizing on its cultural wealth, governmental encouragement to

Yoga and Ayurveda follows the quest to project Hinduism into history, and to present ancient India as the progenitor of modern science and technology.^{iv} It is fair to say that India is being rebranded from a syncretic, tolerant melding of cultures and religions to an exclusively Hindu nation – one where mythology is substituted for actual history, Mughal and Muslim history is effaced or denigrated, and secular, pluralistic voices are suppressed. Needless to say, such ham-fisted methods, which are akin to propaganda initiatives, cannot enhance India's persuasive ability as they depend on misperception or outright deception for their success.

In the second place, chronic neglect of public infrastructure and utilities in post-independence India has made Indian cities

virtually unlivable and a most unattractive destination for travelers. The actual living conditions of most Indian people are indeed quite terrible. This makes it very difficult to promote a decrepit, poverty-ridden, overcrowded, and polluted country as a destination for the people of the world. Thus, attempts to portray India as a feel good, consumerist utopia, Bollywood notwithstanding, have limited traction at best.

Unless India invests massively in improving the living conditions of its people and embraces its rich multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious heritage and democratic ethos, there is every possibility that not only will it fail to efficiently use its soft power resources; it may even squander them completely.

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^{iv} A number of startling unscientific and ahistorical claims have been made from public platforms and there is a clear tendency to deliberately mix up history with mythology. Possibly the worst instance of this is the Prime Minister endorsing the patently false view that cosmetic surgery and reproductive genetics were practiced in ancient/mythological India.

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10

[Op-Ed] Doklam: Preclude to the Clash in South Asia

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India and China are the rising economic and military powerhouses of the century. Not only do they have the largest populations in the world, they are also nuclear powers possessing great destructive military might. The Doklam land issue between India, Bhutan, and China where the borders of the three countries meet (the tri-junction) was one of the tensest moments in Indo-Chinese relations this century and signifies the inevitable clash between the two countries as China expands itself economically and politically. This paper will attempt to outline the causes behind the Doklam encounter, owing to the rising clashes: military, political, and economic, between China and

India. This paper will analyse Chinese-Indian relations within the region in hopes of providing coherent reasons behind the drawn out Doklam Standoff. This article will first provide a background of Indo-Chinese relations and the Doklam issue, before moving to analyze the issue and its possible causes. The article will conclude by showing that the Doklam issue and other incidences are parts of the bigger duel between China and India as each nation attempts to increase and maintain their spheres of influence within South-Asia.

India and China have had a history of military confrontations, directly and indirectly. The last time the two met in a state of war

was close to 50 years ago in the Sino-Indian War of 1962 which lasted for a month. Similar to the issues causing the 1962 conflict, the two countries once again butted heads in Doklam over territory.¹ However, many factors have also changed since that time; both countries possess an estimated one million soldier armies and have significantly stronger air and naval strengths.² Most importantly, they have developed nuclear warheads (China in 1964, India in 1974). Apart from the 1962 conflict, there have also been two border clashes in the 1987 Sino-Indian skirmish, and the Nathu La and Cho La clashes. Including the Doklam incident, most of these events have transpired on the eastern side of the Indo-Chinese border rather than the Aksai Chin region on the Western side of the border.³

The confrontation arose when China extended a road into what was considered by Bhutan and India to be Bhutanese territory. It is important to note that land disputes in the region, despite numerous attempts at dialogue, have yet to be fully resolved. On Bhutan's insistence, Indian troops were mobilized to prevent further

encroachment by the Chinese. The result was a standoff lasting close to three months. Through commendable policies on both sides which prevented firearms to be carried by soldiers near the border, bloodshed and further escalation were prevented. Land ownership in the region, as in most land disputes, varies on which government is considered legitimate. Although numerous treaties have been signed, due to the claims that the signatory governments were illegitimate at the time, most of these treaties are considered to be invalid by successor states. However, this viewpoint is not shared by all, as other signatories may still feel them to be relevant, resulting in a deadlock in most dialogues.⁴ As such, there is no consensus among the countries in many land ownership disputes. The Doklam issue was resolved in late August, 2017, with neither Bhutan nor China giving up its claim to the land.

Having provided the reader with sufficient background knowledge to the crisis and its actors, this article will now analyse the possible causes into why the actions which resulted in the standoff were taken. The most

commonly cited reason for Chinese road building near the tri-junction, apart from China's claimed infrastructure improvement, is for military advantage. The road construction near the tri-junction of Bhutan, India, and China, which started the encounter, lies near the Siliguri corridor (called "Chicken's Neck"), a narrow piece of Indian Territory between Bangladesh and Nepal that connect the rest of the country to its North-East regions. Many military experts claim that this move, as well as ones in the past, have been Chinese efforts to get as close to the corridor as possible, thereby allowing them to cut off the majority of Indian soldiers in India's Eastern Command in event of war.⁵ In turn, the Indian government's response to Chinese action has been fueled by both its commitment to Bhutan as well as denying the opposition any advantage. It is to be noted that India similarly has made organized efforts, through its Militaries Border Roads Organization, to construct roads for Military purposes as far back as 2005.⁶

The military advantage perspective answers the reasons for road construction but only partially explains the elongated standoff. I will argue that the standoff was sustained partly by two political aims. It is important to note that even if the Doklam issue occurred by coincidental road construction by Chinese authorities without ulterior motive, the resulting standoff would still be sustained by Chinese and Indian authorities for close to three months. During this time neither country chose to back off. The situation in the region sees two powerful nations facing off against each other, reminiscent of the early Cold War, where political capital was an essential tool to determine one's influence, strength, and image in the world stage. Hence, the standoff can be interpreted as a clash between two countries eager to appear stronger than the other. Second, throughout the entire debacle, the Chinese efforts to negotiate with Bhutan directly and its calls for India to stop interfering may be another tactic to disenfranchise the Bhutanese people from their Southern neighbour and towards the North. According to the New York Times, this effort may be showing

promise as many Bhutanese Citizens are reportedly growing weary of Indian intervention in Bhutanese affairs.⁷

Focusing on the aforementioned possibility which sustained the crisis, it is necessary that we analyse China's policy with regards to South-Asia to provide an explanation as to why China and India are fighting for influence in the region. The short answer is the fact that given their geographical proximity, their spheres of influence are likely to clash, especially as they grow and compete for allies in the region in which gains for one power come at the cost of the other. China has already made overtures in Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in addition to East Africa and has a great deal of influence in the region.⁸ It has constructed numerous commercial ports in the region and is actively seeking to create operational military bases in the Indian Ocean region.⁹ Furthermore, its extremely close partnership with Pakistan, India's arch nemesis to the West, and its construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has granted China military access to Pakistani soil

and the Gwadar Port, much to Indian opposition.¹⁰ ¹¹ China maintains that these efforts have been commercial efforts to assist the colossal One Belt and One Road Initiative launched to increase Chinese importance and access to Global Markets, and to their credit a majority of development commercial. However, these developments together have nonetheless left many Indian politicians fearful of the Chinese "String of Pearls," Chinese ports and bases which many in India feel would "undermine India's position in the region."¹² Furthermore, it is important to note that even commercial opportunities hoped to be availed by China represent a threat to Indian economic might, any economic gains in the region are to come at the cost of Indian manufacturers.¹³

Given the evidence and circumstances, Indian opposition is certainly understandable. As China increases its prominence as a Global trading capital and seeks to expand itself further, it is likely that they will meet opposition from their Southern Neighbour who no doubt has similar designs of their own.

The Doklam standoff was resolved on 28 August 2017. However, since then, both countries have built up their armed forces across from each other's borders and have voiced their readiness to face each other in combat.¹⁴ The aforementioned possibilities, in varying degrees, contributed to the long drawn out conflict. The Doklam issue was an important one, but in my opinion, it was made important not for the land upon which the standoff was carried out, but the bigger picture dance of influence

that it is a sign of. Even as I edit this piece another standoff is arising in the Arunchal Pradesh in the same North-Eastern region of India where the Doklam standoff took place over the familiar issue of road construction¹⁵. Concluding, a combination of military and political reasons resulted in the standoff at Doklam, however, those reasons are born from the rivalry between two rising great powers of the 21st Century, who seek to oust one another for more influence in their neighbourhood of South-Asia.

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Southeast Asia

Resettlement Policy in *Hồ Chí Minh City*, Vietnam and its Effect on Relocated Individuals

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Abstract

The Asia-Pacific is currently undergoing a massive rural-to-urban migration, annually adding about fifty million people into the region's metropolitan cities. This includes *Hồ Chí Minh City*, the largest urban centre in Vietnam. Boasting a population of eight million and a large commercial and industrial sector, the city is responsible for a quarter of the country's total GDP. However, the city is also the biggest recipient of rural and foreign migrants. Urban growth in HCMC essentially has far outpaced industrialization in HCMC, placing the city in a housing shortage. Compounded by the ever-increasing price of real estate, migrants resort to subpar forms of housing, settling for makeshift dwellings in outer-district slums. These slums; however, started being cleared to utilize the illegally occupied space more productively to accommodate for the city's rising upper and middle class. Since then, HCMC has approved of numerous urban redevelopment projects, from the satellite suburb of "Saigon South" in Quận 7 to the Thủ Thiêm New Urban Area project in Quận 2. Displacing thousands of slum dwellers and low-income property owners, HCMC struggles to negotiate a balance between catering for its growing urban middle class and providing adequate housing for the city's poor.

Key Terminology Defined

Đổi mới: economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 with the goal of creating a “socialist-oriented market economy.”

Modernization: the process of making modern, whether in design or urban planning.

Phường: “Ward.”

Quận: “District.”

Satellite city: a concept in urban planning that refers essentially to smaller metropolitan areas which are located somewhat near to, but are mostly independent of larger metropolitan areas.

Social capital: the network of social connections that exists between people, and their shared values and norms of behaviour which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.

Socio-spatial exclusion: exclusion or segregation of people from access to normal urban social life due to spatial bias.

Socio-spatial network: a social network dependent and determined by a specific positional or geographical situation.

Suburbanization: the process of restructuring space on the fringe of the urban centre as a result of urban expansion, population rise, and usually improved socioeconomic conditions.

Urban fragmentation: the phenomenon of increasingly disordering and disconnecting urban society spatially, as a result of economic processes.

Urbanization: the broad process by which an urban centre advances economically and structurally.

Vietnamese exodus: refers to refugees who fled Vietnam after the Vietnam War, especially during 1978 and 1979 to escape communist rule and dire economic circumstances.

Introduction

Metropolitan cities of the Asia-Pacific, especially those of developing countries, have undergone considerable urban growth in the twenty-first century. According to a joint report of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia (UNESCAP) and Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), by 2018, the total population of the region is expected to be more than fifty percent urban.¹ At current trends, approximately fifty million migrants are being added to Asia's urban centres every year. That is the highest growth rate in the world, followed by Africa, which adds fifteen million migrants to urban centres annually.² Such a large influx has prompted local governments of these Asian cities to reconfigure their urban space and infrastructure to properly accommodate for the projected population increase. This includes

Hồ Chí Minh City (formally Saigon) of Vietnam.

Hồ Chí Minh City (HCMC) is the largest city in Vietnam, boasting a population of about eight million in 2015.³ Being the country's largest urban centre, HCMC draws a significant number of migrants from the rural areas of central and southern Vietnam, as well as from its border neighbours Cambodia and Laos. Two major historical events could be attributed to the city's large urban population. First, throughout the near century-long French colonial rule (1887–1954), Vietnam remained predominantly agricultural as it had been for much of its precolonial history. At the time, a majority of the country's population resided in the countryside.⁴ During the early phases of the French conquest of Vietnam in 1864, what is now HCMC had a population of eighteen thousand residents. However, the population soon climbed to 244,717 by 1916, a thirteenfold jump in just five

decades. Such rapid population growth was fueled by the erection of colonial administration and military infrastructure, along with the commercialization of HCMC.⁵

This fast-paced growth only accelerated during the two Indochina Wars fought against the French (1946–54) and the United States (1955–75). Many from the central countryside and North Vietnam were displaced due to heavy fighting and American bombing campaigns, forcing them to seek refuge in South Vietnam. In particular, HCMC was the go-to destination for these refugees. The city remained a safe haven throughout the war due to heavy American presence.⁶ Immediately after the war in 1975; however, HCMC's population stagnated at 3.5 million primarily due to the Vietnamese exodus. The stagnation was compounded by the introduction of a population control policy: the government restricted migrants from settling in HCMC and dispersed the city's residents to the countryside.

Second, during the late 1980s, HCMC's population growth returned to its historical high and

reaccelerated with the introduction of Đổi mới (1986). Vietnam's export-led economic reform program referred to as "Đổi mới" aimed to integrate more capitalist principles into its socialist economy. The program's push for economic liberalization and rollback of state intervention led to a preferential concentration of capital, investment, and economic opportunities in the country's urban areas, especially in HCMC. The city indeed has risen as the main commercial and industrial hub of Vietnam. Only a few years after Đổi mới in 1992, HCMC was responsible for 18.9 percent of the total production of Vietnam; and now boasts a total GDP (nominal) of USD44.3 billion (2015), nearly a quarter of the country's total GDP (nominal) of USD214 billion (2015). The city's GDP (nominal) per capita income of USD5,538 (2015) is also the highest in Vietnam, far exceeding the country's average of USD2,321 (2015).⁷ As Vietnam's largest urban centre, HCMC has been the primary beneficiary of the country's new wealth, but also the biggest recipient of rural and foreign migrants.

Industrialization in HCMC has been outpaced by the city's urban population. At a rate of around two hundred thousand newcomers every year, low-income migrants flood the city, compounding HCMC's already drastic housing shortage.⁸ This is partly attributed to Vietnam's poor population forecasting, HCMC being the typical case.⁹ Because of repeated inaccurate projections, HCMC's urban planning has never adequately accommodated for the city's real population growth. For instance, the 1993 urban plan for HCMC projected the population to reach five million by 2010; the estimate was surpassed by 1998 and the real population of 2010 ended up being 7.4 million.¹⁰

Making matters worse, HCMC has the largest gap between average household income and the price of real estate in Vietnam. Because of this, without the ability to afford housing upon arrival, many migrants resort to poor forms of housing—settling in outer-district slums, often set up illegally along heavily polluted canals and rivers.¹¹ A slum is a high density informal settlement in an urban area; it is characterized by squalor and substandard makeshift dwellings.

Living conditions in these places are dire. A combination of crowdedness and an absence of toilet plumbing regularly floods slums with waste water, spreading diseases found in human feces and waste. In 2002, the HCMC government estimated that over ten percent of its urban population lived under such precarious conditions.¹²

In 1990, HCMC began clearing slums to utilize the illegally-occupied space more productively to accommodate the rising urban population and to cater to middle-class conveniences; and, in the rhetoric of urban planners, to improve slum dwellers' standard of living. Toward this objective, the city has authorized more real estate and construction ventures, starting a trend of suburbanization in HCMC. A prime example of such a venture is a satellite suburb referred to as "Saigon South" or "Phủ Mỹ Hưng" in Quận 7, which consists of more open space, large shopping malls, international schools, and even factory outlets. The Department of Construction has already proposed adding six more of these suburbs by 2020.¹³ The Thủ Thiêm New Urban Area in Quận 2 is another ongoing redevelopment project, aspiring

to become the new financial district of HCMC—much like the Pudong financial district of Shanghai.

However, these billion-dollar projects, requiring hundreds of hectares of land, have systematically displaced and relocated the illegally-occupying slum dwellers and poor households to new areas far from their original place of residence. Although the Thủ Thiêm project expects to accommodate 130,000 permanent residents and to service about one million people, 14,600 households have already been displaced.¹⁴ To compensate for their loss, a form compensation is handed out in return: Although the selection of compensation packages varies from project to project, the package typically consists of a government-decided value of their property or the right to buy a unit in a resettlement complex. These options; however, are far from adequate. Regarding the former, while households can relocate elsewhere, the compensation value received tends to be far below the market price of their property—preventing them from purchasing a similar-sized property near their

previous residence. The rapidly-rising real estate market of HCMC also quickly diminishes the purchasing power of their compensation.

These circumstances force the households to relocate to outer-urban districts that are underdeveloped and sometimes even lacking access to electrical grids or a functioning sewage system.¹⁵ Concerning the latter, there are an array of reasons why Vietnamese households prefer not to reside in a high-rise resettlement complex. Those who previously owned either a detached or semi-detached property consider moving into a high-rise building a downgrade. This thought is reinforced by the fact that the quality of these complexes tends to be poor: They are constructed cheaply in undesirable locations. In addition, many low-income Vietnamese people operate a shop on the ground level of their flats, but such operation cannot exist in a multi-storey building because there is not enough space to accommodate all residents that might want to set up a shop.¹⁶ Further, the relocatees' frustration over the inadequacy of their compensation is compounded by the local authorities deliberately

mismeasuring their plots of land, pocketing what was officially paid out to them, evicting them with the threat of violence, making false promises or intentionally delaying their promised compensation, as well as the additional fact that some relocatees fail to receive any compensation because they do not possess the complete paperwork documenting their land-use rights or long-term residence.¹⁷ The resettlement policy of HCMC; therefore, fails to productively cater to the low-income relocatees' income-generating activities and spatial positioning needs, deteriorating their socio-spatial network and potentially leading them to a state of socio-spatial exclusion.

Research Hypothesis

The prime goal of this research project aims to examine how HCMC's resettlement apparatus and its displacement, relocation, and compensation policy affected the relocatees socioeconomically, and in particular, their socio-spatial network. More specifically, I wanted to evaluate what factors produced by the city's resettlement policy exerted the

most socioeconomic impact on relocated individuals, and how these factors are manifested in real economic and social terms in the relocatees' daily life experiences. I should emphasize that in this paper, the term "impact" implies neither detrimental nor beneficial change. My research hypothesis is as follows:

When the precise socio-spatial needs of relocated individuals and their previous sources of income are not taken into consideration in the resettlement and compensation process, the result is the disordering of their previously established socio-spatial network. The factor exerting the most impact on the level of intensity of the disordering of the relocatees' socio-spatial network is distance. More specifically, the distance between the relocated individuals' previous and new place of residence. Therefore, the greater the distance the relocatees are repositioned from their previous place of residence, the greater level of socio-spatial exclusion experienced by relocated individuals.

I repeatedly emphasize the terms “socio-spatial network” and “socio-spatial exclusion” considering Vietnam’s cultural emphasis on social capital—as do many other neighbouring Asia-Pacific countries. Social capital is a social network sustained via reciprocity, trust, and shared values and norms, which enables mutually advantageous interactions among those parts of the network. A deterioration of social capital therefore can have real socioeconomic consequences in Vietnamese culture.

Research Background

The data presented in this paper were collected during the two trips I made to HCMC in February and July, 2016. Before providing further details, I must emphasize a few points. During both trips, I was accompanied by the same Vietnamese-to-English translator studying at the *Hồ Chí Minh City* University of Social Sciences. However, he did not have native or bilingual proficiency in English, but only professional working proficiency. The translations I received; therefore, may not be entirely accurate. The accuracy suffered

further because I was prohibited from using an audio recorder. This was because my research project required a low-level group vulnerability and research risk. To avoid confusion, the questionnaire (Figure A.2) was formulated after the February trip. Therefore, the interviewee answers from February may not necessarily reflect the questionnaire.

Regarding the ten questions listed in the questionnaire, they are divided into two different sections. The former is oriented towards inquiring about the relocatees’ displacement experiences, and what choice of compensation they opted for. These questions maintain a uniform theme of uncovering what approach the district governments took, and how much integrity they had, and what responsibility they were willing to take regarding their relocatees’ displacement and relocation. I also inquired about whether or not the interviewees’ neighbours shared a similar experience to rule out any unique cases. The latter part of the questionnaire focused on the interviewees’ daily life experiences after their

relocation—that is, what is their life like now, after repositioning?

None of the interviews conducted with relocatees were previously-scheduled and were entirely spontaneous. However, there were two sites I visited that required a research permit from their respective district Boards of Clearance and Compensation. These two sites were a) Chung Cư An Suong, QL1A, Trung Mỹ Tây, Quận 12, and b) Vinh Loc B Residential Area, Vinh Loc B Ward, Bình Chánh Quận. In both cases, I was accompanied by a security officer, who looked for and introduced me to the relocatees. Again, in both cases, the officers remained close by when I conducted the interviews. Although I did not think the interviewees' answers were affected by their presence, it is worth a mention.

I also made sure the relocatees' I interviewed met certain criteria: they had to be of an adult age in Vietnam, they had to have lived in their current place of residence for at least three months, and they had to have a family. The three-month criterion was established because any period shorter than that was not sufficient to fully identify the

socioeconomic change the relocatees experienced after their resettlement. As well, the family criteria was established because it was the only easily-identifiable factor that could be used to maintain consistency across the relocatees I interviewed.

Case Studies

First Case Study (Quận 1 near the Saigon River)

The first resettlement complex I visited in HCMC was in Quận 1, adjacent to the Saigon River. The exact address could not be obtained at the time. I conducted interviews with three women: a Bánh mì vendor, a nail polish artist/seller, and an unemployed elderly woman. The three had moved into the complex two decades ago (1990s), displaced and relocated from a slum very close by the complex. After many inquiries, they appeared to have had similar experiences. Their main problem was their unit's size. A family of five typically received a unit of *twenty-four* m², while a family of more than five received a unit of *thirty-two* m². However, due to a shortage of *thirty-two* m² units, the elderly

woman who had a family of nine had to settle for the smaller *twenty-four* m² unit. Other complaints included deteriorating building conditions (as visible in Figure B.1/Figure B.2), thin walls between units, noise pollution, and robberies. Although the poor maintenance of the complex is a valid problem, the rest is attributed to the mere fact that they reside in the most urbanized centre of HCMC. Overall, they were satisfied with their relocation, but most notably, none of their and their husbands' jobs had to change. If they had, the relocatees explained that it would not have been due to the relocation.

An interview with three relocated individuals in a complex housing hundreds is not a large enough sample size to draw conclusions on what the overall livelihood is like for the rest of the relocatees residing in this complex. However, these accounts reinforce the notion that the distance between the previous and new place of residence and overall satisfaction about the relocation share an inverse relationship: the shorter the distance repositioned, the greater the relocatees' satisfaction. This

is primarily owed to the fact that distance has a large spillover effect on other socioeconomic factors. Notwithstanding the hurdles they may have experienced during the relocation process, their livelihood underwent no significant change because they were repositioned within the same district they had lived and worked previously.

Second Case Study (Chung Cư An Sương, QL1A, Trung Mỹ Tây, Quận 12)

At the An Sung apartment in Quận 12, I conducted four interviews with household breadwinners (Figure B.3). I was told that every resident in this complex, including the four, were originally from Quận Gò Vấp, and were displaced due to the “Tham Luong – Ben Cat – Vam Thuat River – Nuoc Len Canal Waterway Improvement Project.” According to Google Maps, Quận Gò Vấp is about a seventeen-minute drive from Quận 12. This distance indeed has a considerable spillover effect on the relocatees. A family man with one child complained to me that since he works in Chinatown in Quận 11, his commute time nearly doubled. He preferred

relocating closer to Chinatown, but could not due to the expensive real estate price in Quận 11. He also complained that his cost of living has risen because goods and services in Quận 12 are more expensive than that of Quận Gò Vấp. The longer-commute complaint was voiced by the other interviewees as well. A staff member at the local government of Phường 14 of Quận Gò Vấp kept his post after relocation, but he, too, suffered a longer commute time. A mid-aged woman gave me a similar account: She continued her post as a bank teller in Quận Gò Vấp. In particular, she complained that the quality of education in Quận 12 was inferior to that of Quận Gò Vấp. Because of this, she continues to send her daughter to a school in Quận Gò Vấp, but the commute cost has financially burdened them. What was intriguing was that all four interviewees continued to travel back to Quận Gò Vấp on a weekly or a monthly basis—for grocery shopping, haircuts, or to visit their old friends. The interviewees expressed mediocre satisfaction about their new area. They wanted to return to Quận Gò Vấp, but did not possess the financial means to do so. Again, these

interviewees' complaints further validate the inverse relationship between the distance between the previous and new place of residence and overall satisfaction with the relocation.

Third Case Study (Vinh Loc B Residential Area, Vinh Loc B Ward, Binh Chánh Quận)

The same trend was observed with residents at a complex in Binh Chánh Quận, an outer-city district far from the urban centre (Figure B.4). All of the residents I interviewed did not originate from one district. This is unique since HCMC's resettlement policy tends to relocate all residents from one redevelopment zone to the same resettlement complex. My first interviewee had been displaced due to the "Tan Hoa Lo Gom Waterway Improvement Project" and was originally from Quận 6. She complained that the relocation had added about thirty minutes to her husband's commute who works at the city centre. More notably; however, her income had taken a hit. In the past, she sold beverages by a busy riverside, but Binh Chánh Quận was too rural and not densely populated. Another lady I interviewed was

from Quận 1. She was displaced due to the Nancy Market Clearance Project. Her case was peculiar because she was from Quận 1. It was uncommon to see an individual relocated so distant from their previous place of residence; Quận 1 is a forty-five minute commute from Bình Chánh Quận. She complained that she was cheated out of proper compensation because of her KT2 residency status. Consequently, she was forced to abandon her old grocery and beverage business. As noted by my first interviewee, she also shared the sentiment that Bình Chánh Quận had not enough foot traffic for businesses to turn a profit. Another problem was that her daughter still attended her old school in Quận 1 because of Bình Chánh's poor quality of education. She now had to wake up at five o'clock in the morning to drive her daughter to Quận 1 and then commute to another district for work. These case studies demonstrated the inverse relationship between the distance between the previous and new place of residence and overall satisfaction about the relocation. This case does so as well, but the Bình Chánh Quận's desertedness and long distance from the city's urban centre appears to have

more-intensely affected the relocatees' dissatisfaction.

Concluding Remarks

Each of the three case studies primarily differed in terms of the distance between their relocatees' current and old place of residence. As demonstrated in the accounts of the interviewees, as the distance increased, I was able to observe an increase in the complaints about their relocation and current standard of living. Although distance appeared to have exerted the most socioeconomic impact on the relocatees' daily livelihood, there were other factors. Among those with an underage child, they prioritized sending their child to the best school available, even if it meant commuting to their previous district. Considering that the interviewees were low-income people, this placed a considerable time and financial burden on the interviewees. Another factor with a large spillover effect was being repositioned to an outer-city district. Such repositioning severely deterred relocatees' from continuing their previous job due to the unmanageable commute.

As well, these districts provided far-from-optimal conditions to start a profitable business, primarily due to the low foot traffic. These problems have yet to be properly addressed in HCMC's resettlement policy, and may backfire on the government in the long term. These problems could later manifest in the form of higher

unemployment/underemployment or even increasing the city's income disparity. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the greater the distance the relocatees are repositioned from their previous place of residence, the greater level of socio-spatial exclusion experienced by relocated individuals.

¹ "The State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015: Urban Transformations, Shifting from Quantity to Quality." *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia (UNESCAP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)*, 2015, p. 10. Web.

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⁸ Stumpf, Michael J. "Housing and Urbanization: A Socio-Spatial Analysis of Resettlement Projects in Hồ Chí Minh City." *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, 1284, 2012, p. 7.

⁹ Huynh, Du. "The Misuse of Urban Planning in Ho Chi Minh City." *Habitat International*, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁰ Huynh, Du. "The Misuse of Urban Planning in Ho Chi Minh City." *Habitat International*, 2015, p. 14.

¹¹ Stumpf, Michael J., "Housing and Urbanization: A Socio-Spatial Analysis of Resettlement Projects in Hồ Chí Minh City." *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, 1284, 2012, p. 7.

¹² Wust, Sebastien, Jean-Claude Bolay and Thai Thi Ngoc Du. "Metropolization and the ecological crisis: precarious settlements in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam." *Environment & Urbanization*, 2002, p. 216.

¹³ Stumpf, Michael J., "Housing and Urbanization: A Socio-Spatial Analysis of Resettlement Projects in Hồ Chí Minh City." *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, 1284, 2012, p. 8.

¹⁴ Harms, Erik. "Beauty as Control in the New Saigon: Eviction, New Urban Zones, and Atomized Dissent in a Southeast Asian City." *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society* 39.4, 2012, p. 736. Web.

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12

The Marawi Siege: The Battle Against ISIS Reaches the Philippines

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On 17 October 2017, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte declared Marawi “liberated from the terrorists’ influence” following the deaths of the leaders of the ISIS-affiliated militant groups Maute and Abu Sayyaf Salafi.ⁱ The urban battle which began on 23 May 2017 in the southern city of Marawi (the Islamic capital of the majority Catholic Philippines) lasted five months—the longest urban battle in the modern history of the country.ⁱⁱ Residents who had fled their homes began to return on 24 October 2017, while the military continued to search for remaining militants. The prolonged battle left large parts of the city

uninhabitable and rebuilding will take several years to complete.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite Marawi’s liberation, the looming threat of future conflict with extremist forces remains. The combat tactics and recruitment strategies used by Philippines-based groups mirror those used in the Middle East; in fact, ISIS has even released propaganda videos directly inciting Southeast Asian Muslims to strike against their governments. As in the Middle East, economic incentives have played a significant role in luring citizens of poverty-stricken areas to join extremist groups: new recruits of the Maute Group in Butig can receive a bonus of up to

\$600 USD, a small fortune.^{iv} In the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)—where Marawi is located—poverty, weak rule of law, rampant corruption, and the persecution of Muslim minorities have provided fertile ground for terrorist recruitment.

That it took five months to end the insurgency in Marawi is also explained by the weakness of the Philippines' military. Their personnel lack effective training, and they are over-reliant on weapons and intelligence support from other countries. Furthermore, problems including limited financial resources, poor salaries, corruption, low morale, limited cooperation between police and prosecutors, and inadequate law enforcement have

only hindered counter-terrorism efforts.^v

While security and counter-terrorism are nation-wide projects, the central government's policies towards Muslim communities must be more prudent to prevent the type of resentment that has can lead to radicalization and violence. The challenge is not just internal, however. Neighboring states like Malaysia and Indonesia share porous maritime borders with the Philippines, which makes it easier for extremist forces to move between them.^{vi} Given this common threat, a promising opportunity exists for these countries to enhance cooperation on fighting terrorist networks, and the transnational movement of extremists should be a priority on their agendas.

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ⁱⁱ France-Presse, A. "Marawi: City Destroyed in Philippines' Longest Urban War." *Inquirer.net*, 19 Oct. 2017, www.newsinfo.inquirer.net/939202/marawi-war-maute-terrorism-duterte-isonilon-hapilon-is-islamic-state. Accessed 15 Nov. 2017.

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v Bhattachargi, P. “Terrorism Havens: Philippines.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 Jun. 2009, www.cfr.org/background/terrorism-havens-philippines. Accessed 15 Nov. 2017.

vi Griffiths, J. “ISIS in Southeast Asia: Philippines Battles Growing Threat.” *Cable News Network*, 29 May 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/05/28/asia/isis-threat-southeast-asia/index.html. Accessed 15 Nov. 2017.

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[Op-Ed] Singapore's Free Speech

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Global media outlets have been quick to report the ongoing internal feud occurring at the highest levels of Singapore's government. After making a Facebook post condemning the highly restrictive conditions that have historically constrained people's ability to exercise free speech in Singapore, Li Shengwu—former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew's grandson who is a current academic at Harvard University—now faces legal action by the Singaporean State. Amidst this is what many commentators believe is a spat amongst the former prime minister's children, who argue over the future of the family home

Yew left behind in his will. While the will states that the family home should be demolished after his death, Lee Hsien Loong – current prime minister and eldest child of Yew – has been accused by his siblings Lee Wei Ling and Lee Hsien Yang of attempting to milk their father's legacy for political gain through his obstructing of the house's demolition.ⁱ Such scrutiny generates fears of the potential nepotistic personality cult emerging from Yew's family, with some commentators even comparing the current feud to the ruling sibling rivalries of former Chinese dynasties.ⁱⁱ

Singapore is often noted as an unusual case of rapid economic development without the same level of political democratization that normally supports such processes. Many argue this is largely due to the single-party structure of the state, whereby the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has retained largely unopposed control of Singapore's leadership since its first electoral win in 1959, legitimizing its rule on the premise of the state's economic stability and performance.

Others have pointed out the many legal apparatuses that have helped PAP rule without fear of opposition, such as the infamous Article 14 enshrined in Singapore's Constitution. This piece of legislature—though explicitly states a “fundamental right” to “guaranteed free speech”—permits Parliament to impose restrictions on such rights as laid out in the Defamation Act.ⁱⁱⁱ Critics have argued that such legislation gives disproportional power and advantage to PAP, who repeatedly use such policies to sue political opponents, citing slander and dissidence, which has at times led to their bankruptcy and

inability to continue campaigning. Examples of this include the Worker's Party J.B. Jeyaretnam in 1979 and the Singapore United Front Party's Seow Khee Leng in 1989.^{iv}

Human Rights Watch has called on Singapore's Government to amend such policies, including the additional Sedition and Public Order Acts, that have arguably silenced political opponents through threats of arrest, harassment and further prosecution.^v Considering Singapore's recent treatment of public voices of opposition, including the controversial persecution of teenage blogger Amos Yee, who had criminal charges laid against him after posting a video derogatorily celebrating the former prime minister's passing that forced the teen to seek asylum in America, international criticism against the island state's high levels of political censorship has been mounting steadily.^{vi} Only time will tell whether the state will respond to such reproach through open recognition of the state's shortcomings in free speech and attempt to liberalize the nation's currently “litigious” political

system, as Li Shengwu has publicly argued.

ⁱ “Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong.” *The Guardian*, 19 June 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/19/singapore-pm-lee-hsein-loong-apologises-for-public-family-feud>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2017.

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^{iv} Chan, Cassandra. “Breaking Singapore’s Regrettable Tradition of Chilling Free Speech with Defamation Laws.” *Winter 2003*. 26 *Loy. L.A. Int’l & Comp. L. Rev.* 315-340.

^v Ungku, Fathin. “Human Rights Watch calls on Singapore to relax free speech, assembly laws“ 12 December 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-singapore-politics/human-rights-watch-calls-on-singapore-to-relax-free-speech-assembly-laws-idUSKBN1E70A9>. Accessed 18 December 2017.

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