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**Table of Contents**

**Greater China**

**The Rebalance: A Multifaceted Approach**  
Jimmy Peterson  
5-17

**The Two T’s in McLeod Gani: Taiwanese and Tibetans in Conversation**  
L. Nelissen  
18-34

**Negotiating the Yarlung Tsangpo River: The UN Convention on International Watercoursea and its Implications for Chinese and Indian Dam Building Projects**  
Nathan Robert Harpainter  
35-45

**The Plain Artistic Style in Zhou Zuoren’s Writings**  
Jiaqi Fan  
46-53

**A Paradise Lost: On the Beginning of Landscape Poetry**  
Fei Chu  
54-61

Yu Wang  
62-75

**Japan**

**Japan-ROK Relations: Do They Always Get Better with North Korean Provocations?**  
Esther Chung  
77-91

**The Price of Rice: An Examination of Japan’s Postwar Agricultural Policies**  
Nina Assadi  
92-103

**メディアをかける少女: The Girl Who Leapt Through Media**  
Michael Alexander Lee  
104-109

**Droplets, by Medoruma Shun: Personal Guilt as Collective Responsibility**  
Jordi Serrano Muñoz  
110-120
KOREA

Speech Levels in DPRK Society
Benjamin Lokshin

China’s Complicity in North Korea’s Nuclear Program: Henry Kissinger
For the Defense
Joseph A. Bosco

A Different Place: North Korean State Formation, 1945-1949
Rebecca Lines

Two Kingdoms Under God: Caesar and Christ in the Jerusalem of the East
Brian Jihyuk Kim

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Exploited Workers, Laboring Mothers: Plantation Women in the Formal
and Informal Economy of Colonial Malaya, 1900-1940.
Hong Jie Lim

Singapore and the Pivot: The City State’s Role in Shaping U.S. Foreign
Policy in Asia
Kwanki Tang
THE REBALANCE: A MULTIFACETED APPROACH

This paper analyzes the strategic rationale of the Obama administration in regard to the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S. rebalance to Asia has been criticized as over-emphasizing the military shift, which further inflames tensions in the region, particularly with China. However, while the U.S. Congress has stunted certain economic initiatives of the Obama administration’s Asia policy, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the non-military components of the rebalance have been underemphasized. Although military forces can be moved around relatively quickly, the restructuring of diplomatic embassies and economic tools is often more subtle and longer-term in nature. Furthermore, the military component of the rebalance has been fairly limited and strategically calculated. That being said, given that perceptions of U.S. ambitions are in the eyes of the beholder, the exaggeration of the military shift is a fundamental problem that the Obama administration would be prudent to counter. President Obama understands that Asian governments do not want to have to side with the U.S. or China, but overemphasizing the military aspect of the rebalance makes it seem like the U.S. is forcing Asian leaders to do just that. The Obama administration should be cautious in its handling of the geostrategic challenge posed by China and, at the same time, of its relationships with its Asian partners.

Keywords: Obama, rebalance, Asia, multidimensional, strategic rationale

I. INTRODUCTION

In November 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama administration’s foreign policy “rebalance” 1 to Asia was clearly articulated by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a Foreign Policy article titled “America’s Pacific Century.” Clinton stated that America’s commitment to the Asia-Pacific region was essential to sustaining long-term prosperity and security at home and abroad. 2 Clinton outlined six key areas for increased U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific: strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening working relationships with emerging powers, including China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights. The overarching objective of the rebalance “is to sustain a stable security environment, a regional order rooted in economic openness, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for universal rights and freedoms.” 3 The U.S., particularly as China’s economy and military rises rapidly, seeks to influence the region’s developing norms and rules to be consistent with those of international laws and standards.

Scholars, politicians, and the international media have attacked the rebalance for several reasons. Key among these criticisms is that too many military initiatives have been undertaken. It is contended that the non-military elements of the approach have lagged behind. 4 This pa-

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1 The term “pivot” can be used interchangeably with “rebalance.” Hillary Clinton popularized the use of the term “pivot” and continues to utilize it, but the White House has distanced itself from the term (Clinton 2014, 46). Tom Donilon, Obama’s former National Security Adviser, has stated that the term “pivot” is too sharp and inaccurately signals an abandonment of European allies and the Middle East.


THE REBALANCE

per, however, will demonstrate that this critique is not entirely accurate or fair. Firstly, it will outline the strategic rationale within the Obama administration for the rebalance. Then, it will present the arguments related to the strategy being overly confrontational and lacking in the diplomatic and economic realms. Following that, a section will describe the multidimensional nature of the approach. The essay will explain the limited scope of the military initiatives, the media’s role in creating distorted narratives, and Congress’s power to hinder efforts by the executive.

II. STRATEGIC RATIONALE BEHIND THE REBALANCE

At the beginning of the Obama administration, the president’s closest advisers met and conducted an assessment of the state of America’s standing in the world and foreign policy. Out of that meeting came several lasting conclusions. Obama’s team believed that the U.S. was overinvested in the Middle East and underinvested in Asia. In 2011 in Canberra, Obama asserted that “Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation.” Asia has a number of breaking points that could rapidly escalate into broader conflict such as the East and South China Seas, and the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, a robust U.S. economic recovery is directly linked to Asia’s continued prosperity and stability. By 2025, the Asia-Pacific region will account for over half of the world’s economic output and projections show Asia’s economic ascent lasting for decades. Currently, almost fifty percent of global goods are transported through the South China Sea and more than half of the world’s population resides in Asia.

Clinton and Tom Donilon, Obama’s former National Security Adviser, in particular, thought that expanded engagement in the Asia-Pacific represented an enormous opportunity that will not only bring economic benefits to the U.S., but also enhance its global influence. China’s burgeoning military strength and assertiveness led to a greater demand for a larger, stabilizing U.S. presence among other Asian countries. China’s increasing economic leverage over the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members and Southeast Asia’s geographic position as a maritime transit hub between the Pacific and Indian Oceans fuels the U.S. government’s desire to have closer ties to Southeast Asia. Engaging China from a position of strength is vital. Additionally, Clinton understood that building strong personal relationships with governments is of great importance in Asia. To that end, Clinton made it a priority to visit almost every country in the region.

Furthermore, the winding down of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan gave the U.S. the capacity to reallocate resources to Asia. Obama’s closest advisers were disappointed by the contempt with which much of the world felt towards the U.S. Asian leaders, in particular, made it clear to U.S. officials that they had felt neglected during the Bush years. Bush’s focus on the Middle East produced a perception among Asian leaders that the U.S. was disengaging from Asia. When Bush officials attended regional meetings in Asia, they pushed terrorism to the forefront of the agenda, frustrating Asian leaders who came prepared to discuss other problems. Southeast Asian leaders sought tangible U.S. leadership on major regional problems such as climate change and poverty, criticizing the U.S. as being “diplomatically absentee.”

10 Clinton, Hard Choices, 478.
11 Manyin, “Pivot to the Pacific”, 2.
12 Clinton, Hard Choices, 15.
14 Clinton, Hard Choices, 43.
15 Clinton, Gates, Bader, and other Obama officials conceded that the perception of Bush in Asia disengaging from the region was mostly unfair.
To repair America’s reputation, Obama highlighted the benevolent role the U.S. had played in Asia. Facilitating sustained domestic economic growth would further help to restore U.S. stature.

The Obama administration, nevertheless, agreed with many of the Bush administration’s policies towards Asia. The goals of upholding stability, freedom of navigation, the free flow of commerce, and the promotion of democracy and human rights remained intact. Obama expanded Bush initiatives in other areas, including negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the South Korean free trade agreement (FTA), constructing partnerships with India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and strengthening relationships with allies.

Donilon explains that at the heart of the rebalance, the U.S. seeks continuation of regional economic and social development, stability, and peace, given that there is a demand for U.S. leadership in Asia. The U.S. employs substantial diplomatic resources to mitigate tensions among Asian states, as well as its military as a deterrent to aggressive behavior in the region. It is also an expectation of Asian governments that the U.S. will maintain constructive relations with China. The Obama strategy on China has three pillars: first, welcoming China's rise; second, guaranteeing that China's development is consistent with international law; and third, shaping the regional environment to allow China’s ascendance to be stabilizing. Essential to the bilateral relationship is the management of inevitable competition, and identification of and cooperation on issues where there are common interests. China is not clearly defined as a friend or a foe. The future of the U.S. and China is deeply interdependent, but there are multiple flashpoints in the relationship such as North Korea, Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, climate change, and the South and East China Seas. Therefore, the Obama administration knows that it must find the optimum balance in its China policy.

At the same time, the Obama administration views the efforts of partners toward preserving regional stability as crucial. Given that America’s relative economic and military power is declining globally, the U.S. urges Asian governments to contribute more to the evolving regional order. This largely stems from the belief among senior Obama officials that the U.S. is not all-powerful; rather, it is “indispensable.” The U.S. is a necessary power, but not sufficient power for fixing global problems. It lacks the capacity to dictate the outcomes of international events or the terms of its relationships. Yet, the Obama administration recognizes that it has a vastly greater network of alliances than China and American values are far more appealing to the world than China’s ideology. This situation allows the U.S. to use its power to assume a central task of fortifying the economic, institutional, and defense capacity of Asian states while recognizing that its influence is declining.

III. Criticisms of the Rebalance
OVEREMPHASIS ON THE MILITARY

There is a perception that the rebalance has evolved in two main phases. The first phase, from 2011 until late 2012, involved the Obama administration emphasizing its military initiatives. The second stage is the period since late 2012, wherein U.S. officials have accentuated non-military components, especially economic and diplomatic, in response to criticisms about the confrontational nature of the military realignment. While the Defense Department has been viewed as very active in the rebalance, the State Department has not allocated adequate levels of resources towards the Asia-Pacific. This has allegedly led to an incoherent application of military and non-military tools. Therefore, critics have labelled the Obama administration’s policy as reactive.

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17 Clinton, Hard Choices, 52.
18 Dyer, The Contest of the Century, 22.
19 Manyin, “Pivot to the Pacific”, 4.
21 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 7.
22 Clinton, Hard Choices, 42.
23 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 150.
25 Clinton, Hard Choices, xii.
27 Majority Staff Report, “Re-Balancing the Rebalance”, 2.
28 Defence Department actions are often inconsistent with those of the rest of government. For example, after the 2011 Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown, the Defence Department’s Naval Nuclear Propulsion unit’s assessments were far more alarmist and extreme than the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Department of Energy (DOE), and senior adviser to Obama on science and technology issues, John Holdren (Bader 2012, 136). Obama quickly dismissed the reports of Defence as based on faulty science and unnecessarily having the potential to damage relations with the Japanese.
rather than strategic. 29

Some Asian leaders, during the early stages of the re-
balance, were concerned that the U.S. had misjudged its
strategic goals. There was an impression that the U.S.
was containing China and trying to force Asian govern-
ments to choose between the two countries. 30 Chinese
officials accused Washington of using coercive diplo-
macy targeted at impeding China's rise. 31 Some scholars
have argued that the prominence of the military in the
rebalance is related to the fact that the U.S. associates
Asia's stability with its own primacy. 32 Obama officials
have stressed that a robust American naval and air pres-
ence in the Asia-Pacific is necessary to reassure allies
and ensure peaceful resolution of disputes. 33

The Department of Defense feels threatened by Chi-
na's military, cyber, and space capabilities. Former De-
fense Secretary Bob Gates wrote candidly in his memo-
oir that the Chinese military already poses a serious
challenge to U.S. interests in Southeast and Northeast
Asia. 34 America's new Air-Sea Battle is the Pentagon's
response to China's military rise – a vague concept for
fighting wars primarily targeted at countering China's
anti-access or area-denial strategy. 35 Then Secretary of
Defense, Leon Panetta, stated that the defense strategy
was directed primarily at threats emanating from Asia.
36 The doctrine has an offensive dimension with the pos-
sibility of military strikes on Chinese territory. It con-
centrates on adversaries' weakest links in the chain of
command, namely in control, communications, com-
puters, intelligence, surveillance, and base launchers. 37
Troubling trends within U.S. military war games show
in some scenarios, Chinese missiles overwhelming U.S.
bases in Asia and sinking aircraft carriers in the West-
ern Pacific. This was evident when Gates decided to cap
the number of F-22 stealth fighters the U.S. would buy
mainly because he felt that the F-22s would be futile in
the event of a conflict: the Chinese could immediately
destroy or disable American bases in Japan. 38

America's military force structure, because maritime
disputes are the main sources of tension in Asia today,
increasingly prioritizes naval and air services to en-
hance its operational access to the Asia-Pacific. 39 Cuts
to ground forces, which have less utility than in the past
according to the Obama administration, allow the U.S.
to invest more heavily in the navy and air force. Obama's
insistence that overall U.S. defense budget cuts would
not affect the Asia-Pacific has held true. 40 The deploy-
ment of 11 aircraft carriers was not cut to 10 as many
military experts expected; also the number of amphib-
ious ships for the Marine Corps was preserved at 33. 41

Plenty of military actions have been taken by the
Obama administration. The U.S. will station 2,500 ma-
rines in Darwin, Australia, while augmenting its forces
in Guam. 42 Up to four coastal battleships will be sta-
tioned in Singapore. Joint military exercises with South
Korea have become more common and a military base
on Jeju Island is being erected to deter North Korean
aggression. 43 Separate bilateral agreements have been
established with Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Bru-
nei, and Malaysia, leading to areas of defense coopera-
tion. 44 The U.S. and the Philippines are negotiating a
framework agreement to increase joint exercises and
for rotating U.S. surveillance aircraft and forces to be
based at Philippine facilities. 45 The U.S. also renewed
its commitment to supply arms to Taiwan in 2010. 46 In
response, China has accused the U.S. of provoking Chi-
nese forces. Since 2010, PLA aircraft have nearly col-
lided with U.S. planes on many occasions. 47 When the

29 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 140.
30 Majority Staff Report, “Re-Balancing the Rebalance”, 22.
31 David S. McDonough, “America’s Rebalance to the Pacific: Selective
Deep Engagement, Operational Access, and China’s A2/AD Challenge,”
In Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies, Edited by John
Ferris (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2013).
32 Kaplan, Asia’s Cauldron, 29.
33 Gates, Duty, 529.
34 Gates, Duty, 528.
36 Leon E. Panetta, “America’s Pacific Rebalance,” Project Syndicate,
World Affairs (December 2012).
38 Gates, Duty, 319.
40 Manyin, “Pivot to the Pacific”, 5.
41 Manyin, “Pivot to the Pacific”, 13.
43 Hall Gardner, NATO Expansion and US Strategy in Asia: Surmounting
the Global Crisis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 126.
44 Michael Evans, “American Defence Policy and the Challenge of
Austerity: Some Implications for Southeast Asia,” Journal of Southeast
46 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 72.
47 Gates, Duty, 526.
Chinese declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over much of the East China Sea in November 2013, the U.S. denounced the declaration and flew two B-52 bombers over the airspace. 48

LACK OF FOLLOW-THROUGH ON OTHER ELEMENTS

Critics contend that there has been inadequate progress on the diplomatic, economic, and human rights elements of the approach. 49 The resignations of the key architects of the rebalance, including Donilon, Clinton, Kurt Campbell (Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs), and Jeffrey Bader (Senior Director for Asian affairs on the National Security Council), from the Obama administration have led to suspicion about the U.S. commitment. 50 Current Secretary of State, John Kerry, has little experience in Asia and has questioned the military side of the rebalance. 51 The Obama administration’s preoccupation with domestic challenges is perceived as undermining its foreign policy. 52 Defense budget cuts have reinforced that image. Even if Obama’s cancellation of attendance at the 2013 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum and the EAS was unavoidable because of the government shutdown, political gridlock in Washington has adversely affected the rebalance. 53 U.S. National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlyn Hayden stated that the government shutdown set back America’s “ability to promote U.S. exports and advance leadership.” 54 U.S. political problems give Chinese leaders more ammunition in attempting to convince other Asian countries that the U.S. is not a reliable partner. Experts on Asia reporting to Congress have recommended that the U.S. government increases personnel and funding to the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP). 55 A lack of resources has purportedly hampered the ability of agencies to coordinate and share information on policy. Congress’s refusal to ratify the United Nations (UN) Law of the Sea Treaty prevents the U.S. from having a seat at the table in many international forums on maritime issues.

Domestic opposition within TPP negotiating countries has eroded momentum for the agreement. The U.S. and Japan have been unable to settle differences over market access for automobiles, tariffs on rice, and agricultural liberalization. 56 Market access is a politically sensitive issue for all negotiating states. 57 In the U.S., Congressional rejection of Obama’s request for Trade Promotion Authority undermines the work going into TPP discussions. 58 Furthermore, the Obama administration has been accused of attempting to divide Asia with the TPP. 59 Having less than half of ASEAN part of the TPP negotiations is perceived by some scholars as pitting a U.S.-led camp against a Chinese-led block negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Concurrently, the Obama administration has not been able to convince the public of Asia’s significance to their economic well-being. There is a widespread belief that jobs are being lost to China. 60

IV. THE LIMITED NATURE OF THE MILITARY ASPECTS

While having a large symbolic impact, the scope of the Obama administration’s military initiatives has been quite limited. The new 60:40 balance of naval assets towards the Asia-Pacific (instead of the traditional 50:50) by 2020 does not mean that the total number of U.S. forces in Asia will increase given overall budget cuts. 61 Nor does the U.S. take a position on the maritime disputes themselves. However, it does have an interest in how the claims are resolved. Obama officials repeat that all disputes should be concluded peacefully and conform to international law. 62 In the East China Sea, under the 1960 U.S.-Japan Treaty, the U.S. is obligated to defend territories administered by Japan, including

48 Clinton, Hard Choices, 74.
49 Majority Staff Report, “Re-Balancing the Rebalance”, 22.
52 Gates, Duty, 584.
58 Manyin, “Pivot to the Pacific”, 24.
60 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 111.
62 Clinton, Hard Choices, 79.
the Senkakus, but it takes no position on the territorial claims. However, Bader calls it “absurd” that the U.S. could get drawn into an armed conflict between China and Japan over such small islands. While the Chinese government prefers bilateral mechanisms to settle the maritime disputes in the South China Sea because these provide the most leverage, Southeast Asian governments point to multilateral channels to negotiate more equally. Clinton has declared that all claims should be based on land features, namely the extension of continental shelves. While China ratified the UN Law of the Sea Treaty, it does not actually follow it. Conversely, the U.S. failed to ratify the treaty, but adheres to it.

The U.S. tries to balance between reinforcing Asian countries in their territorial disputes with China whilst dissuading them from taking aggressive actions towards China that could precipitate conflict. Government officials in the Philippines are uncertain that the U.S. would honor its treaty obligations to the Philippines in the event of a conflict with China. Obama refused to take sides on the disputed Scarborough Shoal after a violent confrontation in 2012 between China and the Philippines. The U.S. did not respond militarily to the provocative Chinese oil rig operations near the Paracel Islands in 2014. Instead, the State Department stressed that China and Vietnam “conduct themselves in a safe and professional manner, preserve freedom of navigation, exercise restraint, and address competing sovereignty claims peacefully and in accordance with international law.” Even after publicly rejecting the Chinese ADIZ, the State Department encouraged U.S. commercial airlines to file flight plans with China before entering the ADIZ.

In response to North Korea’s belligerence, the Obama administration has increasingly cooperated with Japan and South Korea. High-level tripartite dialogue has facilitated joint maritime exercises and information sharing on anti-proliferation and disaster relief. The Obama administration has become less optimistic about continuing the Six-Party Talks on North Korea. Officials believe that China will sense more urgency to push North Korea to behave more responsibly given that China considers the Six-Party Talks its own diplomatic achievement. The U.S. wants to break the old pattern of North Korea’s regime provoking others to gain attention and induce rewards from South Korea and the U.S. Moreover, the U.S. has encouraged Japan to act as a responsible regional leader. In December 2013, Vice-President Joe Biden warned nationalist Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe against visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, where 14 war criminals are honored. The U.S. was unsuccessful in that case, but it has pressured Japan to behave less provocatively towards China and South Korea. Remarkably, Japan recently gave the U.S. control over its nuclear stockpile as a way to reassure China, which had been increasingly voicing its concerns about Japan’s large nuclear stockpile.

While U.S. troops are dispersed throughout different countries in the Asia-Pacific, their geographic proximity to China is decreasing. Re-deploying nearly a third of the soldiers in South Korea and Japan, which are on the “front line” of the first island chain and have histories of intense rivalry with China, to Guam (part of the second island chain) is a way of alleviating tensions. The selection of Singapore as the first Southeast Asian country for increased naval deployment was carefully thought out. Singapore is not embroiled in any disputes...
with China over islands in the South China Sea. 76 Even so, only one Littoral combat ship has been deployed to Singapore. 77

Most Asian governments trust the U.S. more than they do the Chinese government. At the 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in Hanoi, Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi launched a diatribe against the U.S. for its involvement in the South China Sea and against Southeast Asian governments for seeking U.S. support. 78 Clinton infuriated Yang by declaring that the stability of the South China Sea was a fundamental U.S. interest. ASEAN leaders issued statements rebuking China's maritime claims. 79 That year, when Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama advocated for an East Asia Community excluding the U.S., Vietnam, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, and Indonesia rejected the idea. 80 They feared that China would be too dominant. 81 However, rather than containing China, the U.S. seeks to expand Asia's security architecture to manage a more peaceful power shift in the region. 82 The U.S. Navy will not allow China to interfere with the global supply chain by impeding crucial sea-lines of commerce and communication. 83 Asian countries rely on the U.S. to ensure freedom of navigation in order to defend international maritime laws.

U.S.-China relations are subject to intense scrutiny and unrealistic expectations. 84 Media and scholarly attention on the furious Chinese response to U.S. military initiatives was much greater than on the other facets of the rebalance. 85 These misconceptions heightened tensions. China had been reported to describe the South China Sea as a “core interest” in 2010 when it had only identified it as a national priority. 86 In China, a core interest is one that is considered so crucial that military force would be used to defend it (such as Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang). Misleading media coverage of China’s rise and America’s decline has led to most Americans wrongly believing that China is wealthier than the U.S. 87 In combination, these have weakened mutual trust and placed the Obama administration on the defensive on various occasions.

The opposite message that the U.S. was delivering to the Chinese was popular among pundits in the first two years of Obama’s administration. After Obama’s visit to Asia in November 2009, the joint statement was sharply criticized for being too soft on China. 88 While Obama’s administration felt the trip had gone well, the government faced domestic disapproval because of unrealistic expectations, distortions, sloppy messaging, and pre-determined narratives. U.S. media outlets proclaimed that Obama made too many concessions including “accepting” Chinese censorship of his interactions with Chinese students. 89 Bader learned that public messaging on official state visits was critical to shaping perceptions about relationships and strategies. 90 During the Hu Jintao visit to the U.S. in January 2011, the U.S. ensured that the communications were engineered more carefully. As a result, overall media coverage of the trip was much more positive than in 2009.

**V. MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS**

The rebalance has multiple facets including economic, political, diplomatic, and institution-building. 91 Panetta declared that the “vast majority of America’s rebalance comes in non-military areas like trade and development.” 92 Clinton’s decision to visit Asia first and Obama’s selection to host the Japanese prime minister first were symbolic gestures to illustrate the centrality of Asia to the Obama administration’s priorities. 93 High-level cabinet visits to Asia were common by Clin-
The first dimension of the rebalance is alliances. The U.S. is counted on to provide military support especially by Japan and South Korea. Yet, the Obama administration takes a more integrated and region-wide approach to the Asia-Pacific than the Bush government did. The geographic vision of the region has broadened to include the Indian Ocean. Achieving a more coordinated regional approach requires that the U.S. work to mitigate tensions and encourage political dialogue by Japan with both China and South Korea.

The second component is improving relations with emerging powers, particularly India. India has publicly separated itself from the rebalance, but quietly appreciates increased U.S. engagement in the region. India is cautious not to provoke China because of the countries’ widening military gap and intensifying border disputes in 2013, and China’s status as India’s largest trading partner. Notwithstanding, Indian policymakers distrust the Chinese government, actively competing for resources and international influence with China. Furthermore, the U.S. intends to strengthen and create new alliances in Southeast Asia through its increasing involvement with ASEAN. Building relations with Indonesia is significant because Indonesia is ASEAN’s informal leader. This has included re-establishing cooperation with Kopassus, the Indonesian army’s principal counter-terrorist arm, which had rebuilt itself after being found guilty of human rights violations in the past.

Given Sino-American competition for influence in Southeast Asia, Clinton views Burma’s liberalization as a potential milestone of the rebalance. Burma sits at the heart of Southeast Asia, strongly influenced by China and India. The Bush administration isolated Burma and refused to meet Burma’s leaders because of their deplorable human rights record. This approach forced ASEAN to pick sides between Burma and the U.S. because Bush would not meet ASEAN leaders with the Burmese delegation present. Obama’s government uses a mix of sanctions and engagement in an attempt to drive political and economic reform. In late 2011, Clinton became the first Secretary of State to visit Burma in more than 50 years. She wanted to convey a message to the Burmese people that the U.S. would engage the country in the future. Sustained engagement in Burma will be necessary for the U.S. because the reform process is going to take many years, if it is to occur.

Thirdly, there is an emphasis on institution building. While Bush felt Asia’s multilateral organizations were ineffective talking shops, Obama’s government has been more receptive of them. Clinton signed ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, which renounces the use of force and pledges to bolster economic, social, cultural, and scientific cooperation in Southeast Asia. A new position of U.S. ambassador to ASEAN was created in 2011 and Obama held two presidential meetings with ASEAN leaders. The U.S. has cooperative initiatives with APEC on public health and trade facilitation; ASEAN on climate change, education, transnational crime, anti-corruption, and economic support funding; the ARF on disaster preparedness; and the East Asia Summit (EAS) on clean energy and transnational crime.

The U.S. thus leverages its expertise in areas such as disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and search and rescue to build up goodwill.

The Obama administration aims to act multilaterally on security matters and make the EAS the premier discussion platform on maritime disputes. In November 2011, Obama became the first U.S. head of state to

95 Clinton, Hard Choices, 33.
97 Manyin, “Pivot to the Pacific”, 7.
101 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 97.
102 Clinton, Hard Choices, 102.
attend the EAS. \(^{110,111}\) The EAS is preferred because the White House views it as Asia's most effective regional organization and it includes India, Australia, New Zealand, and ASEAN+3. \(^{112,113}\) On the other hand, the Chinese repudiate U.S. involvement in the maritime disputes; China favors bilateral settings and ASEAN+3. Moreover, American defense secretaries appear at the annual Shangri-La Asian Security Summit in Singapore. Respect for the international order including freedom of navigation is a pillar of this institutional engagement. \(^{114}\) The U.S. supports and encourages the development of regional norms and standards of behavior that align with the international-rules based order. \(^{115}\)

The fourth element is the strengthening of the regional economic architecture, particularly through the high standards the TPP would set. \(^{116}\) Negotiations over the TPP, in conjunction with the completed South Korea FTA and negotiations for free trade between the U.S. and the European Union (EU), are a substantial leadership move by the U.S. Success on all of these agreements would signal an emerging global free trade regime, which the Chinese leadership would feel pressure to acquiesce to. Obama reiterates that the TPP predates U.S. involvement and some negotiating countries are also part of the RCEP negotiations. \(^{117}\) The TPP is open to all Asia-Pacific countries, including China, as long as they adopt TPP standards. In 2012, the Obama administration established the U.S.-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) Initiative to help all ASEAN members meet these standards. U.S. officials have been cautious about pressing China to change its economic policies. Obama's top economic advisers, Larry Summers and Timothy Geithner, consistently concluded that the impact of China's unfair economic practices on the U.S. was quite small overall. \(^{118}\) They saw huge risks in retaliatory escalation, which would cost the U.S. more than China.

The economic tool revolves predominantly around free trade negotiations, but also Obama's promise to increase foreign assistance to Asia by 7%. \(^{119}\) Foreign aid is utilized for both humanitarian and strategic purposes. Strategically, this type of assistance enhances U.S. popularity. In 2011, approval of America soared from 66% to 85% in Japan after the generous American response to assist the Japanese people following the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown. \(^{120}\)

The fifth component of the rebalance is the pursuit of more productive relations with China. \(^{121}\) Obama officials underline that U.S. engagement in Asia does not constitute a strategy of containment. \(^{122}\) The U.S. works at not only retaining its robust diplomatic and economic channels, but also improving existing weak military-to-military relations. \(^{123}\) Clinton was surprised that the Chinese accepted her proposal to expand the U.S.-China Economic dialogue to cover security in 2009. \(^{124}\) Mitigating, or at least addressing, global problems such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, poverty, and climate change requires cooperation between the U.S. and China. By the fall of 2009, Obama defining security priority with China was attaining cooperation on sanctions against Iran for its developing nuclear program. \(^{125}\) Obama was able to get measured coordination with China on sanctions, forcing the Iranians to the negotiating table in 2013. Since December 2008, China has participated in joint naval anti-piracy operations with the U.S., EU, and Japan in the Gulf of Aden. \(^{126}\) Increasing piracy in Southeast Asia, especially near the Strait of Malacca, is a key area for further cooperation. \(^{127}\)

The number and intensity of natural disasters is in-

\(^{110}\) Sutter et. al., “Balancing Acts,” 34.
\(^{111}\) There was disagreement in the White House about joining the EAS. Some felt that EAS membership would undercut APEC and be too much for Obama to commit to in terms of annual visits to Asia (Bader 2012, 96). Donilon’s pressing of Obama to enter was highly influential.
\(^{113}\) ASEAN+3 is made up of the ASEAN members plus China, Japan, and South Korea.
\(^{114}\) Panetta, “America’s Pacific Rebalance,” 2012.
\(^{118}\) Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 114.
\(^{120}\) Clinton, Hard Choices, 533.
\(^{121}\) Donilon, “The United States and the Asia-Pacific”, 2013.
\(^{123}\) Obama and Hu Jintao met 13 times in 4 years (Donilon 2013).
\(^{124}\) Clinton, Hard Choices, 73.
\(^{125}\) Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 53.
\(^{127}\) Gates, Duty, 253.
increasing. In effect, the U.S. and China will need to cooperate more on disaster relief and prevention. China, the U.S., New Zealand, and Australia have conducted multiple planning exercises on humanitarian assistance and tsunami damage mitigation through the EAS and ARF, China, Brunei, New Zealand, and the U.S. organized ARF roundtables on preventive diplomacy training in the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. supported China’s hosting of the 2014 APEC Ocean-Related Ministerial Meeting on marine conservation.

Cooperation on climate change has been difficult to achieve. In Copenhagen in 2009, the Obama administration knew that it had to negotiate with China given that the two countries are the world’s largest emitters of greenhouse gases. China’s leaders viewed the proposed EU agreement as unrealistic and instead called for a secret meeting with India, Brazil, and South Africa. Obama heard of the meeting and pushed his way past Chinese officials to join in. He pressured Premier Wen Jiabao into approving a compromise by putting the onus of responsibility on China if the conference collapsed. While the Europeans were unhappy, they understood the lack of viable alternatives and reluctantly accepted the non-binding deal Obama proposed. The conference demonstrated the limitations of cooperation on climate change. That being said, in June 2013, Obama and Jinping signed an agreement to eliminate hydrofluorocarbons, which was the first specific arrangement between the U.S. and China on climate change. They also agreed to upgrade discussions on energy policy to ministerial levels.

VI. LONG-TERM FOCUS

The rebalance should be viewed in the long-term, whereby the U.S. incrementally fulfills its strategic objectives. Much of the Obama administration’s efforts have been discreet because of dramatic headlines elsewhere and the nature of long-term investments in Asia. Clinton said that “there is less need for dramatic breakthroughs that marked earlier phases in [the U.S.-Asia] relationship... collaboration may not always be glamorous, but it is strategically significant.” While military forces can be moved around in a relatively short time period, it takes time for civilian hardware, including embassies, to restructure. Obama hopes to lay the foundations for the “sustained work of successive administrations.”

The State Department formulated three approaches to China as possibilities for the U.S. government. These were improving relations with China, strengthening the capacities of allies to counterbalance against China, and engaging regional multilateral institutions. Clinton posits that Obama combines all three options, recognizing that participating in regional institutions is likely to produce only gradual changes over a long time period. The U.S. government seeks a more effective ASEAN despite recognizing that ASEAN is mainly a discussion forum. Obama realizes that diplomacy is tedious, but necessary. Diplomatic engagement is likely to increase in the next few decades.

U.S. efforts to encourage Asian countries to adopt India’s democratic model over China’s state capitalism is another long-run approach. Although this will not pay immediate dividends because of the inefficient economic policies of recent Indian governments, the Obama administration argues that, on balance, the Indian model is superior. The U.S. hopes that India will make steady progress. Moreover, broad trends in China since the 1970s have been towards a more pluralistic and open society. The Obama administration

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130 Clinton, Hard Choices, 491.
131 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 67.
132 Clinton, Hard Choices, 500.
133 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 67.
134 Hydrofluorocarbons come from air conditioning units.
135 Clinton, Hard Choices, 505.
136 Clinton, Hard Choices, 58.
138 Majority Staff Report, “Re-Balancing the Rebalance”, 25.
140 Clinton, Hard Choices, 44.
141 Clinton, Hard Choices, 44.
142 Clinton, Hard Choices, 500.
144 Clinton, Hard Choices, 208.
145 Clinton, Hard Choices, 60.
146 Bader, Obama and China’s Rise, 147.
believes that Chinese leaders will be occupied with internal problems such as fighting corruption, income inequality, and unemployment. China's governance system will change as Premier Wen has stated.  

VII. CONCLUSION

Much of the rebalance consists of an expansion of Bush policies with the same strategic goals. However, there are significant changes with the Obama administration's new military priorities including comprehensive emphases on regional multilateral institutions, the broadening of the Asia-Pacific region to include the Indian Ocean, and efforts to improve relations with Southeast Asian governments. Obama's recognition that the U.S. has limited power means that the U.S. increasingly relies on its Asian partners to assume more responsibility for regional stability and growth.

The rebalance has often been portrayed in the media as that of a militarily-focused strategy. This paper has attempted to illustrate the significant non-military components, particularly diplomatic and economic. The long-term vision of the Obama administration engaging Asia's regional multilateral institutions is paramount to gradual progress. Nevertheless, popular narratives, even those that are untrue, are hard for governments to disassociate from. This is problematic because perceptions can affect strategic outcomes. For the U.S. government to reach its goals, the U.S. will have to establish greater credibility among its Asian partners. America's power projection is directly connected to its economic strength. Addressing domestic problems and economic recovery will play an integral role in the outcome of the rebalancing strategy. Large-scale defense cuts following the 2016 presidential elections would send a signal of weakness and retreat to the world. Obama is laying the groundwork for future U.S. presidents to achieve larger breakthroughs in Asia, but their means of maintaining these policies will be key to sustaining prosperity, stability, freedom of navigation, the free flow of commerce, and progress on human rights and democratic values.

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Most studies of the interactions among China, Taiwan, and Tibet focus on the bilateral relationships between China and Taiwan, or China and Tibet. This study examines relations between Taiwanese and Tibetans through three lenses: the Tibetan Buddhist connection, the friendship narrative, and historical scandal. An analysis of historical accounts, journal articles, and primary sources, including thirty-five interviews, discredits the prevailing view that relations between Taiwan and Tibet are purely religious. Informants from a variety of backgrounds consider Taiwanese and Tibetans victims of the same situation, but coexistence, rather than official alliance, is the intent of both nations. Sources tell a nuanced story, steeped in empathy, but rife with conflict and typecasting, that has significant implications for Taiwan and Tibet’s decidedly separate autonomy and human rights movements.

INTRODUCTION
From the ground level, the Two T’s 1 create each other through religious, empathetic, and political discourse. Whether consciously or not, choices are made in construction of the other. Taiwanese and Tibetans paint each other similarly, even if the Taiwanese seem in a better position to assist exiled Tibetans than the Tibetans do to assist Taiwanese. Whereas political leaders are not pursuing a Taiwanese-Tibetan alliance, visitors and residents of McLeod Ganj certainly are. The friendship is grassroots rather than institutional, which shows its authenticity and real viability. 2

Some Tibetan human rights organizations appear to make note of this latent strength, running campaigns in solidarity with other groups falling within the borders of Beijing’s China, 3 but a similar political move taken by an actual governmental administration, rather than an NGO, would be costly. As Taiwanese Zhang Yunying says, “We need to protect the status quo. It would be best if Tibet were independent, but only if there could be a smooth transition.” 4 Lobsang Tashi, McLeod Ganj hotel manager comments wisely, “There is a lot of ego. If there is anger between two people, there will be fights—even war!” 5 Recognition of Free Taiwan ideology through friendship with Taiwanese activist groups runs counter to the peaceful philosophies of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) 6 and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The CTA chooses the Middle-Way Approach 7—an approach with no ego that requests only the bare necessities for the achievement of dignity.

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1 The “Two T’s” is a play on the term “The Three T’s,” which are comprised of the three taboo subjects in China: Taiwan, Tibet, and Tiananmen. In my paper, the “Two T’s” may refer to either people (Taiwanese and Tibetans) or places (Taiwan and Tibet).
2 This statement is drawn from multiple personal communications.
3 Wu Rongrong (Taiwanese, graduate student and Tibetan human rights organization employee) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 21, 2014. In my writing, “Beijing’s China” refers to the area the Beijing government currently considers China. “Beijing’s Chinese” refers to the population of people the Beijing government considers to be of Chinese nationality. All names in this paper except for
4 Zhang Yunying (Taiwanese, nun) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
5 Lobsang Tashi (Tibetan, hotel manager) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 12, 2014.
6 The CTA, formerly known as the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGE), governs Tibet in Exile. In 2011, His Holiness the Dalai Lama resigned all formal authority over the agency.
7 The Middle-Way Approach, unanimously endorsed by the CTA since 1988, asks for government of Tibet’s three traditional provinces by popularly elected legislature and executive. Tibet would remain within the PRC.
Although informants across the board explain the Taiwanese-Tibetan friendship is both officially and actually rooted in Tibetan Buddhism, I suggest the friendship is a type of apolitical politicking. As is the Tibetan way, the political and human rights cause emerges due to a lack of overt political action. Through the safety of the religious domain, Taiwanese and Tibetans bond and make cultural exchange.

DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES

People all around the world and within the same political parties debate whether Taiwan belongs to the Beijing-governed People's Republic of China (PRC), Taipei's Republic of China (ROC), the USA, or the Taiwanese indigenous population. Similarly, Tibet has a debated PRC identity. More important than the picking apart of political semantics, is the understanding that the Two T's, disputed Chinese regions, have differences as well as commonalities. This section will contrast Taiwan and Tibet.

Whereas the majority of Tibetans want to be ruled by their own people, namely the ethnic Tibetans, who have resided in the Tibetan region for thousands of years, Taiwan's circumstances are different. Most residents of Taiwan are Han, and want to be ruled by Han, not by the Taiwanese aborigines. Although some sources report there is no longer an identifiable distinction between the Taiwanese populations, indigenousness is relevant from a human rights perspective. According to author Hsiang-Chieh Lee, indigenousness may be a necessary political construct in the facilitation of general human rights protest, even if Taiwan does not necessarily tap this resource. A view of cultural uniqueness as being defined by marginalized enforcement assists an understanding of human rights politics in Tibet. Tibetans describe themselves as native to the Tibetan plateau, consider themselves holders of unique knowledge, and use these two actualities to gather international support for their cause. One interpreter for the CTA, Jampa Woesel, says Tibetans are “just like the Indians in the United States. With too much immigration of people from other countries, the land that belonged to the Indians was lost.” Han Taiwanese, on the other hand, do not reference indigenousness in their cause.

Also principal is that, while His Holiness the Dalai Lama does not claim Mainland China is part of Tibet, current ROC Guomindang (GMD) party President Ma Ying-jeou asserts legitimate leadership over the whole of Beijing’s China. Ironically, the PRC considers Taiwan its own. Sun Chen, Taiwanese tourist, maintains one has only to look to the Civil War era to realize Taiwan’s legitimacy as a nation, however. Jiang Zhongzheng fled to Taiwan while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) stayed in the Mainland. She argues that when Jiang made his residence in Taiwan, he symbolically established the residence of fellow ROC citizens for generations to come. Still other informants imply that superiority and condescension have been the historical tools of the GMD. Qiao Peimi, TV programming director and documentary filmmaker, says that when she was young, “there was the idea that we should help out our brothers in the Mainland because they eat grass for lack of food.” Such a condescending view could have buoyed support for an ROC instead of PRC Mainland.

Tibetans also view their territory’s intrinsic right to autonomy in terms of the Chinese Civil War account. Personal interpreter to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kalden Gyatso, explains that, if the GMD had won the Mainland instead of the CCP, Tibetans still would not be free. “The GMD had the same plan in mind as Mao Zedong: Tibet would be China’s. It was only after the GMD had fled to Taiwan that they claimed they would

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8 During the Chinese Civil War, the USA backed the GMD. Now that Taiwan is governed by the GMD, some believe Taiwan is also the USA’s.
10 This statement is drawn from multiple personal communications.
11 Li Xiao Chen (Taiwanese, pilgrim) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 14, 2014.
13 Tibetan: byams pa ’od gsal.
14 Jampa Woesel (Tibetan, CTA interpreter) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 13, 2014.
16 Jiang Zhongzheng is also known by the names Jiang Jieshi and Chiang Kai-shek, among others. I have chosen Jiang Zhongzheng because this is the way his name is pronounced in Taiwan.
17 Ibid.
18 Qiao Peimi (Taiwanese, documentary filmmaker) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
19 Tibetan: skal ldan.
have supported Tibetan independence." 20 An examination of certain ROC maps indicates that Jiang included Tibet in his calculations of the ROC territory (Figure 1), 21 which introduces another difference for consideration. Historically, the Tibetan Empire has never desired the Taiwanese island.

The fourth difference between the two territories is that the portions of Tibet the PRC has labeled the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) do not operate autonomously, while the ROC functions relatively autonomously in Taiwan, even if it does receive pressure from the PRC to certain political and economic ends. By way of explaining Tibet’s lack of self-rule, Lobsang Tashi says, “In China, you cannot wear rosaries. The teacher will take your rosaries from you. You cannot protest in China because you will be thrown in prison.” 22 Even non-Tibetan Yang Xiuying says “Taiwan is lucky because they have independence, but Tibet has been occupied for fifty years.” 23 When asked if they think Taiwan should be independent, half of my Taiwanese informants answered with a confused crinkle in their foreheads, “Taiwan is free.” When pressed for the reason Taiwan is free, several explained that Taiwan has its own elected president, its own economic system, and its own system of writing (traditional rather than simplified characters).

The fact remains that the Taiwanese state receives pressure from Beijing. Just recently, there were protests worldwide because the PRC and GMD had signed a document that made a portion of Taiwan’s economy dependent on the Mainland government. 24 Sun Chen says she was in Sydney, Australia at the time, and that she participated in the protests there. There is an understanding that, if Taiwan does not fight back against Beijing, Taiwan will become Tibet. Qiao Peimi quotes a saying popular these days, “Tibet yesterday, Hong Kong today, Taiwan tomorrow.” 25 She adds, “We are all in similar situations, so we must be careful. We must pay attention.” 26 Other informants agree with Qiao, with reservations. Two informants indicated “Taiwan tomorrow” is not entirely accurate, as Taiwan could never be quite like Tibet or Hong Kong because of its economic independence. One informant did concede, however, that Taiwan will only be protected from Tibet and Hong Kong’s fates if society becomes civilized and open. 27 As China develops, perhaps the Beijing leadership will place more emphasis on justice.

With so many differences and so much passionate debate, the common ground the Two T’s share is easy to overlook. Three points, however, are notable regarding the Taiwanese-Tibetan connection: Tibetan Buddhism, 28 the directional bent of pity, and historical scandal. McLeod Ganj, as the convergence point of all of these topics, is a suitable climate in which to study relations between Taiwanese and Tibetans.

THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST CONNECTION

The Tibetan Buddhist connection is a strong one, but it is brewed in a metaphorical soup that contains ingredients of cultural typecasting and what some of my informants consider “level one” philosophical attainment. The arguments of my informants draw on concepts of pure Buddhism—concepts that have pervaded East Asian philosophical discussion for over a century. Many consider Tibetan Buddhism purer than Chinese Buddhism, 29 and this is especially true of Tibetan Buddhism as practiced in McLeod Ganj, the town of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Through a process of othering, the Two T’s construct images of whom they would like to be in relation to each other. In many cases, the Tibetan is passive—naturally endowed with a divine Buddhist perfection. The Taiwanese pilgrim is also perfect, but actively so, and through the acquirement and exercising of Tibetan Buddhism. Reasons for conver-
sion vary, but what the Two T’s have in common creates a space for friendship.

“In Taiwan, there is no real Buddhism. Here, the Buddhist philosophy is real,” says one volunteer Chinese teacher and Taiwanese resident of McLeod Ganj. Yang Xiuying is not a Buddhist, but she believes that Tibetan Buddhism is more authentic than other Buddhism. Tashi Tsering, Director at Amnye Machen Institute, an ideal venue for archival research, says that, when Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese Buddhist texts are compared, the Tibetan texts are around ninety-eight percent the same as their Sanskrit mothers. My informants indicate that Taiwanese come to McLeod Ganj because, in the region, the individuals who enact the proliferation of Buddhism are the individuals who have access to an accurate text. The availability of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s teachings is particularly attractive to Taiwanese for this reason.

The allure of Tibetan Buddhism’s purity is not a recent development. In the early twentieth century, two Chinese monks made the decision to travel to Tibet to learn Tibetan Buddhism and translate Tibetan Buddhist texts into Mandarin Chinese. According to their biographies, both Nenghai Lama (1886-1967) and Master Fazun (1902-1980) (Figure 2) appreciated Tibetan Buddhism as the groundwork of powerful Buddhist teachings, and as a school that remedied apparent shortfalls of Chinese Buddhism.

In addition to an appreciation for the exactness of the Tibetan Buddhist text, Taiwanese tend to glorify Tibetan values and presentation within a religious context. Yang Xiuying says that the Tibetans in McLeod Ganj “don’t care about other people’s material wealth. They just care about a good heart,” and Zhang Yunying, a Taiwanese nun of Tibetan Buddhism, says the Tibetans “don’t have to have money and they are still happy.”

Taiwanese, even nonreligious Taiwanese, contemplate the Tibetan character within the Tibetan Buddhist context provided by teachers such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama. As such, the Tibetans become synonymous with their primary religious association. They are native to the terrain of Tibetan Buddhism, and, spared the process of conversion, are almost as pure as Tibetan Buddhism itself.

Tibetans also appreciate the Taiwanese, but frame their admiration in terms of cleanliness in addition to religious devotion. Sonam Dolma, in the Tibetan home stay business, says Taiwanese are “down to earth and clean. The Taiwanese feel lucky to be able to meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.” Another home stay parent of sorts, McLeod Ganj hotel manager Lobsang Tashi, also commends the orderliness of the Taiwanese: “They are disciplined. They will keep their environment clean, and they will save power.” The pairing of orderness with religious devotion is not coincidental. Such a pairing implies the Taiwanese strive actively toward the goal of proper dedication. Like organizing a room or deciding to conserve energy, the Taiwanese must seek out the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama by traveling to India, must convert, and must create the outward appearance of devotion until that day the practice becomes intrinsic fact.

Despite the fact that McLeod Ganj teems with Taiwanese visitors and pilgrims during McLeod Ganj’s tourist season, the number of Tibetan Buddhists in Taiwan is actually minor. David Schak and Hsiao, Michael Hsin-Huang, Michael Hsiao’s “Taiwan’s Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups” contends that thirteen percent of Taiwan’s adult population self-identifies with Buddhism. As for how many Tibetan Buddhists there are in Taiwan, the number is much smaller. One estimate by the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) in Taiwan, as published in Buddhism Between Tibet and China in the year 2009, suggests there could be 500,000 Tibetan Buddhists in Taiwan, about two percent of Tai-

30 Tibetan: a mis rma chen.
31 Tashi Tsering (Tibetan, Amnye Machen Institute tibetologist) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 14, 2014.
32 Gray Tuttle, Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 98.
33 Yang Xiuying (Taiwanese, volunteer Chinese teacher) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 18, 2014.
34 Zhang Yunying (Taiwanese, nun) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
35 Some Tibetans open their homes to foreigners at a small price.
36 Sonam Dolma (Tibetan, home stay mother) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 17, 2014.
37 Lobsang Tashi (Tibetan, hotel manager) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 12, 2014.
wan's population at the time, but the MTAC's estimate may be a slight exaggeration considering the MTAC's political motivations. 39 In Dharamsala, 40 the vast majority of Taiwanese are Tibetan Buddhist. These Taiwanese Tibetan Buddhists, just like their ethnically Tibetan contemporaries, make their pilgrimage to Dharamsala because the town is home to the Holinesses the Karmapa and the Dalai Lama.

Taiwanese pilgrims Li Bai and Ma Hui say the popularity of the school in Taiwan cannot be attributed to any single aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. Truly, sections of Yao Lixiang's work, “The Development and Evolution of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan,” spell out a variety of reasons that Taiwanese might have chosen to convert. Most of the Taiwanese he interviewed said teachers or friends had introduced them to Tibetan Buddhism. “Their curiosity was aroused by this initial contact and was deepened when they met with rinpoches, who made deep impression upon them.” Others joined because they were interested in the supernatural powers of Tibetan lamas, or because of health problems, or even because they wanted to learn divination. Some just wanted a son. 41 Additionally, as one Taiwanese nun and resident of McLeod Ganj claims, some “level one” 42 Tibetan Buddhist Taiwanese even like the school because it allows one to eat meat. This same nun, Zhang Yunying, explains her own reason for enjoyment and reverence for Tibetan Buddhist thought is that it contains more emphasis on emptiness 43 in comparison to Chinese Buddhism. 44 As with any religion not native to the region of its contact, the reasons for conversion are diverse.

Although a formulaic view of the other T is common in the Tibetan Buddhist connection, I think cultural typecasting is not unwelcome. In the next section, I will problematize the Tibetan Buddhist connection, arguing that it cannot be separated from Taiwan and Tibet's political undercurrents. Two stories will be told, both of which unintentionally expose the political in their efforts to be wholly religious.

APOLITICAL POLITICKING

In order to understand the true influence of Tibetan Buddhism on Taiwanese-Tibetan relations, we must come to an understanding of apolitical politicking. Throughout Chinese history, religion and the court have cohabitated. The Qing court was a major patron to Buddhism, and there were many Tibetan Buddhists within the court. 45 Today's Dalai Lama, although on the surface a primarily spiritual leader, is actually a specialist in dancing the political dance. A careful review of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings to the Taiwanese in October 2014, for example, reveals that he never once mentioned politics (Figure 3). His teachings focused on the Middle Way Treatises, a purely religious topic, and one requested by the Taiwanese. In fact, one Tibetan nun indicated that, if His Holiness had brought up politics, the pilgrims would have thought, “What a pity. I am sorry he brought that up.” 46

His Holiness knows he holds political power, even now that he has stepped away from his position with the CTA. As he stated in his autobiography, “religion and politics do mix,” and, “I find no contradiction at all between politics and religion.” 47 If a choice is made not to discuss a topic such as the missiles pointed at Taiwan from across the Strait, then His Holiness is making that choice in order to protect his audience from association with possibly damaging politics. When His Holiness was invited to South Africa for a Nobel Laureate conference in October 2014, China pressured South Africa not to give him a visa and, rather than allowing his visit to hurt South Africa, His Holiness withdrew his visa.

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39 Matthew Kapstein, ed., Buddhism Between Tibet and China (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 382
40 Dharamsala is the name of the town in Himachal Pradesh, India whose suburbs contain McLeod Ganj, Gyangkyi, and Sidhbari among other small municipalities. The Tibetan for Dharamsala is either “dha shod” or “rdz shod.” The Mandarin Chinese is “Dalansala.”
42 Here, Zhang refers to a lower level of philosophical achievement. The Mandarin Chinese is “Yi nian ji.”
43 Mandarin Chinese: Xu; Tibetan: stong pa nyid. Whereas labeling things according to a “real” physical state is appealing, doing so would be to disregard the Buddhist concept of impermanence, whereby all things can change, and whereby emptiness is profoundly evident.
44 Zhang Yunying (Taiwanese, nun) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
45 Tuttle, Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China, 19.
46 Zhang Yunying (Taiwanese, nun) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
47 Tuttle, Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China, 98.
application. Whether attending secular or religious events, His Holiness must carefully measure his every statement.

One particular incident illustrates this need. In 1997, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Taiwan. The cabinet of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which presided over Taiwan at the time, invited His Holiness to speak, but only on religious topics, following a devastating typhoon that year. “The Dalai Lama could come to Taiwan to help rest the souls of the dead and also pray for the well-being of the survivors,” Ma Ying-jeou, at that time recent ROC Justice Minister, is quoted to have said in one American newspaper. His Holiness agreed to come, and, once there, he conscientiously kept his discussion spiritual (Figure 4). Even so, Taiwan received backlash for its “splittist” behavior. In one government-run newspaper on the Mainland, Taiwan’s then President Lee Teng-hui was accused of building a dictatorship, even though he had been democratically elected. Researcher Xin Qi at the Center for Peace and Development Studies, additionally, said China would be willing to use military force if pro-independence forces should “go too far.” Beijing’s furious response could hardly have come as a surprise, and I suggest the DPP, although feigning innocence, always had an ulterior political agenda.

Beijing was not overly cautious. Two hundred supporters of formal independence for Taiwan, “also waving Tibetan flags, gathered outside the airport.” Additionally, after the teachings, Taipei allotted five million dollars for the liaison office in Taipei of the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGE). Perhaps His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s statement that religion and politics mix is incomplete; a leader’s political significance must accompany him or her into a religious setting. In Taiwanese-Tibetan relations, the significance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is necessarily political, even in religious settings.

Taiwanese Qian Liwen has been coming to McLeod Ganj yearly, and for months at a time, since 1998. She comes because she is a follower of Tibetan Buddhism. She says she thinks she was a Tibetan in her past life because “even though my knees hurt and I am sick, I come to McLeod Ganj every year.” Although a staunch believer that Tibet has never been, is not, and should never be distinct from China, Qian once shaved her head in solidarity with the Tibetan people, explaining to the twenty journalists who came to interview her that she thought it was wrong for China to keep people from visiting McLeod Ganj, as it is a center of Buddhism. A person who believes Tibet has willingly and legally entered a contract of subordinacy with China comes to shave her head in the capital of Tibet in Exile through a belief in the spiritual right of every Buddhist to visit McLeod Ganj and still be able to return to Tibet.

His Holiness’s careful speech is different from Qian Liwen’s religious speech—or even completely opposite to it—but it still carries an ironic tone. His Holiness the Dalai Lama makes a political situation more obvious through his avo idance of it, and Qian undermines a political objective. Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) might consider promising by waving the banner of religion instead of that of political justice. From His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s careful speech to patronage and exchange between Tibetan Buddhists and Chinese to present-day reasons for interest in the hallowed McLeod Ganj, Tibetan Buddhism is a complex presence in the political and cultural sphere. The complexity is intensified in McLeod Ganj, where the CTA and His Holiness the Dalai Lama make residence.

PITY GOES ONE WAY

Taiwanese and Tibetan cultures are seemingly well suited, but their relations may be influenced by a power differential. Taiwanese, not Tibetans, have the power to “save” the other through the intervention of monetary and political measures. Taiwanese can afford to send Tibetans to Tibet. Moreover, Taiwanese have a political

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49 “Taiwan approves visit from Dalai Lama to comfort survivors of devastating typhoon,” Casper Star-Tribune, August 27, 1997.
50 Mandarin Chinese: Fenlie
52 “Dalai Lama will be welcomed in Taiwan as an ROC citizen,” China Post, March 18, 1997.
55 Qian Liwen (Taiwanese, pilgrim) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
status that allows them entry and return from places like Tibet. Taiwanese and Tibetans are not on equal ground, but sympathize with each other’s similar circumstances all the same.

“We don't have empathy for them, they have empathy for us,” Sonam Dyiki 56 said to me in interview. Sonam Dyiki is a Tibetan nun who lives in McLeod Ganj. She wanted to become a nun her entire childhood, but she spent her early years working due to her family's financial needs. Sonam Dyiki’s statement on empathy does not imply she dislikes the Taiwanese people. To the contrary, she says they are very polite and devout. As for the reason pity goes one way, Sonam Dyiki says Tibet and Taiwan are in different situations. Tibet does not have its own government. Taiwan, on the other hand, has its own country, she feels.

Undeniably, the Taiwanese are able to attend teachings with His Holiness the Dalai Lama without so much as an odd look from the man or woman in customs. Tibetans, on the other hand, can rarely obtain the proper travel documents to visit McLeod Ganj, and, upon their return to Tibet, they may be questioned vigorously and searched for items such as Tibetan flags, Tibetan medicine, and pictures of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. 57 Taiwanese independence supporters speak openly about their hopes for their nation, advertising most any leader and waving most any flag. 58

Even so, Taiwan goes through phases of leadership in which relationships with figures such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama are considered counterproductive to ROC political objectives. Ever since the GMD party regained power in Taiwan in 2008, after a few years of leadership by the DPP, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has not been able to visit Taiwan. Qiao Peimi worries that the GMD is too close to the Beijing government, and adds that, if the Taiwanese do not fight back against the CCP, Taiwan will become Tibet. 59 In justification of Qiao’s worries, Taiwan does suffer media blackouts, even if they are not as pervasive as media blackout in the Mainland. 60 The press is not able to report on certain issues, Qiao explains. If Taiwanese want the real story, they must find answers on the Internet, which requires active interest in a subject. The situation with media in Taiwan, Qiao claims, means there is less Free Tibet work in Taiwan than there should be.

Even so, Qiao has actively sought to understand the Tibetan dilemma, going as far as to spend all her savings producing a documentary film. The film is about home. Below is the story Qiao told of Momo-la, a Tibetan woman who went to Tibet to die.

When I met her, she was old and alone. She wanted to go back to Tibet to be with family, but she had no money. My friend and I decided to collect funds for her travel. While we collected funds, Momo-la applied for a visa. Then she had a stroke. We went to see her and she couldn’t move an entire half of her body. She cried when she saw us, both out of joy and frustration at her helplessness. We talked to her doctor and he said she would not be getting any better, and that we should take her to Tibet now rather than later. We arranged for her extended family—all of who had never met her due to her advanced age and early departure from Tibet—to meet her in Sichuan Province. She had a monk friend who was taking care of her, and we hired an interpreter so that we could communicate with Momo-la and her helper. The five of us traveled by vehicle until the border, at which point all but myself had to stay behind. The monk and the interpreter were Tibetan, and did not have visas, and my friend had shouted “Free Tibet” at a protest in Taiwan, so she would have been watched and would have drawn unnecessary attention. It was just Momo-la and me.

It was Momo-la’s first time seeing a plane, and she held my hand tightly during the entire flight. I was not able to film because of this, but I felt holding her hand was more important. Momo-la’s family met her in Sichuan as planned, and I followed a day later so as not to be associated with her. At customs, the officers threw out Momo-la’s Tibetan medicine because it had Tibetan script on it. I, with all my camera equipment, had no problems at customs. I went to the small village where

56 Tibetan: bde skyid.
57 Qiao Peimi (Taiwanese, documentary filmmaker) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
59 Qiao Peimi (Taiwanese, documentary filmmaker) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
60 Wang Jiahong and Xie Qi (Taiwanese, pilgrims) in conversation with the author, Dharamsala, India, October 16, 2014.
Momo-la and her family were from.

While Momo-la was well taken care of by her extended family, I took a secret video recording to a woman’s house. The recording was of the woman’s husband. He had asked me to take her his spoken words—words of longing and encouragement—to his wife. She cried and cried while she watched his face and heard his words, and asked to send a message back to him. I took the new message, along with some yak cheese and a chupa, 61 back to the woman’s husband when I returned to McLeod Ganj. Three days after my return to McLeod Ganj, I received notification that Momo-la had left this world. When they hear this, Tibetans always tell me, “She was so lucky because she could die in Tibet.” 62

Qiao’s willingness to spend her own savings on Momo-la’s journey cannot be attributed entirely to Qiao’s interest in making a documentary film. Qiao gave up her chance to film so that she could hold Momo-la’s hand during the flight, and Qiao’s countenance as she told the harrowing tale was one of profound distress and empathy. Qiao concluded her story with the statement, “When Tibetans ask me if I miss home, I say, ‘If I want I can go back, so why should I miss?’ I want to tell the world: ‘These people cannot go home. They are suffering.’” There is a perception that the Tibetans are in a much worse situation than the Taiwanese.

The second story of camaraderie between the Taiwanese and Tibetan people, drawn from an interview one early afternoon, features Wu Rongrong, a Taiwanese graduate student completing her studies in Dharamsala. 63 She first came to Dharamsala in 2013 with a program sponsored by Students for a Free Tibet (SFT). Now, Wu works for a Tibetan human rights organization. Wu notes that there are many human rights issues in the world, and some refugees live in worse conditions than the Tibetans, but Wu has chosen the Tibetan issue because “I am part of the Chinese world—the place where people speak Chinese. I am also free as a Taiwanese! China is getting stronger and stronger. There has to be more effort in terms of communicating with the Chinese government and public. It is good for me to use my skills as a free person who speaks Chinese to help Tibet.” Wu brings up a certain saying without any prompting: “Tibet yesterday, Hong Kong today, Taiwan tomorrow.” She says Taiwan currently has de facto independence, but that this could disappear quickly. Perhaps by coming to understand the inner workings of the Tibetan issue, Wu will know how to deal with a similar issue in Taiwan.

Wu views relations between Taiwanese and Tibetans as extremely important to the autonomy movements of both Taiwan and Tibet, noting, however, that the type of autonomy Taiwan can reasonably seek is different from the type Tibet reasonably can. Taiwan wants to be an independent nation de jure, but Tibet, with the Middle-Way Approach 64 promoted by the CTA, can probably only hope for a true autonomy within the Chinese state. Wu argues that SFT does not limit its activity to the Tibet issue. SFT did a campaign and petition in solidarity with the Taiwanese people following the GMD’s signing of a trade agreement with China. “Actually, SFT did this following the Hong Kong protest as well. All the issues with China are connected.” Clearly, political friendship is effected through certain NGOs, even if less often through official agreements signed by members of the Taiwanese and exiled Tibetan governments.

When asked if she thinks SFT’s actions dilute the Tibetan cause by creating an image in black and white and no gray, an image in which China is pure evil and marginalized peoples are victims, Wu says she thinks SFT’s actions only enable dialogue. She identifies the Chinese government, and not the Chinese people, as the problem. “The government is doing bad things in South Mongolia and East Turkestan, and is even harming the Chinese people. SFT is doing two things: it is going against the Chinese government, and it is approaching normal Chinese and informing them so that they may become involved.” According to Wu Rongrong, the best way to reach the Chinese laypeople is to protest en masse—that is, through the combined effort of all Beijing’s Chinese who identify as oppressed.

Wu, having now worked for several Tibetan aid organizations, is very knowledgeable about the history of

61 Tibetan: phyu pa
62 Qiao Peimi (Taiwanese, documentary filmmaker) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
63 Wu Rongrong (Taiwanese, graduate student and Tibetan human rights organization employee) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 21, 2014.
64 Mandarin Chinese: Zangren Xingzheng Zhongyang Guanfang Wang; Tibetan: dbus mi’i sgrig ‘dzugs
Taiwanese-Tibetan relations, and she demonstrates interest in the evolution and future of the friendship. Apparently, before 1990 there was much hostility between the Taiwanese and the exiled Tibetans. This was before the rise of the democratic regime, and was a full decade before the accession of the DPP’s Chen Shui-bian to the Taiwanese presidency. “Exiled Tibetans used to regard the Tibetans who worked for the Taiwanese governments as traitors. Now, they have learned more about Taiwanese history. They have done screenings of Taiwanese movies. I am sure they were surprised to learn certain things the two of us have in common. Although we might seem just like the Chinese, our government also escaped from China. Many countries colonized Taiwan. As the Tibetans learn more about relations between Taiwan and China, they will become more and more aware.” With increased interaction between Taiwanese and Tibetans since His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s first visit to Taiwan, the Two T’s friendship and even political alliance is a real possibility.

Wu herself was not terribly knowledgeable about the Tibet issue before coming to Dharamsala with SFT. Author Kensaku Okawa says in his 2007 work “Lessons from Tibetans in Taiwan: Their history, current situation, and relationship with Taiwanese nationalism” that few people know about the Tibetan population in Taiwan, and that there are probably only four hundred Tibetans in Taiwan. Wu says there are six or eight hundred Tibetans in Taiwan, and admits she did not have a single Tibetan friend in Taiwan before returning from her first trip to Dharamsala. The invisibility of the Tibetans in Taiwan can be attributed to their political status, which the CCP and GMD find inconvenient. The story, Okawa claims, is that Tibetans want independence from China, not Taiwan. Additionally, propaganda campaigns are aimed at the exile population in India, not Taiwan. As the status of Tibetans in Taiwan is complicated, they are elided in television, newspapers, and even everyday speech. That, combined with the limited media access in Taiwan, ensures citizens are not aware of the status of Tibetans—whether in Taiwan, Tibet, or exile. Until coming to McLeod Ganj, where, unlike Taiwan and the Mainland, there is widespread publication and knowledge of the Tibetan issue, Taiwanese may not discover their feelings of camaraderie with the Tibetans.

If the curiosity of the Taiwanese is piqued, however, and they decide to visit McLeod Ganj, they may discover just how at home they feel in the capital of Tibet in Exile. Yang Xiuying, volunteer Chinese language teacher, says, “I studied in the USA, but McLeod Ganj feels like home.” She continues, “Culturally, the Tibetan people are quite similar to the Taiwanese. People in Taiwan are kind and willing to help. They are a little bit shy, but they will help you no matter if you are their friend or not.” Although I was only able to meet with one Taiwanese who had married a Tibetan, sources reported knowledge of three additional Taiwanese who had come to McLeod Ganj a second time to marry. These love marriages, although undoubtedly founded in appreciation for individuals over cultural or political identifications, show the compatibility of Taiwanese and Tibetan culture.

The compatibility of Taiwanese and Tibetan culture is not lessened by apparent power differentials. The presence of a similar element of marginalization, and the presence of similar histories of exile, appears to transcend notions of statelessness.

SCANDAL, BLAME, AND DISUNITY

Relations between Taiwanese and Tibetans have not always been so rosy, however. Several informants, both Taiwanese and Tibetan, refer to a time period in which Tibetans were quite angry with Taiwanese. Zhang Yunying, Taiwanese nun and resident of McLeod Ganj speaks of a time, perhaps ten years ago, when Tibetans would not use Mandarin Chinese when speaking to Taiwanese. Pema Wangyal, Tibetan-American visitor to McLeod Ganj, says relations with Taiwan used to be so bad that Tibetans had trouble even visiting the island. In this section, I will discuss one scandal that lead to poor relations between Taiwan and Tibet in Exile.

67 Mandarin Chinese: Zhongguo Putonghua; Tibetan: rgya skad. If Tibetan-speakers would like to distinguish between Mandarin Chinese and Chinese more generally, they use the Chinese or English words.
68 Zhang Yunying (Taiwanese, nun) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 6, 2014.
69 Pema Wangyal (Tibetan-American, visitor) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 24, 2014.
Zhao Qizheng’s statement in Beijing at the conference on national research in Tibetology and external propaganda on Tibet at the Office of the State Council, June 12th, 2000, speaks to the PRC’s perception of the possibility of a possible domino effect where the dissident regions are concerned. “The Dalai clique has increased its activities to cement ties with other ethnic splittist forces and anti-China forces…such as the independence movements of Taiwan and Xinjiang, democracy movements, Falung Gong, and conservative elements.” Zhao claims that, following the election of Chen Shui-bian, DPP member, to the Presidential Office, a Taiwan-Tibet Alliance was officially formed. Additionally, Taiwanese in Los Angeles designated every June as the Tibet Foundation Month. These examples of political dissent, viewed as having arisen from contact with the “Dalai clique,” and understood as extremely threatening, have become part of the Beijing rhetoric that makes its way into newspapers and other venues for information dissemination. China creates a national enemy in the body of Tibetan leadership.

By way of explaining enemy creation, Carlo Galli et al. says, “The enemy not only undermines our own identity, but also threatens it from within. The enemy is not radically dissimilar to the Us. Rather, even though it brings subtle and deadly differences into the Us, it is similar to the Us to the point of being disquieting and anguishing.” The enemy the CCP creates in the CTA and the “Dalai clique” maps perfectly onto the enemy Carlo Galli et al. describes. Beijing’s dissident Chinese are a danger from within. Their supporters live among the millions of law-abiding Han Chinese.

The CTA is not so different from the CCP. They too create enemies, even within their own people and leaders. Perhaps enemies are part of the nation-state ideology, and Exiled Tibet’s participation in enemy creation tactics assists their nationalist cause. One series of events that is particularly illustrative of the CTA’s own enemy creation is the Chushi Gangdrug (Chugang) incident. Chugang is a welfare association first set up in Kham in order to assist the Kham people in their fight against the perceived Chinese occupation. Chugang involved a military in its early days, but today it focuses its resources on providing free English lessons for students of all ethnicities, assistance in acquiring the Indian Registration Certificate, and financial assistance for Tibetan college students and the elderly. Chugang has a troubled past, although, today, most Tibetan informants cannot recall exactly what went wrong.

A review of Chugang’s informational website shows that, in 1994, wanting to operate with the approval of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s office, Chugang requested official permission to sign an agreement with Taipei’s MTAC. However, before receiving permission, the agreement was signed by Rthur Norbu, then President of Chugang, and several other Chugang bureaucrats (Figure 5). Shortly afterward, Chugang received word that it had behaved incorrectly, and that the organization now formed a threat to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Vice General Secretary of Chugang, Tenzin Palden, confirms this account. He adds, however, that the intentions of Chugang’s relations with Taiwan were always centered on the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to his home in the TAR. The incident was understood as a threat to the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the TGE because, in signing an international document, Chugang was behaving as if it could represent Tibet in foreign relations. What ended up occurring carries the telltale signs of nationalist enemy creation—and this creation sheds light on past views of Taiwan.

Different individuals attribute the corruption case to different bodies. Jampa Woesel, interpreter for the

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71 Ibid.

CTA, blames 1994 President Rthur Norbu for the scandal, saying Rthur Norbu, “had a close relationship with Taiwan, and his relations with the CTA disintegrated. It was considered corruption.” Jampa Woesel’s view reflects the prevailing logic of publications such as the Tibetan Review. In its June 15, 1994, issue, under the heading “We have locked the door from the outside, but is the thief already inside?” the Tibetan Review argues that Rthur Norbu has cozied up with the enemy, the MTAC in Taiwan, and that they are plotting together to go against the Tibetan constitution. In another article published that same date, an interview with one member of Chugang is detailed. In the interview, one Chugang representative and secretary, Phurbu Tsedok, claims no prior knowledge of Rthur Norbu’s dealings with MTAC, going as far as to insist Chugang had never discussed the independence issue with MTAC. “That would be like dreaming. In a meeting with the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, topics such as Tibetan independence would never come up.” Clearly, in the year 1994, discussion of Tibetan independence with Taiwanese bodies was taboo, if not criminal.

Understanding the criminality of his actions, then President Rthur Norbu, made an attempt at redefining his actions, within which attempt emerges one of the earlier conceptions of difference between Taiwan and the Mainland. “First thing,” Rthur Norbu says, “I must make it clear that I am fighting for justice against the Chinese.” The implication is that Taiwan is not China. Even so, the interviewer asks, “If you are so worried about the Tibetan cause then why are you trying to establish a relationship with the GMD? You know they are under the Chinese.” Rthur Norbu responds, “We are not going to the CCP because they destroyed our monasteries,” wherein is elucidated Rthur Norbu’s statement that the GMD, given its non-CCP political history, is an ally.

Interestingly, His Holiness the Dalai Lama made a speech at this time clarifying what recent events with Chugang might have thrown into question. His Holiness is quoted to have said, “The way that Taipei and Beijing stand on the Tibet issue and in regards to the Tibetan diaspora is the same.” Informants from a variety of backgrounds and employments say His Holiness has never said anything against the Taiwanese. Rinzin Lhundup, cofounding member of the Common Grounds Project, says, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama talks about how we should have ties with the Chinese people.” Apparently, however, there was a time of more conservative and, in fact, exclusionary politics. For Exiled Tibet to be strong, bodies with close ties to Tibet’s China had to be labeled other and enemy.

Chugang’s relations with “the other” evidently necessitated a harsh backlash from the TGE. A referendum on the entire Kham population was instated through the TGE’s circulation of a survey. The survey’s main question was: “Do you support His Holiness the Dalai Lama or do you support Rthur Norbu?” Tashi Tsering claims the question was an oversimplification of the situation, but admits the survey uncovered what the TGE considered most important: the allegiance or lack thereof of the Kham people. Tashi Tsering furthers the survey revealed that the vast majority of Khampa aligned themselves with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the TGE. “There were only around six people who were in favor of Rthur Norbu, and these people were pressured in the following weeks by their family members and friends to withdraw what was largely considered a terrible heresy.” The TGE considered the actions of the members of Chugang so heretical that it established a second Chugang under the original Chugang’s same registration number, which the original Chugang’s website notes was illegal. The present-day Prime Minister

79 Jampa Woesel (Tibetan, CTA interpreter) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 13, 2014.
80 “We have locked the door from the outside, but is the thief already inside?” Tibetan Review, June 14, 1994.
82 “Interview with President of Chugang, Rthur, and Secretary Serga,” Tibetan Review, date unclear.
83 “Taipei and Beijing are the same,” Tibetan Review, June 31, 1994.
84 Tibetan: rig ’dzin lhun grub.
85 Common Grounds Project is an organization that provides space for discussions and movie screenings with the hope of promoting positive relations between Chinese, Taiwanese, and Tibetans.
86 Rinzin Lhundup (Tibetan, Common Grounds Project cofounder) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 21, 2014.
87 “Tibet’s China” refers to the territories and ethnic peoples who the CTA considers Chinese, either historically or currently.
88 Tashi Tsering (Tibetan, Amnye Machen Institute tibetologist) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 14, 2014.
89 “The Dilemma,” Dokham Chushi Gangdrug, Accessed November 26,
of Tibet in Exile, Lobsang Sangay, was one of the elected members to the new Chugang. His picture, however, does not appear in the Tibetan Review, which published an article on October 15th, 1994, that contained a picture of the new, TGE-approved, Chugang members (Figure 6). When asked why the TGE established an illegal Chugang, Vice General Secretary Tenzin Palden, says “The CTA wanted a representative body for the Kham people, but did not want a group that was affiliated with Taiwan.” 90

Although the TGE blamed Rthur Norbu and the Chugang institution for the scandal, others blame the Taiwanese nation. Sherab Wangchuk, the former Director of Taiwan’s Office of Tibet (officially known by the name “Religious Foundation of H. H. the Dalai Lama”) says, not so long ago, Taiwan tried to create disharmony among the Tibetan people. He hints Taiwan signed the agreement with Chugang with the sole intent to create misunderstandings. 91 Whether Chugang was the victim of a GMD scheme or the perpetrator of intentional actions against His Holiness’s leadership, the Chugang scandal of 1994 illustrates the complex history of Taiwanese-Tibetan relations.

Today, the MTAC is considered by the CTA to be evidence of the difference between Taiwan and the Mainland. Vice General Secretary Tenzin Palden says, “Taiwan is not the same entity as China because Taiwan has a Tibetan and Mongol association.” 92 Whereas Tibet once spurned Taiwan, Taiwan now views alliance with Tibet as unnecessary. As liberal Taiwan is looking for de jure autonomy and the CTA now advocates for mere genuine autonomy, Taiwanese interactions with the CTA have decreased. “Taiwan’s government is separate, and they do not want to be Chinese,” says Tenzin Palden. With Tibet’s new, more moderate demand, the Taiwanese government no longer sees much benefit from pursuing relations with Tibet. “With the CTA’ Middle-Way Approach, [Taiwan’s] smaller groups have less reason to support us or have contact with us at all. That’s okay because the CTA is not looking for partnership,” 94 says Sherab Wangchuk. The difference between Taiwan’s and Tibet’s political goals limits communication between the two parties, to the extent that one secretary in the Chinese Section of the Department of Information and International Relations claimed, perhaps mistakenly, that the CTA had no relations with Taiwan at all.

Rather than recognize their common goals, Taiwanese and Tibetan leaders have historically labeled the other counterproductive to their respective national causes. The 1994 Chugang incident is an example of a time in which there was disunity both within the exiled Tibetan population and between the Two T’s. Although former Director Sherab Wangchuk often used to attend conferences related to Chinese democracy, both in Taiwan and the Mainland, 95 these occurrences do not seem to have bearing on the futures of Taiwanese and Tibetan autonomy movements. The Taiwanese and Tibetan governments are not working together against Beijing. Instead of occurring from the top-down, from government down to people, alliances between Taiwanese and Tibetans seem to work best from the ground up. A Taiwanese documentary filmmaker spends her life savings on a film about Tibetans and home. A Taiwanese graduate student works for Tibetan aid organizations. A Tibetan pilgrim shaves her head in protest of Beijing’s prohibition of Tibetan pilgrimage to McLeod Ganj. Strangely, Taiwanese-Tibetan relations are private and effected in isolation.

CONCLUSION

When I visited the CTA’s Department of Security, the General Secretary told me he knew nothing of relations with Taiwan. “Go to the Department of Information and International Relations.” At the Department of Information and International Relations, I was told to go to the Department of Religion. “The connection between Taiwan and Tibet is purely religious.” At the Department of Religion, I was told by another General Secretary to go to the Department of Information and International Relations because “We don’t know anything about Taiwan.” Back at the Department of Information

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90 Tenzin Palden (Tibetan, Vice General Secretary of Chugang) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 20, 2014.
91 Sherab Wangchuk (Tibetan, former Director of Taiwan’s Tibet Office) in conversation with the author, Gyangkyi, India, November 14, 2014.
92 Tenzin Palden (Tibetan, Vice General Secretary of Chugang) in conversation with the author, McLeod Ganj, India, November 20, 2014.
93 Ibid.
94 Sherab Wangchuk (Tibetan, former Director of Taiwan’s Tibet Office) in conversation with the author, Gyangkyi, India, November 14, 2014.
95 Ibid.
and International Relations, I was finally able to hear from the former Director of Taiwan’s Tibet Office, Sherab Wangchuk, that formal diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Tibet are close to nil. When pressed about his daily routine during his time in office as Director, however, Sherab Wangchuk mentioned frequent travel to Taiwan and attendance at several pro-democracy conferences, both in Taiwan and the Mainland. Even so, Sherab Wangchuk is stationed within the Chinese section—a section that focuses primarily on printing materials in Chinese for dissemination in the Mainland.  

That the elected representative for Tibet-Taiwan relations is positioned within the Chinese section shows the CTA’s treatment of Taiwan and the Taiwanese autonomy cause. To elide Taiwan’s autonomy movement through the merging of Taiwan and China in political practice is to make a clear statement: the CTA does not align itself with Free Taiwan ideology.

Some would argue the CTA’s current treatment of Taiwan merely reflects the reality that the GMD, debated vassal of the CCP, is in power in Taiwan. If the DPP were in power, the CTA would join forces with the DPP, they might say. As a Chinese newsletter writer says, “Taiwanese never come to the CTA to talk. This is because the GMD party does not have a connection with us.” However, even if the DPP were in power, the CTA would uphold its Middle-Way Approach, the policy that dashes all hopes of a truly independent Tibet. Since 1988, the CTA has fully endorsed the Middle-Way. The CTA is so resolute in its support for the Middle-Way that it vicariously puts the Taiwanese freedom cause to rest. If Free Tibet is to expire, then Free Taiwan will too. Exiled Tibet, in avoiding relations with Taiwan, resigns Taiwan to Tibet’s fate.

Tibetan Buddhism creates a space for the cultivation of Taiwanese and Tibetan nationalism, even if not to the extent that the Two T’s will ever pose a substantial threat to Beijing’s repression. The actions of Taiwanese and Tibetans, both lay and official, are easily misunderstood as ignorant of or indifferent to a critical political opportunity. These actions are more appropriately understood, however, as valid “apolitical” stances. A religious finish glistens on a durable political form. The Taiwanese-Tibetan friendship will continue, even if territory disputes are someday laid to rest, because the Taiwanese-Tibetan friendship will always stand as a symbol of hope and freedom.

96 Dechen Kunsang (Tibetan, Chinese newsletter writer) in conversation with the author, Gyangkyi, India, November 10, 2014.

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NEGOTIATING THE YARLUNG TSANGPO RIVER:
THE UN CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL WATERCOURSE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINESE AND INDIAN DAM BUILDING PROJECTS

Commentators have suggested that China should be encouraged to ratify the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses as a way of resolving potential disputes over dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo and other rivers in South Asia. While the UN Convention does provide a legal basis for negotiations over international watercourses, it is likely not necessary that China actually ratify the treaty. Instead, the treaty can remain as a primary statement of accepted customary law, which can inform bilateral or multilateral negotiations over the watercourses. Due to the history of relations between China and South Asia, these bilateral or regional negotiations or mediation are likely to be more effective than attempting to ‘force’ China to sign the 1997 Convention and submit future disputes to arbitration or adjudication by the ICJ.

INTRODUCTION

One of the central aspects of China’s history has been its relationship with its rivers. Since the earliest dynasties, when Chinese civilization emerged between the Yangtze and Yellow River, China’s development has depended upon its ability to control and harness the power of its watercourses. In the modern period, this relationship to its watercourses has led China to undertake a flurry of dam building, with the most iconic example being the Three Gorges Dam completed in 2012. The purposes of these dams include generation of electric power, storage and diversion of scarce water resources, and control of seasonal flooding.

Unfortunately, however, many of the dams China has built or intends to build are located on rivers shared with neighboring countries. Thus, the possible effects of some of these dams on downstream or upstream countries have caused these construction projects to emerge as a potential source of tension in China’s international relations.¹

To try and resolve these issues, it has been argued that other countries should encourage China to sign the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourse Convention). This paper will first examine how both the Watercourse Convention and customary international water law would apply to China’s hydraulic projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo river, known as the Brahmaputra in India, then consider whether convincing China to ratify the Watercourse Convention is a promising way of resolving potential disputes, or whether other means will need to be utilized in sharing water resources between China and its South Asian neighbors.

BACKGROUND

THE ROLE OF CHINA AS THE “WATER TOWER OF ASIA”

The headwaters of ten of the largest rivers in Asia are located in the Himalayan Mountains. As a result, this region has been referred to as “the water tower of Asia.”² Of these ten rivers, nine of them begin their journey in China. The country’s jurisdiction over these regions and its ability to affect the rivers through upstream construction ensures that China will be an im-


² Ibid.
portant factor in determining how other downstream countries will utilize their river resources.¹

THE BROADER ISSUE OF DAMS IN ASIA

The immediate concern surrounding upstream dams is that they will result in reduced flow of water to downstream states. As Asia’s populations continue to grow, many countries worry that they will soon face a crisis in supplying fresh water to their people.

Dam building can also have significant environmental impacts on the rivers themselves, including increased pollution, changes in the migration patterns and health of fisheries stocks, and shifts in the flow pattern of the given river. In the case of many Asian countries, these impacts are not just environmental issues— they are human health and security issues as well. Much of the population in the downstream countries depends on fish from the rivers for a majority of their protein, and changes in the fisheries stocks due to the dams could have serious consequences from a food security standpoint.² Pollution or changes in water quality can also affect the suitability of the river for agricultural irrigation, causing difficulties for crop production downstream.³ Changes in the quality of the river water can result not just from pollution, but also from standing water held by the dams that may contribute to more bacteriological growth. Dams can also change or prevent the shifting of sediment from upstream to downstream portions of the river, which is often a vital source of nutrients both for fish and agriculture. Also, if the water-releases from these dams are not well managed, they can result in flooding damage downstream.

In addition to their negative impacts however, dams can also have positive effects, if managed properly. They can serve as a means for storing water to be used during the dry season of the region. They can also help control seasonal flooding, which often is a source of great damage to many countries in Asia.⁴ And they can be a source of electricity, which can be provided not just to the country where the dam is located, but also to upstream and downstream countries.

Within Asia, there are several significant rivers and watersheds that have been impacted by hydrological projects, which have caused tension between the countries that share these rivers in the past. In two specific cases, however, these tensions have been lessened by the creation of bilateral or multilateral legal regimes. These different regimes may help illustrate potential means of conflict resolution over this issue. Since this paper will examine possible ways that countries in the region can cooperate effectively, it is worthwhile to briefly consider two such cases: negotiations regarding the Mekong River and the Indus River.

The Mekong River is shared between numerous countries in Southeast Asia. As with the Yarlung Tsangpo, it also has its headwaters in China. The river flows through Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam before reaching the ocean. The river plays a crucial role in these countries’ agricultural and fishing industries. The importance of the Mekong to these countries led to the creation of the Mekong River Commission, a multilateral forum that is now the primary mechanism for discussions of water use along the river. The commission has made valuable contributions to protecting this resource, and has led to the conclusion of water-sharing treaties between the riparian nations in the region. However, China and Myanmar, two countries along the Mekong River, have declined membership, hampering the ability of the commission to address many of the issues facing the Mekong, such as China’s planned dam construction upstream. There is also a great deal of enthusiasm within some of the member countries for building their own dams along the Mekong, many of which could have significant adverse effects on both the environment and the fishery stocks of the river.

Another river that has seen significant controversy is the Indus, flowing between Pakistan and India. Unlike the Mekong, which is managed multilaterally, the Indus is managed by the bilateral Indus Water Treaty. Since being enacted in the 1960s, the Indus Water Treaty has resolved a number of disputes between India and Pakistan, many of them involving dam building projects by

³ Ibid.
⁵ Pomeranz, “Asia’s Unstable Water Tower,” 6-7
India. The treaty owes much of its existence to the efforts of the World Bank, which used financial incentives to encourage the two countries to enact the agreement. The treaty today represents an example of how international bodies can play a positive role in resolving water disputes. However, its history has been somewhat contentious, and for this reason the treaty also illustrates potential pitfalls to water sharing agreements.

THE POTENTIAL CONTROVERSY OVER THE YARLUNG TSANGPO/BRAHMAPUTRA

The Yarlung Tsangpo is one of the largest rivers in Asia. It begins in the glaciers of Tibet, and flows east above China’s borders with Nepal and India and then turns sharply south into India. After flowing through India, it enters Bangladesh, joining with the Ganges to form the third largest river in the world by average discharge.\(^7\)

Both China and India are in the planning or construction stages for a number of hydrological projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo. China is currently completing construction of one dam as part of its Zangmu Power Station project, and it has approved at least three more hydroelectric projects for the river upstream of India.\(^6\) In addition to the Zangmu Dam, other projects that have received approval include the Dagu, Jiexu, and Jiacha dam projects.\(^9\) These dams are primarily aimed at providing electricity generation, but they could also be used to store water or control flooding. Dams built along the Yarlung Tsangpo would be especially well-suited for generating hydroelectric energy because of the significant decrease in elevation along the river, which would increase their power generation potential.\(^10\)

These projects have raised concerns in India and Bangladesh about the potential effects of the dams on the river downstream. Chinese hydro-electric projects have already caused damage to downstream areas in


\(^10\) Yan Yong, “Hydropower challenges for the Brahmaputra: a Chinese perspective,” Brahmaputra: Towards Unity, 10

Map showing the Yarlung-Tsangpo, as well China’s primary hydro-electric project on the river, the Zangmu Dam. Copyright © 1998-2014, RFA. Used with the permission of Radio Free Asia, 2025 M St. NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20036. http://www.rfa.org
India as a result of unannounced water releases from dams.\(^\text{11}\) China and India’s ongoing border disputes and the legacy of the two countries’ 1962 border war also ensure that public opinion in India is extremely sensitive to potential Chinese plans to increase the number of dams on rivers shared between the two countries. Many worry that the dams along the upper portion of the river will give China the ability to either withhold water during the dry seasons or release the water in a harmful manner in case of future disputes between the two countries.\(^\text{12}\) Indeed, many see China’s push to build dams as a deliberate strategy to gain leverage over downstream countries.\(^\text{13}\)

In addition to criticizing China’s current dam projects on the Yarlung, the Indian news press has also accused China of planning to divert the Yarlung Tsangpo before it enters India and transport the water northeast to the Yellow River as part of China’s South-North water project.\(^\text{14}\) While such a plan appears to have once been discussed, Chinese officials have stated that the project is no longer being seriously considered and have assured India that this is the case.\(^\text{15}\) This is reasonable on China’s part, given that such a project would also face formidable engineering challenges that would have to be overcome before it could be seriously considered.\(^\text{16}\) However, this rumor of China’s plan is unlikely to disappear, since some Chinese academics continue to voice their support for such a plan in the future.\(^\text{17}\)

Under these circumstances, many policymakers have debated how to best resolve potential conflicts over the Yarlung Tsangpo. Some analysts point to China’s absence from the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-negotiable Use of International Watercourses as a significant obstacle to resolving water-use disputes, and a number of public policy organizations, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, argue that China and other countries should be pressured to ratify the Convention as an initial first step.\(^\text{18}\) Since the Yarlung Tsangpo is not the only river where China faces potential water disputes with its downstream neighbors, China’s failure to sign the UN Convention is an obstacle to alleviating these other potential disputes, as well.

Others argue that the key to solving potential disputes is for China, India and the other South Asian countries to form a regional commission that would govern the use of their shared watercourses.\(^\text{19}\) If this is not possible, then at the very least, the countries involved should seek to negotiate bi-lateral water-sharing treaties in order to help define the rights each side has to the use and development of the river. In each of these cases, it is important first to consider what the countries’ obligations are under international law.

**THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF UPSTREAM AND DOWNSTREAM STATES**

**CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL WATERCOURSE LAW**

Even before the creation of the 1997 UN Convention, a substantial body of customary international law existed for the use of shared watercourses. Initially, there were several legal approaches competing for the dominant position in customary law governing the use of shared watercourses. These different doctrines tended to favor either the downstream state or the upstream state, reflecting the fact that the use of a watercourse will affect a country differently depending upon where it is located along the river. These doctrines included historic rights or prior apportionment, territorial sovereignty, territorial integrity, and reasonable and equitable utilization. Over the course of the last century, the doctrine of reasonable and equitable utilization emerged as customary law. However, many countries still assert the other legal doctrines, which include: the doctrine of prior apportionment, territorial sovereignty,

\(^{11}\) Tushaar Shah and Mark Giodano, "Himalayan Water Security: A South Asian Perspective," Asia Policy 16, (July 2013): 30

\(^{12}\) Robert Wirsing, "Melting the Geopolitical Ice in South Asia," Asia Policy 16, (July 2013): 22

\(^{13}\) Chellaney, Brahma, "Water is the New Weapon in Beijing’s Armory," ft.com, August 30, 2011, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4f19a01e-d2f1-11e0-9aae-00144feab49a.html


\(^{18}\) “UN Watercourse Convention” World Wide Fund for Nature http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/policy/Conventions/water_conventions/un_watercourses_convention/

\(^{19}\) Jennifer Turner, Susan Shifflet, and Robert Batten, “China’s Upstream Advantage in the Great Himalayan Watershed,” Asia Policy no. 16, (July 2013): 16-17
terrestrial integrity, community of interests, and equitable and reasonable apportionment. Thus, it will be useful to briefly introduce them here.

**Historic rights (prior apportionment):** The doctrine of prior apportionment has a long history, and aspects of it are still present in certain aspects of water law, for example in the laws handling domestic water use in most of the western United States. The doctrine is based on the concept that once a country or population makes use of a river’s water for a period of time, it has an absolute right to continue to use the same amount of water as it has in the past.20 This doctrine is usually favored by downstream states, generally in more arid climates, and typically develops when the state that is furthest downstream has a more developed system of water utilization on the river than its upstream neighbors. While the theory of historic rights is no longer considered a valid legal principle, national governments continue to argue that they have a right to defend their historic use of a river. Examples of this can be seen in disputes over the Nile and the Rio Grande rivers.21

**Territorial sovereignty:** This doctrine holds that riparian states may make any use or carry out any action on a watercourse so long as that watercourse is within their sovereign territory. This sovereign right is considered absolute, even if the upstream state’s actions on its portion of the river cause harmful effects downstream, no matter how serious. The classic historical use of this concept was the Harmon doctrine that was asserted in a controversy between the US and Mexico over the utilization of the Rio Grande River. In response to complaints from Mexico over water shortages in the downstream portion of the river, US Attorney General Judson Harmon stated his opinion that, under the principle of national sovereignty, a state had an absolute right to make whatever use of a river or watercourse within its territory as it saw fit. A downstream state was considered to have no legal basis to object to the water usage of an upstream state, regardless of the consequences.22 While the US and most other countries no longer accept the doctrine of absolute sovereignty as valid, it is still occasionally asserted by some states.

**Territorial integrity:** This doctrine states that a country has a right to have the rivers within its borders flow free and unhindered by upstream states. Territorial integrity is favored by downstream states, and has been used to argue that no upstream projects may be undertaken if they might affect the river downstream in another country. In one example, Spain objected to an upstream water diversion project undertaken by France. In response, France modified the project so that all of the water diverted would ultimately be returned to the river by the time it entered Spain. Spain refused to withdraw its objection however, because it argued that it had an absolute right to object to any diversion of the watercourse by an upstream state regardless of whether or not it suffered any damage as a result.23 The International Court of Justice was eventually asked to arbitrate the dispute, and it rejected Spain’s position in its final decision.

**Community of Interests:** This doctrine views shared international watercourses as a commons, or a resource shared by all countries along its banks.24 Under the community of interests approach, states along a river would be obliged to share in equal measure the water resources or the benefits that are derived from it. As an example in practice, this could mean that all riparian states would have an equal right to hydroelectric power or other benefits produced from a river, and would have an equal obligation to manage and protect it.

**Equitable and reasonable apportionment:** Under this doctrine, states have an obligation to share the resources of a watercourse in an equitable and reasonable manner. Over time, this has gradually been accepted as the customary obligation of riparian states, and it has since been expressed in a number of legal instruments, including the Helsinki Rules and the 1997 UN Watercourse Convention.

THE HELSINKI RULES

In the 20th century, a number of efforts were made to construct a regime of international law concerning the non-navigational uses of international rivers and bodies of water. One of the first major attempts to compile customary international law on the subject into a single document was the Helsinki Rules on the Use of Waters

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22 Ibid., 83-92
23 Delli Priscolli and Wolf, 59-60
24 McCaffrey, The Law of International Watercourses, 149-153
of International Rivers, which the International Law Association adopted in 1966. The Helsinki Rules endorsed the doctrine of equitable and reasonable apportionment, and would ultimately have a significant effect on subsequent legal instruments that further addressed the subject. More importantly, the principles of the Helsinki Rules, while not binding, explicitly guided the formulation of the provisions of the Mekong River Commission.

THE 1997 UN WATERCOURSES CONVENTION

Today, the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses is the primary codification of international law regarding non-navigational use of watercourses. It built on both the Helsinki Rules and other norms of international law, and represents the first formal international treaty governing international watercourses. The treaty imposes three basic principles on countries’ joint use of shared watercourses: equitable and reasonable utilization; a duty to prevent harm to other riparian states; and an obligation to provide notice of current and planned watercourse projects and information regarding the effects of these projects on the surrounding countries. In addition, some provisions of the treaty could be interpreted as also imposing a duty to protect shared watercourses from environmental degradation.

The Convention generated a significant amount of controversy when it was being drafted, and a number of revisions and compromises were made before the final instrument was presented for signature. While the treaty eventually received 103 votes, and was formally presented for ratification, a large number of countries abstained from the vote, and China, Burundi, and Turkey voted against it. The Convention recently reached the required number of 35 ratifying countries, and entered into force on August 17, 2014. Under the principle of reciprocity however, a country must ratify the Convention before it can be bound by it. At present China, India, and Bangladesh have all declined to do so.

Despite the limited number of countries that have ratified it, the Convention has gradually acquired the status of customary international law. For example, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has relied on the Convention’s principles in several disputes it has settled, including the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project case between Hungary and Slovakia. This use of the Convention indicates that the ICJ considers the Watercourse Convention to hold the status of customary international law. Thus, even if a state has not ratified the Convention, international practice recognizes that the legal principles of the Watercourse Convention can affect negotiations over its exploitation of shared watercourse systems.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF LAW/DISPUTE SETTLEMENT

In addition to customary and international treaty law, another source of legal principles in international watercourses is other bilateral water sharing agreements and multilateral, regional treaties or commissions that have been formed to manage the rivers in other regions. These regional agreements can illustrate how water-sharing arrangements work in practice, and can also provide potential models for water sharing arrangements. Two such arrangements in Asia that are particularly useful to examine are the Indus Water Treaty, and the Mekong River Commission.

The 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan sought to reduce disputes over shared watercourses by agreeing on the amount of water each side was entitled to use and the number of dams that could be initially built and on sharing hydrological information between the two countries. India and Pakistan also agreed to submit any disputes to a bilateral commission established by the treaty. Since its conclusion, Pakistan and India have disputed the extent of information that must be shared under the treaty, and Pakistan often objects to Indian projects on the Indus River on the grounds that India has not provided the required level of information. Despite this fact, for the most part the bilateral commission has allowed India and Pakistan to resolve these disagreements and continue to develop
the river in a way that they could not have in the absence of the treaty.\textsuperscript{31}

The regionally based Mekong River Commission (MRC) provides an example of a multilateral framework set up to jointly manage an international river basin. The Commission currently consists of four members: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. The other two Mekong River states, China and Myanmar, are not members but do participate in the MRC as Dialogue Partners. The Commission is unique in that it is the only multilateral treaty to have been based on the Helsinki Rules, the set of principles on which the UN Watercourse Convention was based.\textsuperscript{32} Because the Helsinki Rules endorsed the doctrine of reasonable and equitable utilization, the MRC provides a real-world example of what other multilateral treaties based on these principles might look like.

**NEGOTIATING AGREEMENT OVER THE YAR- LUNG TSANGPO**

The first issue that must be addressed is the effect of international treaties, customary law, and the practice of other states will have on the potential disputes over the Yarlung Tsangpo. The 1997 UN Watercourse Convention places two primary obligations on riparian states: the principle of equitable and reasonable allocation and the obligation to do no harm. However, these obligations are not absolute, and to a certain extent they must be balanced with each other.\textsuperscript{33} The principle of reasonable and equitable use is generally considered to take priority over the obligation to do no harm, and it may be permissible for an upstream state to carry out river projects that result in some harm to a downstream state, so long as the actual share of benefit between the two states is equitable. The no harm obligation is one of due care, requiring a state to take reasonable efforts to reduce the harm to other states, while pursuing the primary principle of equitable allocation.\textsuperscript{34}

The Watercourse Convention, as a result, does not place an absolute prohibition on any projects that would harm another state; instead, it advocates that the states involved should seek an end result that is equitable and reasonable for all countries affected. In some cases, rather than imposing requirements on the manner in which a project is built, the Convention might allow states to pay compensation for projects that cause harm downstream as a way of achieving an equitable solution.\textsuperscript{35}

In order for the states to achieve an equitable allocation of the watercourse, the Convention also imposes a duty of prior notification and information sharing. While this is a procedural obligation, this requirement could also be controversial. In the case of the Indus River, a similar information sharing and notification requirement exists between India and Pakistan. As mentioned above, Pakistan on numerous occasions has asserted that India may not go forward with certain hydroelectric projects due to a failure to provide adequate information regarding their downstream effects. While most of these disagreements have eventually been settled through the bilateral commission, they also illustrate the potential for disagreement over information sharing requirements.

If the Watercourse Convention were applied to China, India, and Bangladesh’s use of the Yarlung Tsangpo, it would require the three countries to agree to a water sharing arrangement that is both equitable and reasonable. Following this requirement, the countries, particularly China as the upstream state, would have a duty to exercise due care in preventing harmful effects to its downstream neighbors.

China and India would also be required to share information regarding their planned hydroelectric projects with downstream countries. Both countries have already taken some steps towards improving their information sharing, signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) promising that China will share certain information regarding its projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo with India.\textsuperscript{36} While this is a positive develop-

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\textsuperscript{32} Delli Priscoll and Wolf, 221

\textsuperscript{33} McCaffrey, Law of International Watercourses, 347-348

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 372

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 376-377

opment, it is unclear what level of information China intends to share. Here, the Convention could serve as an important guide to define exactly what data China should be required to disclose under international law.

OBSTACLES TO CHINA’S RATIFICATION OF THE UN WATERCOURSE CONVENTION

While the Convention is clearly applicable to potential disputes over the Yarlung Tsangpo, China has refused to either ratify the treaty or officially agree to abide by its principles. They have also been reluctant to participate in bilateral or multilateral agreements for managing these resources. China’s lack of support for the UN Convention is likely due to a number of factors, but there are two in particular: the substantive and procedural requirements of the treaty itself, and the requirement that disputes be submitted to a mandatory fact finding commission if other proceedings are ineffective.

THE ISSUE OF OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE WATERCOURSE CONVENTION

When it voted against the Watercourse Convention at the UN, China based its objection on its view that countries have indisputable sovereignty over waters running through their territory. This objection seemed to indicate that China considers the principle of equitable and reasonable use and the obligation to do no harm to represent an impermissible infringement of its sovereignty. Despite this however, China’s bilateral treaties with other countries have contained similar principles to those of reasonable and equitable use. These treaty examples suggest that China does consider the principles contained in the UN Watercourse Convention to represent legitimate principles of international law, and that it might not object to these principles in negotiations over the Yarlung Tsangpo.

Some examples of watercourse treaties between China and third countries include the 2008 China-Russia Agreement Concerning the Reasonable Use and Protection of Transboundary Waters, which references the principle of reasonable and equitable use in the preamble. Other treaties, such as the 1994 Agreement on Protection and Utilization of Transboundary Waters with Mongolia, state an obligation to refrain from causing harm to other countries. Finally, China has also agreed to the sharing of hydrological project data with other states, similar to the requirements of the UN Watercourse Convention. The most recent examples of this are two 2008 Memorandums of Understanding concluded separately with both India and Bangladesh regarding the sharing of hydrological data on the Yarlung Tsangpo.

Despite its formal vote against the UN Watercourse Convention, these examples suggest that China might still accept the substantive provisions contained in the convention as legitimate principles of transboundary watercourse management and customary international law. Even if China continues to refuse to ratify the convention, these principles could serve as a set of criteria to guide future watercourse agreements between China and its downstream neighbors.

THE ISSUE OF INTERNATIONAL ADJUDICATION OR MANDATORY FACT FINDING

The dispute settlement provisions of the treaty are more likely to be unacceptable from China’s perspective. Article 33 of the UN Watercourse Convention contemplates that states will resolve conflicts over international watercourses either through private recourse, negotiation or mediation, or submission of the dispute to the ICJ or another form of arbitration. If these methods do not result in resolution, the dispute must be submitted to an independent fact-finding commission, set up under the Convention. It is likely that this mandatory dispute resolution provision is one of the major reasons that China voted against adoption of the 1997 Convention when it was drafted. China’s government places strong emphasis on the inviolability of national sovereignty. While China does cooperate with neighboring countries over natural resources and other territorial issues, it does so with the position that no other

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38 Huiping Chen, Alistair Rieu-Clarke, and Patricia Wouters, “Exploring China’s transboundary water treaty practice through the prism of the UN Watercourses Convention,” Water International, 38:2, 225
39 Ibid., 220
40 Ibid., 221
41 Ibid., 218
42 McCaffrey, 443
43 Nickum, 232
country or international body may interfere with any decisions affecting China’s natural resources.

This emphasis on national sovereignty also leads China to have a strong preference for solving transnational disputes through bilateral negotiation or mediation, as opposed to submitting them to an international body such as the ICJ for arbitration or adjudication. Most of China’s territorial disputes that have been settled since the PRC gained control of China in 1949 have been addressed primarily through bilateral negotiation. The Chinese government often seeks to avoid multilateral negotiations, stressing its position that disputes must be settled bilaterally between China and individual countries, rather than submitting them to an international forum.

Even in circumstances where it has ratified agreements that include provisions for dispute settlement by an international adjudicative body, China has still opted out or made reservations to such provisions. For example, although China ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it issued a reservation to the provision allowing disputes to be submitted to arbitration by the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), or adjudication by the ICJ.

SPECIFIC OPTIONS FOR RESOLVING DISPUTES OVER THE YARLUNG TSANGPO

Despite China’s unwillingness to ratify the UN Convention, the treaty can still play a positive role in resolving disputes between China and its neighbors. Because the Convention is widely considered to represent customary international law, it can still guide negotiations over the Yarlung Tsangpo, and help determine the rights and obligations of the countries that share the river. Using the treaty’s principles as a basis for negotiation, the countries along the river can seek to establish a multilateral or regional commission to jointly manage the river, or conclude a bilateral or multilateral water-sharing agreement after the model of the Indus Water Treaty.

CREATION OF A REGIONAL COMMISSION ON THE WATERSHED

One option is the creation of a regional commission to manage the Yarlung Tsangpo. The best model for such an agreement would likely be the Mekong River Commission. A similar joint body could be set up between China, India, and Bangladesh, perhaps as part of a regional organization focused on watercourse management in South Asia as a whole. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been listed as one potential organization that could serve as the basis for such an arrangement. Unfortunately, SAARC is a relatively weak institution that must overcome the distrust between Pakistan and India before it can become more influential. While China is an observer in SAARC, there is also no guarantee it would be willing to become a full member of the organization or to consent to the organization’s mandate being expanded to cover management of shared water resources.

BILATERAL NEGOTIATION

The other option is for India, and possibly Bangladesh as well, to negotiate a bilateral water-sharing treaty. The possible scope of such a treaty could vary depending on the situation. The Indus Water Treaty is one of the best examples of a comprehensive agreement. Its terms included the right of Pakistan to receive certain portions of the river unimpeded, a limit on the number of hydraulic projects that could be built on the river initially, financial contributions from India over a ten-year transition period, provisions for information sharing, and the establishment of a permanent commission to resolve future disputes. While negotiation of a similar agreement between China, India and Bangladesh would be the ideal scenario, many of the provisions listed above would be controversial. Initially, a more limited agreement could be negotiated to avoid discussing certain issues. Any such agreement could then serve as a building block for further negotiation of more contentious topics.

These countries can improve their chance of success—
fully reaching an agreement if they follow several principles during the negotiation process. These principles include placing an emphasis on “water needs” rather than “water rights,” searching for inventive solutions, cooperating with and involving outside states and organizations, and insisting on objective criteria in negotiating a resource sharing arrangement. These principles are based not just on historical experiences negotiating over international water resources, but are also supported by negotiation experts who recommend an interest based, integrative approach to negotiation, rather than a distributive approach focused on positions and rights.\(^{48}\)

A key component of successful negotiation of shared watercourse management is a need to shift the focus from “water rights” to “water needs.” It is natural for countries to insist on protecting “all” of their rights that they assert over an international river.\(^{49}\) Indeed, India’s recent moves to increase the dams it is building on the Brahmaputra are partly motivated by a desire to protect what it sees as its historic rights on the river. However, the rights claimed by the different states are certain to shift from the rights of the different countries to their needs. Once these shifts occur it becomes easier to focus on finding an equitable division of limited resources.\(^{50}\)

The second principle, searching for inventive solutions, refers to the fact that countries involved in a dispute over hydrological projects can sometimes overcome their disagreements by finding ways to share the benefits of a project between them. One such example is the Lesotho Highlands Treaty, where South Africa agreed to finance the building of a hydroelectric dam in Lesotho. Lesotho gained an increased ability to generate electricity, and in exchange it agreed to sell additional electricity and also to supply drinking water to South Africa.\(^{51}\) By discussing their needs and coordinating over the management of a watercourse, countries can agree to build a single dam in an area suited to the production of hydroelectric power or water storage, and then share the benefits between them, rather than unilaterally develop their own individual hydrological projects. The Yarlung Tsangpo may be suited to a similar approach since a significant portion of the river in China is well-suited to generating electricity due to the significant changes in elevation as it flows down from Tibet.\(^{52}\)

Additionally, outside parties may be able to play a positive role, even if the negotiations are bilateral. During the Indus Water Treaty negotiations between Pakistan and India, the two countries were ultimately convinced to reach an agreement by the World Bank, which offered to finance hydrological projects in both countries if they concluded an agreement on sharing the waters of the Indus. The World Bank does not have the same influence in Asia that it did in the past, though. China, rather than international financial institutions such as the World Bank, now finances much of the dam building in Asian countries, and China itself does not need the assistance of the bank in order to pursue its current projects.\(^{53}\) Nevertheless, the World Bank and other institutions such as the IMF or the Asian Development Bank may still be able to exert some influence over the countries involved through financial assistance or offers of technical expertise.

Other countries may also be able to play an advisory and advocacy role. The US in particular could offer to help countries evaluate the potential environmental impact of future dams along the river. The US has significant experience with modern hydroelectric dams. In particular, it has had time to evaluate the potential environmental effects of such projects and to determine potential solutions to the problems that are sometimes created.\(^{54}\) Scholars have already suggested that in the

\(^{48}\) The primary proponents of the “integrative negotiation” approach are Roger Fisher and William Ury in their classic work Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In, (London: Penguin, 2011); Scholars focusing on water conflict management specifically have referenced their work, and believe it to be applicable to the resolution of cross border watercourse disputes. Delli Priscolli and Wolf, 34

\(^{49}\) Delli Priscolli and Wolf, 69-70

\(^{50}\) Delli Priscolli and Wolf, 75, 214

\(^{51}\) Yan Yong

\(^{52}\) Richard Cronin and Timothy Hamlin, Mekong Tipping Point: Hydroelectric Dams, Human Security and Regional Stability, (The Stimson Center: 2010) 27

\(^{53}\) Economy, Elizabeth, “China’s Global Quest for Resources and Implica-
case of other rivers shared by China and its neighbors, such as the Mekong, the US has leverage in the form of its research and data resources regarding hydrological projects, which could be offered to China and its downstream neighbors to help evaluate the actual threats and potential of hydropower projects along the rivers. It is likely that such research tools would also be of use in the Yarlung/Brahmaputra watershed, particularly given the fears among the downstream populations regarding the effects of the planned dams.

Finally, in negotiations one of the most important things for the parties to do is to insist that the negotiating process and the final agreement be based on shared, objective criteria. If both sides in a negotiation can agree at the outset to such objective criteria, this will help insure that neither party will be disadvantaged by the final agreement. When based on such objective criteria, such agreements tend to be more robust, since it is less likely that one side will experience dissatisfaction due to feelings of being taken advantage of. Because it is a formulation of accepted customary international law, and because its principles have been endorsed not just by bodies such as the Mekong River Commission, but by China’s own treaty practice as well, the UN Watercourse Convention represents the most authoritative set of objective criteria for negotiations over shared watercourses in South Asia.

CONCLUSION
China’s planned hydroelectric dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo will likely be a source of tension with India for the foreseeable future, particularly given the potential effects the projects can have on the populations downstream. In this situation, the 1997 UN Convention on International Watercourses has an important role to play in resolving these potential conflicts. Even though China has not ratified it, the Convention represents accepted customary international law on the non-navigational use of watercourses. For this reason, it is not necessary to convince China to formally ratify the convention.

Because of the river’s importance to the region, China, India, and Bangladesh should attempt to instead construct either a multilateral or bilateral agreement on sharing the resources of the Yarlung Tsangpo. Such an agreement should be based on the principles of the UN Watercourse Convention. Doing so will help ensure that the agreement is equitable to all sides, and that it will be effective in managing development of the river.

While much attention is paid to the dangers of China’s dam building efforts on its rivers, there are also potential benefits that could improve the livelihood of much of the population in the Yarlung/Brahmaputra basin. Realizing these benefits will require that all countries be willing to objectively share and evaluate information regarding the effects of these dams, and cooperate so as to find the best methods of managing the vast potential of the third largest river in the world.
During the May Fourth era, many intellectuals were eager to save China by actively incorporating politics into their writings; as a result, an obsession with the Chinese national condition became a major theme in many modern Chinese literary works. Thanks to Zhou Zuoren (周作人), who promoted the literature of leisure, there has been an alternative way of modernizing China through the so-called human literature (ren de wenxue, 人的文學), which emphasizes individual and subjective opinions. A striking feature about Zhou Zuoren’s lyrical and sensational writings is his plain artistic style that conveys profound thoughts through concise and simple forms. Hence, most of Zhou’s prose, which often deals with mundane affairs and human feelings, are short but also thought provoking.

How could this plain artistic style be so rich and evocative? Two of Zhou’s notions answer this question — the astringent taste (se wei, 濞味) and the preference for simplicity (jian dan wei, 簡單味). Through his aesthetic appreciation, Zhuo Zuoren sought to shape a new kind of subjectivity that embraced his understanding of true humanitarianism, which was inspired by the exploration of human emotion in Western literature and traditional Chinese philosophy. This paper seeks to explore Zhou Zuoren’s plain artistic style by analyzing the sophisticated taste of asperity and simplicity in his writings. Furthermore, by referencing his personality and philosophy, this paper will also examine how Zhou Zuoren’s subjectivity shaped the May Fourth enlightenment project.

Previously, scholars including Qian Liquan (钱理群) and David E. Pollard have examined the subtlety of Zhou Zuoren’s prose by discussing the taste of bitterness in his Bitter Bamboo Miscellaneous (Kuzhu zaji, 苦竹雜記). In this collection, Zhou Zuoren likened the bitter-sweetness of tea to the multifaceted nature of human life, emphasizing the importance of creating multiple layers of taste. It is worth pointing out the concept of “bitter taste” in Zhou Zuoren’s works, as this concept is prevalent in many of his writings. However, Bitter Bamboo Miscellaneous may not be the best or the only source to indicate Zhou Zuoren’s implementation of subtlety because he explicitly made the analogy between tea and human life, therefore losing the sense of subtlety.

“This is like drinking bitter tea. Bitter tea is not nice at all. The child will not drink even ordinary tea until he is in his teens. To feel invigorated after a swallow of strong tea is the sad lot of an adult, life’s ‘bitter-sweetness,’ as the Greek poetess called love. As the Book of Odes [‘Ku feng’] says: ‘Who said the sow-thistle is sweet? Its sweetness is like the shepherd’s purse.’”

Moreover, Pollard’s analysis on the simplicity of Zhou Zuoren’s writings refers to many of Zhou Zuoren’s supportive comments on the utilization of plain language; however, Pollard does not use any of Zhou Zuoren’s essays to show the directness of his writings. In order to rectify this omission, this paper seeks to

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demonstrate the simplicity of Zhou Zuoren’s writings by closely reading some of his essays. Finally, the paper will also associate Zhou Zuoren’s plain artistic style with his personality and philosophy, which could be observed from The Impression of Zhou Zuoren (Zhuo Zuoren Yinxiang, 周作人印象), a collection of essays that were composed by his young brother as well as his friends and protégés.  

Many scholars point out that Zhou Zuoren’s lyrical writing was considered very distinct during the May Fourth Era. Zhou Zuoren argued that literature should be lyrical and serve a private purpose. This assertion was at odds with the conventional May Fourth mentality and was often considered decadent. Therefore, his beautiful essays were undermined in terms of their significance and contribution towards the society. However, this paper seeks to show that Zhou Zuoren’s plain artistic style is not only an absorbing literary approach, but also an alternative understanding of the China modernization project during the May Fourth era.

THE ASTRINGENT TASTE

Zhou Zuoren wrote extensively on the topics of bitterness, describing a myriad of unpleasant experiences through sensational depictions. However, this bitterness would be dull without the taste of astringency, which vividly suggests a bidirectional shift between frustration and enjoyment in the feelings towards certain phenomena. In the essay “Relentless Rain,” Zhou Zuoren describes varied forms of experiencing the rain, so that he generated different emotions towards the rain. More importantly, Zhou Zuoren includes sensory details that help the readers see, hear, feel, and taste the experiences he wrote about. In the first passage of the essay, Zhou Zuoren recalls a bunch of pervious experiences, which contains both sufferings and pleasure. The first place that Zhou Zuoren depicts is the train that travels between Hangzhou and Shanghai. He claims that he could not find anything special but depressing about the rain in trains. In contrast, the experience in the “black awning” boat seemed to be much more fun. Here we could see the second place — Shaoxing, Zhou Zuoren’s hometown. Since Zhou Zuoren opens all of his senses to feel the rain, the rain per se and its surroundings were all components of the whole story. For instance, he particularly points out the sound of the rain in Shaoxing.

As shown above, this experience is not only caused by the rain itself but also by his longings and appreciation towards Shaoxing’s culture, including the “black awning” boat and the call. Later on, Zhou Zuoren moves from Shaoxing to a seemingly surreal journey in desert. Differing from the previous two experiences, this time Zhou Zuoren feels that the rain was created in his mind. However, this imaginary experience still seems so real because the descriptions were sensationalized.

If you run into a storm then it should be a great relief. I can imagine you lounging in your mule cart, the desert lands underneath, the pelting rain above, quaffing large quantities of soda pop as you proceed serenely on your way: that would really rank as one of ‘life’s delights.’”

In addition to the auditory sense, Zhou Zuoren also added touch and taste in this experience. The phrase “lounging” (huzuo, 胡坐) vividly depicts a physical state of being that was very comfortable and relaxed. The depiction “quaffing large quantities of soda pop” allows the reader to imagine the tingling sensation when soda goes down the throat. By indulging in outlandish fantasies, Zhou Zuoren enjoys the pleasure of the imaginary rain.

This fantasy is in stark contrast to the experience at Beijing. Suddenly, the primary subject of the essay, Beijing’s rain, brings Zhou Zuoren and the readers back to a bitter reality. Zhou Zuoren claims that Beijing’s heavy rain was not pleasurable. He is disturbed by the drumming sound of the rain and the soggy books. Com-

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4 Ruxi Liu, The Impression of Zhou Zuoren (Shanghai: Shanghai Xue Lin Press, 1997), 1-2.


7 Ibid, 4.

8 Ibid, 4.
pared to the imaginary world, Zhou finds the Beijing rainy days to be a frustrating annoyance. However, Zhou Zuoren does not forget to add a hint of amusement in the bitterness.

“At long last five o’clock came around, and holding an umbrella I ran to the west wing in my bare feet to take a look. Indeed it was as I had thought, there was water all over the floor, to a depth of about an inch. Only then did I give a sigh, out of relief. If I had rushed over there so keyed up and found there wasn’t any water, I fear I would have been disappointed, or perhaps not as satisfied as I was.”

Despite being tortured by the unpleasant rain in Beijing, Zhou Zuoren never ceases to discover and embrace pleasure out of suffering. The “satisfaction” (manzu, 賺) mentioned in this passage is like a self-deprecating emotion that is described in this passage paved the way for future enjoyment. At this point, the frustration towards Beijing’s rain began to make a transition.

As expected, Zhou Zuoren makes another change in the depiction of Beijing’s rain by introducing children and animals, whose feeling towards Beijing’s rain was a pleasure — a more obvious shift from frustration to enjoyment. Zhou Zuoren says “there are only two kinds of people who really like this heavy rain (zhe hui de dayu, zhiyou liang zhong ren zui xihuan).” The first kind are the children, who loved water. He claims that Beijing is usually dry, so it is hard for them to find water. When the yard is filled with water, the children are totally thrilled about “crossing the river” (tang he, 涉河). More importantly, the children’s joy changes the way that the adults perceive the rain: “Since the children were obviously having such good fun, some of the adults joined in, but their record was not spectacularly good (darenmen jianxiaohai wan de youqu, ye yige liang ge de jiaru, danshi chengji que bu shen jia, 大人們見小孩玩的有趣，也一個兩個地加入，但是成績卻不甚佳).” Although Zhou Zuoren does not mention whether he would also like to participate, one can still detect a sense of brightness in his tone. Besides children, the second category of those who love the heavy rain is frogs. Frogs get excited in rainy days and begin to croak all day long. According to Zhou Zuoren, their sound may be “a bad omen for the harvest” (huang nian zhi zhao, 荒年之兆), but it also makes the city sound like a beautiful countryside. Moreover, although some people who have sensitive eardrums hate this noise, Zhou Zuoren considers it a peculiar sound that is fun to listen to. He also writes some intriguing words regarding the noisy sound of frogs:

“I think that is quite unnecessary. There isn’t anything you can’t incline a casual ear to without pleasure: not only those things that have long been the subject of poetry, all animal call are in fact worth listening to.”

The sound of frog is an analogy to any kind of bitterness in life, and Zhou Zuoren asks people to explore the hidden sweetness by changing their perspective. Here Zhou Zuoren mentions one of his favorite words, “趣” (qu, “entertaining” or “fun”), which does not merely mean pleasure, but rather the fascination of finding pleasure. In “Relentless Rain,” Zhou Zuoren portrays different responses towards natural phenomena, including both Beijing’s rain and the sound of frogs. The shift from frustration to enjoyment takes place multiple times within the prose.

Compared to “Relentless Rain,” “First Love” (chulian, 初恋) seems a more intimate and private account. Unlike “Relentless Rain,” which depicts different roles vis-à-vis various phenomena, “First Love” tells of one’s feeling toward a single issue. Nevertheless, Zhou Zuoren is still able to wander between bitterness and sweetness. In “First Love,” Zhou Zuoren delineates a complicated psychological activity: a shift from enjoyment to frustration — and then to enjoyment again. At the beginning of the essay, Zhou Zuoren describes the appearance of the girl who was his first crush.

“As I recall now, she seemed to have a thin face, black eyes, slender figure and small feet. There is noth-
ing spectacularly attractive about her. But she was the first person that caught my notice in my love life, made me feel the love towards another person, stirred up my nascent understanding of sex, and galvanized my interest towards the opposite sex.” 11

“在此刻回想起來，彷彿是一個尖面龐，烏眼睛，瘦小的身材，而且有尖小的腳的少女，並沒有什麼殊勝的地方，但是在我的的生活裡總是第一個人，使我於自己之外感到對於別人的愛著，引起我沒有明了的性之概念的，對於異性的戀慕的第一個人了。” 12

By depicting the interactions between the girl and him in detail, Zhou Zuoren shows his nostalgia towards this sweet memory. However, Zhou Zuoren then informs the reader that this girl died of cholera during the time of his departure to Hangzhou. Zhou Zuoren admits that he suffered from thinking about her miserable fate. Up to this point, the sweet memory turns into mourning.

Yet, the story does not stop here, and another turn takes place at the very end of the essay. Zhou Zuoren says, “but I also feel tranquil as if a stone in my heart is finally load off”13 (Dan tongshi que you sihu hen shi anjing, fangfu xinli you kuai da shitou yijingfangxiale, 但同時卻又似乎很是安靜，彷彿心裡有塊大石頭已經放下了). 14 This simple sentence signifies a sigh of relief. Although Zhou feels the pain of loss, he realizes that this girl would live forever in his mind.

This relief may not be completely joyful, but certainly is some kind of positive feeling — liberation from frustration. The multiple-layer taste in Zhou Zuoren’s writing is reminiscent of the changing voice within Chinese traditional poetry. As Stephen Owen discusses in his book Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics, the poets could be inconsistent in terms of voice as they mediated on composing the poems.15 This is also what Charles Laughlin suggests about wandering and ambiguity in the literature of leisure.16 Indeed, essays and poems are tools for the writers to explore their inner world, which can be volatile, random, and complicated. According to this concept, Zhou Zuoren employs inconsistent emotions in his essays, creating a subtle movement between bitterness and sweetness.

The astringent taste, which contains both bitterness and sweetness, is something that Zhou Zuoren sought to embody in his writing. Another interesting aspect of the astringent taste is the way it tickles people’s taste buds — the explicit bitterness along with the implicit sweetness. By reading Zhou’s Bitter Taste and Sweet Taste (Kukou gankou, 苦口甘口), one can see that Zhou favored bitterness over sweetness because he believes this particular experience resonated more easily with the reader.

“In my humble opinion sharing in pleasure is a very shallow thing. Apart from the fact that honeyed words about the never to be future are totally unreliable, even a wholly factual picture of everyone earing sweets together is not very interesting; at the most it could only arouse the envious delight of children. More important and more interesting is in fact the sharing in distress.”17

“鄙意以為同甘是薄淺的一件事，無論口惠而實不至的將來的甜蜜話毫不足信，就是確確實實的大家現在一起吃糖的照相也無甚意思，至多是可以引起兒童們的欽羨罷了，比較重要而有意義的倒是共苦.” 18

Zhou Zuoren appreciated bitterness because it has a more thoughtful and long-lasting effect. He wanted the reader to think about the pieces over and over. Above all, Zhou Zuoren thought that ultimate goal of literature was to build a bridge between the writers and the readers. This concept was extremely crucial during the May Fourth era because the intellectuals hoped to educate and enlighten the masses through literature. Nonetheless, Zhou Zuoren did not completely abandon sweetness due to his pursuit of a more sophisticated and interesting taste. As a result, he created the astringent taste of olives, which carried the fragrance lingering long in mouth.19

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19 Gengsheng Fu, Intimation of Chinese Literary Appreciation (Beijing: Beijing Press, 2003), 16.
THE PREFERENCE FOR SIMPLICITY

The simplicity of Zhou Zuoren’s writing is not merely about the absence of extravagance, but rather about simple refinement (jing, 精). In Zhou Zuoren’s Bitter Taste and Sweet Taste, he praises Tao Qian’s poems and prose as in “the sentiment being sincere and the language lucid” (yi cheng er ci da, 意誠而辭達). The phrase “ci da” (辭達) is actually borrowed from the Analects of Confucius, meaning that “words should simply convey.”20 As shown here, Zhou Zuoren’s goal is to be sophisticated while embracing lucidity. The messages conveyed in his works mattered to him, and he hoped to disseminate those intelligent messages in a simple and refined way. Two of his short prose pieces aptly embody Zhou Zuoren’s refinement: “Goat Liver Cake” (Yang gan bing, 羊肝餅) and “Beijing’s Pastries” (Beijing de chashi, 北京的茶食).

Zhou Zuoren talks about food in the two prose pieces; interestingly, both examples of food were considered snacks, not suitable for a grand feast. “Beijing’s Pastries” refers to a variety of baked refreshments, and goat liver cake was actually made of red bean (so that its color looks like goat liver). The subjects chosen in these prose indicate Zhou Zuoren’s concern for simple and unassuming things. However, his simplicity does not indicate a lack of intelligence. Zhou Zuoren’s comment on Japan’s goat liver cake explains his definition of simplicity well.

“There is an impressive feature about Japanese culture—that is its ‘simplicity,’ meaning that they are able to constantly strive for excellence for a certain thing. This could be observed in the food culture as well. There is a store that specifies in making goat liver cake (goat bisque), just like the store that specifies in making seaweed.”21

“在日本的文化上有一種特色，便是‘簡單’。在一樣東西上精益求精的幹下來，在吃食上也有此風，於是便有一家專做羊肝餅（羊羹）的店，正如做昆布（海帶）的也有專門店一樣。”22

In this essay, Zhou Zuoren points out that goat liver cake originated in China; however, the Chinese goat liver cake later added cream and vanilla under Western influence. Hence, there were too many ingredients and the cake thus lost its original flavor. In contrast, Japan imported goat liver cake from China hundred years ago and pushed its original beauty to excellence. According to Zhou Zuoren, goat liver cake has never been a luxurious good, so he describes it as something “plain” (sijing, 素淨). Admittedly, what Zhou Zuoren promotes here is to perfect every ordinary thing in life; at the same time, he also stresses that trivial things were also essential components of human life. At the end of “Beijing’s Pastries,” he says:

“We enjoy the sight of sunset, the Milky Way, and the flowers, listen to the rain, smell the incense, drink wine not for the purpose of quenching thirst, and eat pastries not for feeling full. These are all necessary for life. Although they seem to be useless decorations, they ought to be as refined as possible. It is a pity that the current Chinese life is extremely dull and vulgar. On top of everything, I wander around Beijing for approximately ten years, but I have never found good pastries.” 23

“我们看夕陽，看秋河，看花，聽雨，聞香，喝不求解渴的酒，吃不求飽的點心，都是生活上必要的——雖然是無用的裝點，而且是愈精煉愈好。可憐現在的中國生活，卻是極端地乾燥粗糙，別的不說，我在北京彷徨了十年，終未曾吃好點心。”24

In this passage, the words “necessary” (biyao de, 必要的) and “useless” (wuyong de, 無用的) appear together, but they do not conflict with each other because they are measured differently. Sightseeing and sipping wine may not be considered living necessities, yet they still deserve people’s attention since entertainment can galvanize people’s subjective feelings. Zhou Zuoren’s human literature emphasized the importance of human experience as well as the relationship between humans and nature. Zhou Zuoren sought to cultivate the refined taste of simple things in human life through his writing and undertook a spiritual reform, unpretentiously exuding the taste of simplicity (jiandan wei, 簡單味).

HOW TO BE HUMAN; THAT IS THE QUESTION

During the May Fourth era, China faced an influx of Western ideologies. Meanwhile, the most important goal of the May Fourth movement was to modernize China by adopting new ideas. Compared to the intellectuals who were obsessed with China’s national condition, Zhou Zuoren put more heed to the uninhibited exploration of natural human emotions, which he thought was the key to modernization. In Zhou Zuoren’s essay Human Literature (Ren de wenxue, 人的文学), he promotes the idea of humanitarianism, which can also be understood as the concern for each individual person and his or her subjective feelings. Each individual forms a collective society, so it is worth carefully examining and enlightening the individual in order to achieve a real transformation. Zhou Zuoren’s works often deals with ordinary people, and he also considered himself one. “Relentless Rain” and “The First Love” are told in the first-person narrative. Zhou Zuoren depicts how people and himself respond to certain natural phenomena (rain and frog sound), as well as his inner-most voice towards a nameless figure that he calls “san gu niang” (三姑娘). Speaking of his feelings, we always see an astringent taste that contains both bitterness and sweetness. This intertwined emotion indicates that he was neither a pessimist nor optimist, but rather an ordinary person that sensed the frustration and enjoyment of life. After all, this is what common people undergo in daily life. Zhou Zuoren utilized literature as means to express his true feelings and supported the freedom of individual expression.

Being a member among the ordinary people, Zhou Zuoren hoped to teach Chinese people how to behave in society by embedding his idea of being a Confucian gentleman (junzi, 君子) in this writing. If we consider Zhou Zuoren a true Confucian gentleman, a striking feature about him is the moderation “zhong yong” (中庸) in his thinking. The Chinese concept “zhong yong” is an intriguing one. The fourth chapter of The Doctrine of the Mean summarizes this philosophy as “既無過之，亦無不及” (jì wú guò zhī, yì wú bù jí), which suggests the importance of making unbiased and moderate decisions. Zhou Zuoren adopted and promoted this ideology in his writing. Unlike other radical intellectuals who were so anxious to get rid of Chinese traditional value, Zhou Zuoren sought to find a wise balance between Chinese value and Western ideas. Although Zhou Zuoren appreciated the ideas of individualism and subjectivism, which were considered Western ideologies, he was at the same time willing to embrace some traditional virtues. As shown in The Impression of Zhou Zuoren, his colleagues described him as a calm person, who barely said anything fervent. Ernst Wolff suggests that “[Zhou] is not by nature a fighter; in his temperament there is nothing pugnacious or bellicose.” As a result, Zhou Zuoren’s essays are contemplative but not assertive. In “Beijing’s Pastries” and “Goat Liver Cake,” Zhou Zuoren shows his disappointment towards China’s current situation in terms of its food culture. Nonetheless, he still pines for hope in China and provides his advices. He thinks that “it is a big pity for not having historical, refined or decadent pasties in this ancient city” (zòng jüède zài gǔ lú de jǐngchēng li chì bù duó bāo hán lǐ shǐ de jīnglián de huò tuìfēi de diànxìn shī yī yín hén da de quèxuàn, 总觉得在古老的京城里吃不到包含历史的精炼的或颓废的点心是一个很大的缺陷). In other words, Zhou Zuoren believes that the city with splendid culture should find a proper agent to present its cultural heritage. Here he admits that Beijing has the ability or potential to develop a more refined way of life. Similarly, goat liver cake represents the development of China. It was overwhelmed by the Western influence and lost its original simple flavor, which was the most attractive feature about this food. According to this analogy, Chinese people seemed to get lost amidst all the drastic changes and throw away many old values. In Zhou Zuoren’s opinion, enlightenment during the May Fourth era is abused and over-consumed. Instead of merely criticizing the national condition, Zhou Zuoren sees China as the “little red bean popsicle” (xiăodòu bīngbăng, 小豆冰棒), which still maintains some degree of the pure and simple aspects of Chinese tradition. By incorpo...
rating the idea of moderation into his writing, Zhou Zuoren hopes the public would be willing to preserve the good aspects of Chinese tradition when receiving modern teachings from the West.

Zhou Zuoren’s appreciation towards a proper combination of Chinese and Western culture can also be observed in his concept of “Belles Lettres” (meiwen, 美文) and “informal prose” (xiaopinwen, 小品文), which to Zhou redefines the basic function of literature.

“In Chinese classical prose, prefaces, descriptions, discourses, etc. may also be said to be a form of belles lettres. But in contemporary vernacular literature think kind of composition has not yet appeared. Why do not those who are active in the new literature try their hands at it? ... We may consult foreign models in writing essays, but we must use our own words and thoughts — we may not imitate them.”

“中國古文的序、記與說等，也可以說是美文的一類，但現在的國語文學裡，還不曾見有這類文章，治新文學的人為什麼不去試試呢？······我們可以看了外國的模範去做，但是必須用自己的文句與思想，不可以去模仿他們。”

Zhou Zuoren again gives credit to the Chinese tradition just like he did in Beijing’s Pastries and Goat Liver Cake. However, Zhou Zuoren is not satisfied with the current situation of what “have been known since ancient times,” and seeks to revitalize and refine the admirable aspects of Chinese tradition by rationally using Western methods.

CONCLUSION

Since the publication of One’s Own Garden (ziji de yuandi, 自己的園地), nearly all of Zhou Zuoren’s works were about mundane affairs in life. He claimed that he did not seek to educate or please other people anymore, but wrote for the purpose of self-entertainment and mediation. Indeed, we no longer see an assertive essay like “Human Literature.” Regarding this change, he said, “If my ideas are genuine, my language clear enough to convey them, then my side of the affair is done. Whether the readers are men or women, greybeards or youngers, or whether they enjoy reading it or not, these things I can forget about.”

Zhou Zuoren’s plain artistic style was carefully designed at the aim of impressing and enlightening the masses. The taste of asperity (se wei, 糧味) and simplicity (jiandan wei, 簡單味) aptly summarize the essence of human life: the emotions of human beings constantly revolve around the struggle between bitterness and sweetness, and this bittersweet life is composed of little things that arouse our emotion and guide our future. The bi-directional shift between bitterness and sweetness in “Relentless Rain” and “First Love” informs the reader of the hardships in life. But Zhou Zuoren also encourages the reader by conveying the profound taste of asperity. The simplicity in “Beijing’s Pastries” and “Goat Live Cake” provides a concrete solution for seeking a modernized and refined life. As a result, Zhou Zuoren’s literature of leisure is not the escape from the responsibility of an intellectual. By asserting the value of humanitarianism through plain artistic style, Zhou Zuoren thought that this was perhaps the most efficient way to enlighten the people, who were precluded from literary enjoyment due to “the intricacies of the literary language” in China.

zdmj/zzr/msfw/051.htm
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A Paradise Lost: On the Beginning of Landscape Poetry

The founding of shānshuĭ shí (landscape poems) is regarded as the peak of poetic progress during the Six Dynasties (220-589 AD). As one of the most important genres in ancient Chinese poetry, landscape poems have been the focus of numerous articles that shed light on this field of poetry from various perspectives. However, although there are already very comprehensive works on the development of landscape poetry, thorough studies on many major poets, the mechanisms at work in this tradition are still worth discussing. The pivotal questions are, why is it that the literati in the Six Dynasties would go into the mountains to seek inner peace? Mountains and water have always been long recognized for their beauty, but why do they become of such importance for the literati in this period? What exactly do landscape poets achieve by viewing nature in this new way? Is this shift merely aesthetic, or are other machinations at play?

It’s almost cliché to say that the literati, tired of the profanity and vulgarity inherent in the bureaucratic affairs of back home, sought refuge in the high mountains and pure water where they could free their minds from the mundane world they so disdained. In this sense, they are said to construct another world, a paradise of their own and there they linger to forget all about the trivial trouble in their lives. However, is it true that the solitary landscape represents another world? If so, how is the realistic world connected to the it? And why would a slight sadness or disappointment be seen lurking in early landscape poems?

My thesis approaches these questions by investigating the relationship between shānshuĭ 山水 (natural landscape) and xiānjìng 仙境 (immortals’ paradise). From my point of view, the beginning of the so-called shānshuĭ poetry is not a way to construct a paradise loftier than the mundane world, which is seen in its predecessor yóuxiān shí 遊仙詩, but on the contrary, is a return to the mundane world. This transformation can also find its source in the change of philosophical thought then and its development in later times. Furthermore, close scrutiny of these vast and booming landscape poems is needed, among which Xiè Língyùn’s 謝靈運 (385-433 AD) works will be taken as the primary representative.

but works that share similar themes before and after Xie will be examined, for this tells the context from which his writing has emerged, and how his style reflects his position in the tradition of which he is a part.

1. FROM THE LAND OF IMMORTALS TO THE LAND OF NATURE: FROM AN IMAGINED PARADISE TO THE REALISTIC WORLD

Although Xie Lingyun is usually recognized as the first shānshānshi poet, it is obvious that the portrayal of mountains and water had already appeared in many poems long before his. Expressing the emotions that arise when faced with natural scenery is a tradition in early times, in which hills and rivers frequently appear at the beginning of a poem – the primary phenomenon which gives rise to the poet’s literary reflections.

As Xú Fúguān 徐複觀 points out, before the Six Dynasties, the literary depictions of the relationship between man and nature is a relationship of bǐ 比 (parallelism) and xìng 兴 (association), which indicates that the subjectivity of man plays a more important part in viewing the landscape. Poets tended to think of themselves, rather than the landscape, and mountains and waters were mere conduits through which to interrogate one’s feelings. But in the Six Dynasties, poets began to view the landscape as a whole environment; instead of considering themselves individuals for whom the surrounding scenery was merely subjective expressions for them to explore, they tried to settle themselves in the landscape, as a part of it. However, before going into the reasons that led to this change, one must first raise the question: what is the landscape of this period? If the so-called “emergence of landscape poetry” is not about opening one’s eyes to the nature for the first time, then it should be about the following questions: How has the status of landscape changed in the eyes of the poet? What does he expect and experience from the scenery in which he finds himself?

Surprisingly, as I look into the poems of this period, it’s not the so-called shànshānshi in which mountains and water first appear, but the popular yóuxiān shí 遊仙詩 (wandering immortals poems) at the end of the Jin Dynasty. Interestingly, the so-called landscape was not at first described as a “natural landscape” but rather a kind of “transcendent landscape.”

Yóuxiān shí, as the name suggests, focuses on the life of the immortals. Thus, they could not start without first creating the environment in which the immortals reside. Therefore, a portrayal of the landscape is always necessary in these poems, in which the elements of mountains and waters play an indispensable part in creating a transcendent atmosphere.

It has been common to consider the immortals within a background of mountains and water ever since pre-Qin times. In Shānhǎijīng 山海經, the immortals’ land is divided according to mountains and seas. Around the gods and magical creatures live the everlasting woods and winding rivers, so Guó Pú 郭璞 states in the preface “遊魂靈怪，觸象而構，流形於山川，麗狀於木石者，惡可勝言乎 (Wandering spirits and strange creatures resemble objects, forming in mountains and rivers, shaping as trees and rocks, I cannot name them all).” But at this stage, the imaginative creations are more primitive myths than they are a literary form.

Following the Chǔshī 楚辭, a great number of the so-called yóuxiān works appeared during the Han Dynasty, including both the qiuxiān 求仙 (pursuing gods) stories recorded in Shiji 史記 and the grand fú 賦 (rhapsodies) that portray a transcendent life. Yóuxiān shí also appeared in both the leisure works of the literati as well as in lyrics used in rituals and ceremonies. Therefore it evolved into a relatively mature genre when it came into the Six Dynasties, as all major poets after the Han Dynasty had at times entered this field, such as Cáo Cāo 曹操, Jī Kāng 稲康, and Ruǎn Jī 阮籍. However, it should be noted that the mountains and water here are not necessarily the same as those in the later shānshānshi, for here these landscapes are celestial – they always seem intangible for ordinary people.

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4 For more elaboration on this issue see Zhāng Hóng, Qínhán wéijīn yóuxiānshí de yuǎnyuǎn liúbiàn lùnlù, (Beijing: Zōngjiào wénhuà chǔbānshè, 2009).
Here I’d like to take a poem from the famous yóuxiān poet Guó Pú 郭璞 as an example.

遊仙詩第三  Yóuxiān shí Number Three
翡翠戲蘭苕, A kingfisher toys with an orchid,
容色更相鮮。 Each sets the other’s color off, into vibrancy.

綠蘿絡高林, Green vines coil up towering trees,
蒙籠蓋一山。 Like mist, envelop the mountain.
中有冥寂士, In which resides a hermit who,
靜嘯撫清弦。 Whistling quietly, brushes his strings.

放情凌霄外, With emotion in flight way beyond the sky,
嚼藜挹飛泉。 Chewing on petals, scooping up water.

赤松臨上游。 Chi-Song, high upstream,
駕鴻乘紫煙。 Is riding a wild goose in purple smoke.

左挹浮丘袖。 To the left, holding Fu-Qiu’s sleeve.
右拍洪崖肩。 To the right, patting Hong-Ya’s shoulder.

借問蜉蝣輩。 I’d like to ask the petty brevity of the may-fly.
寧知鶴鶴年。 What it can know of the eternity of the tortoise and crane. 5

At the very beginning, the poem displays a luxuriant mountain scene, in which birds fly among orchids and vines grow in lush forests that cover the mountain. Then it goes on to describe the hermit immortal living there, depicting his actions as well as flowers and a flowing stream. In this scene, although the latter half tells about Chísōngzǐ 赤松子 (a famous god in Chinese myth) which indicates that it’s located in a world of immortals rather than the terrestrial world, this world to a large extent resembles the realistic landscape of a real mountain. An analysis of one of Xie Lingyun’s landscape poems written almost a hundred years later may further explicate this point.

石室山 Shishi Mountain 6

7 Here weīröng’s 微戎 meaning is not very clear. In Zhāng Pú, Hánwēìlùzhào bàisānjiā jì 漢魏六朝百三家集, Xinhùtàng chōngkānben 信德堂重刊本, 微戎 is reprinted as 微戎(wēirōng). In Lù Qínlí and Gu Shābó’s footnotes, they both explain 微戎 as a misprint of 微戎, which means “I myself not.” However, in Yě Xiàoxuē’s footnotes, 微戎 is explained as 無戎, as in Shījīng, Xiàoyà, and Chāngdǐ: “每有良朋, 無戎, 无戎 (Even with good friends, no one has come to help).” Máo Chuăn’s 毛传 “戎, 相也” and Zhēng Xuān 郑玄’s “犹无相助已者” also make sense in the context, as the sentence can be interpreted as “no one is travelling with me.” I here adopt Lu and Gu’s explanation in the translation. There does exist a difference between the two interpretations, but neither will contradict the following analysis.


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This poem was written near Shishi Mountain, where Xie sometimes used to stay, and which, like in almost all his landscape poems, is a very specific place near his hometown in Zhejiang. And in the first part of this poem, just like Guo Pu’s 郭璞 發尤信 石室 No.3 遊仙詩第三, it also depicts a journey heading to a lush mountain, where there are similar images of orchids, forests and flowing streams. And in the latter half, the immortal Qiao 王子喬 (Wángzǐqiáo) appears as an ideal figure for the poet, which is usually seen as a counterpart of Chisŏngzǐ 赤松子 mentioned in Guo’s poem. There are many similarities between the two poems, both in terms of the natural setting depicted and the personae inside it. But it is also clear that they fall in different genres. For example, both poets describe a similar action: picking the flowers’ petals (Guo’s jiàorú 嚼蕊 and Xie’s zhāifāng摘芳). However, in Guo’s poem, the immortal eats the petals to indicate a transcendent lifestyle, in which the heart is at ease, but in Xie’s poem, the poet is plucking the flower as a lonely traveler; his sharing the moment with the flower betrays a strong sense of isolation. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that they are actually in two different worlds, though the landscape in the two worlds may look alike.

The immortals’ world is somewhere 灑霄外 (above the clouds), and the immortals enjoy peace and longevity; it is an imagined perfect place. But in Xie’s poem, it is clear that though the bleak land feels like a transcendent world he longs for 靈域久韜隠, 如與心賞交 (This soulful place has long sat solitary and hidden, Like my own heart, with which, appreciatively, it intersects), the poet himself, as human, cannot be an immortal, and he can only admire the immortal 總宜養升賓 (When I was young I admired the transcendent Qiao) and live with the terrestrial flowers and trees 摘芳弄寒條 (I pluck a flower and touch the cold bough). And so for Xie, the relationship between poet and immortality is a more complex one. Immortality has some kind of presence in his world and, through his contact with the landscape in which he finds himself, he is, in some sense, able to perceive it, though it remains permanently out of reach.

Thus, the so-called landscape poetry (shānshuǐ shī) may find its predecessor in the yóuxiān works, the imagined world which appeared long before the real natural beauty was discovered, and shānshuǐ shī emerges, to a certain extent at least, because of the secularization of the imagined celestial world. It’s not that the poets dreamed of another world when they saw the natural spectacle but on the contrary, as a current of realism began to undermine notions of paradise and heavenly kingdoms, the celestial unreal world poets had created and dreamed of found its embodiment in the beautiful natural landscapes around them. But how did this change take place?

2, INTERPRETATION OF THE DAOIST CONCEPT AND THE ANXIETY OF XIE LINGYUN

When talking about the emergence of shānshuǐ shī, Liu Xie writes in Wēnxīn Diàolóng 文心雕龍, “莊老告退，而山水方滋” (The withdrawal of Laozi and Zhuangzi’s thoughts engendered the flourishing of mountains and waters). However, ever since landscape poetry found its place in the literary tradition, no one can discuss it without relating it to Daoist thought, for the very spirit of landscape poetry is to seek peace in nature, which is precisely what Laozi and Zhuangzi advocated. But why would Liu Xie say the budding of landscape poetry was due to of the retreat of Daoist thought?

The answer lies in the definition of “nature.” The word ziran 自然 can mean both natural scenery (mountains and waters for example) and inherent quality. In Dàodéjīng 道德經, by saying “人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然” (Man is governed by earth, earth is governed by heaven, heaven is governed by Dao, Dao is governed by ziran), Laozi defines ziran 自然 as a rather abstract concept, meaning mostly a kind of ultimate being. In some sense Zhuangzi sticks to Laozi’s concept by saying “莫之為而常自然” (Being always in nature is doing nothing). However, he also seems to have made a connection between the natural landscape and the abstract natural being by telling stories about wandering: when fishing he exclaims “山林者，皋

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* See Liú Xíe 劉勰, Wēnxīn Diàolóng 文心雕龍, Minshì No.7 明詩第七, in Huang Lin 黄琳, Wēnxīn Diàolóng Huìpíng 文心雕龍匯評 (Shanghai: Shànghái Gùjí Press 上海古籍出版社, 2005), p. 29.
A PARADISE LOST

But what plays an important role in the transformation from immortals’ world to natural landscape is the literati’s interpretation of the Daoist texts in the Six Dynasties. It can’t be denied that the Xuánxué 玄學 experts’ opinion deeply influenced the literature of the period. And the imagination of a celestial world can find much to do with Guō Xiàng’s 郭象 footnotes of Zhuangzi.

According to Guo Xiang, being “natural” means to follow one’s inherent instincts. Nature is the quality lying inside one’s heart. People do not necessarily need to go away from the mundane world to be free and unfettered: “夫聖人雖在廟堂之上，然其心無異於山林之中 (Even if they are at court their heart can be the same as in the mountain forests).” In this way, the true salvation lies in one’s own mind, thus, a perfect unfading world can be constructed right in one’s heart. Guo Xiang’s explanation intends to amalgamate Daoism with Confucianism (冥內而遊外 [Being at peace within and wandering outside]) is a way to construct a tranquil world in a mind free of public vexation.

As Guo Pu writes in kē-ào “客傲”，“無岩穴而冥寂，無江湖而放浪 (There is no cave but I’m in silent peace, there is no open land but I’m frivolously free).” Although the real world is far from perfect, one can be satisfied in the imagined world of the mind. This just falls within Zhuangzi’s ideal of wúdài 無待: for the real master, if the wind is not necessary, then mountains and waters should be superfluous too. In this context, the relationship between man and natural landscape is rather vague. It’s accepted that mountains and forests can give troubled literati peace, but instead of seeking the mountains and forest insofar as they are part of the real world, they tend to believe it as, or at least representative of, a paradise above the realistic world in which they live. One does not necessarily need to trek among the bushes, but can just as well rest in the heaven in one’s mind.

However, when it comes to Xie Lingyun, the poet seen as the harbinger of landscape poetry, it seems that this is no longer the case. A fundamental difference lies in the fact that the scenery in Xie’s eyes is totally realistic, as mentioned above in the chapter before.

In fact, in his lifetime Xie tried very hard to find the right landscape.

(Xie) erected fences across ponds, grew bamboos and bushes……traveled outside the town, sometimes a hundred and six or seven Li everyday, didn’t return in ten days……seeking the mountains and climbing ridges, he must go into the most secluded and steep places, thousands of rocks and barriers, he hiked on them all……cutting woods to make the path, all the way to the seaside, with hundreds of companions. (謝靈運) 穿池植援，種竹樹菴……出郭遊行，或一日百六七裏，經旬不歸……尋山涉嶽，比造幽峯，岩障千重，莫不備盡。……伐木開徑，直至臨海，從者數百人。 Unlike his ancestor Xie An, who can be at ease in a courtroom, or his contemporary Tao Qian, who is relatively contented with an idyllic life, Xie doesn’t have a spiritual paradise in which he may hide. He’s always in the process of exploring and searching, no longer for a peaceful state of mind, in his imagination, but for a peaceful place in his surroundings. More than simply traveling, he always has the intention of finding a place, a landscape which he can call his own.

Huìzhōng Lake lies in the east part of Kuàijī, Xie asked for it as his private land (but got rejected by Kai)……As he couldn’t get Huìzhōng Lake, he then wanted Píhuáng Lake in Shìníng to be his own, but the request was rejected by Kai again. Xie criticized Kai for not benefiting his people and slandered him, which turned Kai against him.

見稽東郡有回鶴湖，靈運求決以為田……靈運既不得回鶴，又求始寧岫舫湖為田，恬又固執。靈運謂恬非存利民……言語毀傷之，與恬遂構嫌隙。
Xie asked for several pieces of land to own as his own private garden, even slandering the other official for this purpose (which later even indirectly resulted in his death). This desire to own his own natural space had a profound effect on his writing. Stephen Owen once spoke of the increased privatization of land among Chinese intellectuals, pointing out that the literati, by making a portion of land his own, was at the same owned by the land. Xie, in this case, in traveling far away to seek natural beauty, and erecting fences to make a piece of land his own territory, was also trapped in his private garden, which resulted in a strong sense of insecurity and anxiety.

Many scholars have already noticed the sadness or disappointment expressed in Xie’s poems, and the conclusion is somehow obvious: although he’s trying to find a place for himself in nature, he never really achieves the tranquility he desires. Scholars have interpreted the unresolved tension from different perspectives, but here I’d like to propose that the anxiety originates from the collapse of a spiritual paradise: the momentous joy disappears when he realizes that the mountains and waters are firmly grounded in the realistic world, while the transcendent world is no more than an illusion.

In some of his ending couplets, he confesses his confusion:

Walking out of Xīshè Hall in the evening (Excerpt)

Heavenly order is an empty phrase, heavenly order is a perfect state but illusory, while traces of immortals is desirable but unreachable, the brook is at his side. In this sense, Xie’s insecurity and anxiety originates from the realization that the paradise in his mind always collapses, and he inevitably finds himself in the real terrestrial lament that being in a transcendent world cannot be realized, and he can only console himself by playing music. Guo Xiang explains Ānpái 安排 (heavenly order) from Zhuàngzì as the mingling of person and universe, thus the real master enters a world of no difference and absolute freedom. However, according to Xie, this is merely an “empty phrase”; it is not possible to reach this perfect state. In another poem, this tension is even clearer.

Boating to the magical stone to seek the Relic of the Three Emperors (Excerpt)

In this poem, Xie goes searching for the Three Emperors’ Well 三皇井, a relic of ancient myths. In the main body of the poem (not included in the quote), Xie imagines a world in ancient myth. Unlike the typical landscape of his poems, which is usually situated against a backdrop of peace and quiet, the atmosphere in this one is somehow more magnificent, with waves crashing along the boat and fog engulfing the mountain. However, in the end, as quoted above, Xie still gets frustrated since the ancient emperor’s world is unreachable, the strong waves and tides in the picture are gone, and what he is left with is nothing more than a flowing stream. Taking the two poems above as an example, in his final couplets, Xie represents a contrast between an unattainable ideal transcendent world and the realistic landscape which is actually there. Ānpái 安排 (heavenly order) is a perfect state but illusory, while mingquán 嗚泉 (the lute)’s sound is real; xiánzōng 仙蹟 (traces of immortals) is desirable but unreachable, while mingquán 嗚泉 (the brook) is at his side. In this sense, Xie’s insecurity and anxiety originates from the realization that the paradise in his mind always collapses, and he inevitably finds himself in the real terrestrial

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16 “Walking in the Mountain” 獨樂山水. Lecture notes of Stephen Owen at Peking University, May 24-31, 2010
17 Kang-i Sun portrays Xie as a “lonely traveler” whose self-realization occurs in a departure from the landscape he sees, Richard Mathers interprets him as influenced by Buddhism, and Wendy Swartz sees it as a manifestation of the Yijing
land. The lush mountains are no immortals’ residence but a hill in his neighborhood, and the flowing waters are no dragons’ birthplace but a plain stream nearby: from the very beginning of landscape poetry, the poet is not located in a lofty realm away from the trivial everyday, but instead in the very departure from a mythical perfect world.

In one poem, Xie writes

居常以待終，Lying in commonplace, in wait for the end,

处順故安排。In pliant accordance with the heavenly order.

惜無同懷客，It’s a pity no one is with me
共登青雲梯。In ascending the ladder to the clouds.

However, Guo Pu, as mentioned before, writes in the very first of his 遊仙詩:

臨源挹清波，At the stream, scooping up water,
陵嵐掇丹荑。Up the mountain-slopes, plucking herbs

靈溪可潛盤，So soulful a stream, as to dive into it
安事登雲梯。Why would I ascend the ladder to the clouds.

Here we can see, in Guo’s view, the natural land in the human world is enough, so there is no need for yünfēi 雲梯, ascending the ladder to the clouds. While in Xie’s perspective, there’s no other choice than living this life; he wants to get on the cloud ladder but he cannot.

From this perspective, it seems that landscape poetry does not come from the joy of entering another beautiful world, but, on the contrary, is born from the disillusion of paradise. A change in aesthetic obviously plays some role in the choice of subject matter of the shānshuǐ poets, but underlying this aesthetic are more ideological mechanisms in play: the inner tension of the literati, when the peaceful ideal world of the mind collapses and natural landscape is the only alternative to which they can turn.

3. ECHOES IN LATER TIMES

Much has been discussed above about the so-called “beginning” of landscape poetry, but of course this genre has much more than merely Xie Lingyun. With the maturing of structure and language in poetry, landscape poems have developed in many aspects too. Not only does descriptive language become more sophisticated, but also emotions within get more diverse and reflective.

Donald Holzman says that when it comes to the Tang Dynasty poetry, “they [the Tang poets] seemed to delight in the forests and mountains they described and find in them a life independent of the life of men...[But in] earlier literature in the original Chinese I was surprised not to find the delight I had so much admired and emphasized within the Tang poets’ verse, surprised and disappointed.”

Here it is obvious that the sentiment of landscape poems changes, or progresses, when it comes to the Tang, although it belongs to the same genre. However, the same tension between ideal and real worlds can be found to resonate in later times.

For example, one can look to Li Bai, one of the most canonical poets of the Tang Dynasty as an example. Never concealing his appreciation and admiration of Xie Lingyun, Li takes traveling in great mountains and waters as one of the highest pursuits in life. As a romantic wanderer, Li has left numerous outstanding works that can be categorized as landscape poems. But very different from Xie, who always has some extent of sorrow lurking in his poems, Li seems more carefree and outlandish, which gives his poems a more open air. When it comes to the search for the perfect landscape, he has another explanation.

山中問答 Question and Answer in the Mountain
問餘何意棲碧山，You ask me why I live in the mountains,

笑而不答心自閑。I laugh with no reply – my heart is contently at ease.

桃花流水杳然去，Peach blossoms drifting with water, in gradual ebb,

別有天地非人間。There’s another world that’s no human realm.

This well-known poem of Li Bai’s is interesting in the way that he analyzes his own fulfillment in the mountain. He does not answer the question about why he goes into a mountain, or rather, he answers by silence, because xinzixián 心自閑 (a heart at ease) is his answer already. And then in the background, blossoms

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and stream fade away; he is in another world, not the real one anymore. Here he has in fact talked about two worlds: one is the human realm where he sees the peach blossom and flowing water, but as he goes into his heart, he goes into the otherworld, where he does not see the scenery but realizes true peace.

Burton Watson says when he talks about the maturing of poetry in the Tang Dynasty, “(With the Chinese nature poet), his choice of detail is dictated less by what we may suppose was actually before his eyes than by the conventions of literary allusions and symbolism.”

Here in Li Bai’s case, it seems that his feeling about the landscape is dictated less by what is actually before his eyes than by the fantasy and illusion he creates when faced with what he sees. Watson’s point is apt, but what is to be focused on here is less the makeup of that which supplants what is “before his eyes” (i.e., the symbolic “conventions”), and rather the philosophical drive which shifts his literary attention from reality to fantasy and illusion: a dichotomy the origins of which can be traced back to the poetry of Xie Lingyun. Yet, unlike Xie Lingyun, who is constantly frustrated by the unbreachable boundary between the two worlds, Li seems better at bridging the two to attain a broader understanding.

From this perspective, landscape poetry is the point at which the inner perfect landscape detached from the real physical landscape, leaving behind only the dark shadow of the absence. And the history of landscape poetry has been the struggle to come to terms with this absence.

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On the back cover of a book entitled The last Romanticism: a Documentary of Beijing Free Artists (20shiji zuihou de langman: Beijing ziyou yishujia shenghuo shilu) ¹ completed in 1996, the author Wang Jifang summarized her book with the following paragraphs:

History proceeded to the 90s in the 20th century, in the first few years of which—in Beijing, China—eventually raised a group of independent and noteworthy artists. They are Yuanmingyuan painters who first draw the attention of the media, rock musicians and other freemen who take experimental drama, underground film and modern dancing as their careers. Many among them are even rid of the strict residential restriction, become “mangliu”. But they produced lots of avant-garde art works, attract keen attention from peers all over the world; their extremely hard living conditions become hot topics of all kinds of media.

Reading symptomatically will make us realize the rich information lying between the few lines. First of all, Wang Jifang believed that in and only in the specific context of early 1990s Beijing, China, practitioners in various mediums composed a particular group so called “Beijing free artists”, with independence and freedom as its core. Secondly, what combined artists working with different mediums together was their common minor identity resulted from their active refusal to fit into the highly unified society exemplified by its residential policy, formal economy and job allocation controlled by one official ideology. Thirdly, these artists were not Lu Xun-like tragedy heroes making efforts in vain and isolation, ² but were supported by an imagined community composed of people from both China and the world, who were not only counterparts in the same avant-garde fields but also media that led to a potentially larger and diversified audience base. Fourthly, the idea that “now only Beijing can still form such a cultural spec-


² One of the most representative piece in Lu Xun’s writing tells the story of a rebellious soldier, who makes even the Creator ashamed by tempting to change everything that have already been settled. See Lu Xun, Complete Works of Lu Xun (Lu Xun quanjji) 2Vols. (Beijing: People’s Lit. Publishing House, 2005), 227.
tacle” traces the origin of the early 1990s avant-garde community back to the 1980s New Era, which is now in frigidity and precariousness.

What makes the cited paragraph even more significant is that the author Wang Jifang herself was a mangliu, who gave up her allocated job in 1990 for the reason that “a person who doesn’t have to get his or her salary from danwei, or unit, is free in both body and mind”. Becoming an independent writer, Wang Jifang was drawn to the avant-garde community for its status of being “minorities in the cultural center” resembling herself and produced two consequent essays “The Last Romance in the 20th century: a documentary of yuanningyuan art village” (20 shiji zuihou de langman: Yuanmingyuan yishu cun ji shi) Beijing and “Rock Man in the Capital” (Jingcheng yaogun ren) in the fall of 1993 in Zhongshan, a pioneering—though officially acknowledged—periodical since the 1980s. Since then, expanding her scope to more diversified mediums including film, dancing, drama, etc. she eventually published this documentary of the entire avant-garde community. Whereas Wang Jifang didn’t use the word “circle” or “community” in treating her objects of investigation as a whole, Li Xianting suggested in Preface I of the book that “in the 1990s, free artists has already formed a marginal social force, or what may be called a “circle”—“contemporary circle” of contemporary art, which is designated by some people as “pioneering” or “avant-garde”. While Wang Jifang was both the observer and the member of this avant-garde community, the Last Romance was both the product of the latter and—without full self-awareness—its elegy. However, overindulging in the romantic imagination of an idealistic community reaching the audience by means of the market and various media, Wang Jifang overlooked a “Real” that was not dismissed by Zong Fangbin, who wrote in Preface II of the book: “once a free writer no longer exist as a minor but reenters a certain ‘centre’, can they still produce good works?” Although Zong Fangbin immediately answered the question herself, the answer of which in the case of Wang was yes, she adopted a skeptical attitude towards the general situation which, as we will see in the deployment of this research project, was a key factor that led to the disintegration of the avant-garde community and diminishment of its common spirit.

My investigation precisely focuses on this early 1990s avant-garde community. Existing in cultural essays, digital films, folk histories, etc., vaguely sensed by scholars as “a circle” , “a grand era” , it is a shadowy and background existence without ever being studied seriously as an independent object. While I attempt to systematically and philosophically inspect… this phenomenon, what is especially appealing to me is this avant-garde community based its formation on its memberships’ common aspiration of being one while being in a community, which was best incarnated in the art practitioners’ individual conducts of self-exile—sometimes practically and always metaphorically—from the cultural center, a conduct that was indispensable from the encouragement and help offered by the avant-garde audience and alliances in the early 1990s cultural atmosphere as a whole. In short, what this thesis is interested in exploring is the movement of a spirit of being one while being in a community at all levels of the avant-garde community—i.e., among practitioners of different mediums, between each medium and the avant-garde as a whole, between the practitioners and the audiences, and finally between the avant-gardes and the mainstream. It was this spirit that distinguished the early 1990s avant-gardes from other cultural spheres. As Wang Jifang suggested in The last Romance, “avant-garde” is a rather ambiguous category that neither fits into any cultural identity like rock or mangliu artists, nor

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1 In Preface II of The Last Romacism, Zong Fangbin quoted this sentence by Wang Jifang from another essay of hers written a few years after 1990. See Zong Fangbin. Preface II to The Last Romanticism: a Documentary of Beijing Free Artists (20 shiji zuihou de langman: Beijing ziyou yishujia de shenghuo shi lu), by Wang Jifang. 1-4 (Harbin: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 5.

2 Li Xianting: “in the early 1990s, free artists had already formed a marginal social force, or what may be called a circle—a contemporary circle of contemporary art.” Preface I to The Last Romanticism: a Documentary of Beijing Free Artists (20 shiji zuihou de langman: Beijing ziyou yishujia de shenghuo shi lu), by Wang Jifang. 1-4 (Harbin: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 3.

3 Li Wan: “The era was not only composed of the single medium of yaojun, but was an entire culture or a grand era in which all parts move forward and backward together”. “China Rock in 30 Years” (Zhongguo yaojun 30nian), Tianya. no.2 (2009):162-169, 168.
identifies with the poor rather than the rich as in the case of Cui Jian, who was nevertheless an avant-garde artist, despite that he was relevantly wealthier than his successors. Besides, it is also for the sake of this spirit that the centripetal tendency of early 1990s avant-gardes to Beijing—despite its recognized identity as the center of the former—should not be over-exaggerated. Not only does this over-exaggeration risks eliminating the intersubjective relationship between the capital and the province and the particular function of the province in preserving avant-gardes thanks to a relevantly loser state scrutiny, but also the function of the avant-garde spirit that—with its temporal nature—crossed different spaces and bound all avant-garde enthusiasts together as an imagined community.

POLITICAL IMMEDIACY, COLLECTIVITY AND DETERRITORIALIZATION: EARLY 1990S CHINESE AVANT-GARDE AS A MINOR CULTURE

Proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, “minor literature” is characterized by “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation”. Identifying the similarities of minor literature with early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes, I adopt and expand Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of the former to define the early 1990s Chinese avant-garde community as a minor culture against official ideology and the rising market, in hope that thinking them together may facilitate understanding of both sides: on the one hand, the three characters—i.e., collectivity, political immediacy and deterritorialization—that Deleuze and Guattari use to define minor literature are particularly useful to identify the characters of early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes by situating them in the entire social-political context; on the other hand, early 1990s Chinese avant-garde community as a case study also provides a chance to look into the merits and shortcoming of minor literature theory and deconstructualism as way-out for the disadvantageous groups. In this part, I will discuss in turn how the three characters manifested in the intersubjective relationship between early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes and their context, which consequently facilitated the formation of the former as a collective identity.

First of all, collectivity is a key character of the early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes, which distinguished them from avant-garde practices before and after. Whereas the 1980s New Era was a pan-avant-garde period where the entire society was involved in it, the post-1997 was a time when experimental artists have been known as individuals rather than a community. It was only in the early 1990s that Chinese avant-gardes formed a collective phenomenon and can only be recognized as one in order to grasp its true spirit of being one while being in a community. Lacking the cunning and cleverness to appropriate the aesthetics, themes and producing mechanisms of either the official culture or the popular culture, early 1990s avant-garde mediums and practitioners shared the fate of being prejudiced as dangerous amateurs by the state, and were also treated as incomprehensible and not attending their proper duties by the folks, whose major concern—as was shown in the early 1990s realistic film Good Morning, Beijing—was whether to hang on their designated stable job positions or to make adventure in the market to earn more money. Despite the fact that the post-1989 state order and the newly imported market system were themselves in the process of formation, they as the strongest social powers leading the transformation of the society nevertheless excluded the avant-gardes and became the promise of the avant-garde community. Deleuze and Guattari were only half-right by highlighting the function of literature in preserving transitional collective political consciousness, since literature is not the only medium that was able to function as an “active solidarity” that incarnates the collective consciousness of a marginal community while extending it to other spheres and to the future as a deterritorializing force. In the case of the early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes, the avant-garde community composed of various mediums marked a more intensive “collective assemblage of enunciation” by

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9 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 17.
10 Ibid. 18.
basing itself on the profound personal choices of all its memberships, without biases toward either certain mediums whereas eliminating the imbalance between the authors to audience, or vise versa.

Political immediacy is another character of early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes, a character that is closely connected to the first character of collectivity, yet with particular emphasis on the individual aspect. Although Deleuze and Guattari located Kafka’s works in which each individual concern has “a whole other story” “vibrating in it” 11 in the bourgeoisie social context, where there is a profound dichotomy between the individual life and the social life that doesn’t necessary applies to China, their conclusion has wider application. As Jameson’s famously claimed that all third world literature is necessarily national allegories 12 , each depiction of the experience or concern of minor individuals in early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes is a metaphor of the broader society full of social conflicts, iniquities and tensions—although as Hegel claims with the famous metaphor of the owl of Minerva, it is only in its aftermath can we relocate it in its context and understand more fully its social-political significance, a task which is impossible for the early 1990s avant-garde practitioners and critics themselves, whose self-understandings were at best “the rose in the cross of the present” 13.

This fact was at least partially the reason that the objects of early 1990s avant-gardes were not only “folks” as some people suggest, but those folks living in particular precarity, such as homosexuals, avant-garde practitioners, the mental-disabled, etc. For the same reason that draws Wang Jifang close to the rock musicians and Yuanmingyuan painters, what made early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes turn their eyes to those extreme social minorities was their own cramped space, the origin of which was first of all the pressure came from the state. Following the general instruction of the highest authority—“rectification at one hand and prosperity at the other” 14 after 1989, political stability and economic prosperity were established as the two goals of the Chinese society. Avant-garde practices which were regarded as prompting neither of them and especially threatening the former faced either the reticence or institutional restrictions from the state, though the extents varied according to the social influence and reputation of different mediums: experimental oil painting tempting to break off from aesthetic principles of the academy was criticized as embodying “bourgeoisie freedom” and therefore lost all opportunities to reach the audience through public channels like state-approved art journals and art exhibitions 15 ; rock parties in foreigner-owned bars or restaurants were tacitly consented, but live performances were sometimes either eliminated or interfered according to the official judgment of current political situations; experimental dramas were not only impossible in nation-owned theatres, but there was still space of development for small-scaled ones performed at campus; independent films were perhaps the most unfortunate by failing state scrutiny easily and having no chance to reach domestic audience, etc.

On the other hand, although the potential of avant-gardes in facilitating the market economy gradually facilitated the general condition of state tolerance, the market itself was another ideological force that marginalized the avant-garde community and finally prompted its disintegration and molecularization. The way it did it was not by evolving avant-garde into the market as one commodity among various other substituting commodities as was the case after 1997; rather, the market was from the very beginning a latent threat to the avant-gardes by commercializing the entire society and by depriving the avant-garde community its membership base, which was the pillar of it. It was hard to find out—nor does it really matter—how many people were actually in that community, since what really counts is their mutual belief in the existence of a certain amount of like-minded people and even more people with the potential to be interpelated and transformed to be their comrades, with whom they formed an imagined community. The importance of these shallow-like figures can be understood in light of Alexandre Kojève,

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11 Ibid., 17.
13 Alenka Zupancic. The Odd One in on Comedy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2008), 160.
who followed Hegel to argue that a man’s aspiration ceases to be a mere illusion only when recognized by others. Since early 1990s avant-garde as a whole was a non-profitable cause except for a few exceptional cases like Cui Jian and Wang Guangyi, the persistence of its memberships relied heavily on their belief that the cause they pursue was a nobler one, an ideal that further based on their imagined recognition from a sub-society composed of self-conscious young people representing the future, a society that was constantly threatened by the temptation of market yet was also tested and selected by it. From both perspectives, early 1990s avant-gardes as a whole was a cultural spectacle thriving out of the crack in the context of a structural transformation of the Chinese society. It gained its political immediacy by means of the narrow space it occupied, which not only drew the marginalized memberships closer to each other, but also inevitably connected them to the larger society and made them structural components of contemporary Chinese history.

The third and arguably the most important character of early 1990s Chinese avant-garde is deterritorialization. Built upon the first two characters that emphasized collectivity and individuality respectively, cultural hegemony deterritorialization was only made possible by a minor culture entering into the symbolic order by means of subjective-destitution. Though different in forms, all avant-garde mediums had the same otherness in them, namely the official culture. Despite Derrida’s point that the three cultures—official culture, mass culture and academic culture had their relevant statuses, the latter two cultural forms were still largely under the control of the official culture in the context of early 1990s China, with both of them only being legitimized by the official culture under the same name as “art for the people”—easy to comprehend, compatible with the communist harmonious aesthetics and progressive ideology, conveying positive messages of the society and the Party, etc. Even avant-gardes in the 1980s New Era was legitimized in this category, just remembering the fact Cui Jian’s song I Walk This Road Alone, which was recognized as the initiative of China rock, won the support of national level institutions like China Audio & Video Publishing House and Beijing Television and was disseminated by mainstream newspapers like China Youth Daily. Despite that each avant-garde medium in the early 1990s has its own otherness, they all constructed their identity against the idea of “art for the people”.

Although in reports, documents and interviews of contemporary avant-gardes in the early 1990s, “people” was a word of high frequency, the meaning of this word—as has been indicated in previous parts of this introduction—was an imagined avant-garde community rather than the folk at large. Rather than serving the people, early 1990s Chinese avant-garde dedicated to interpellate those who had the potential to be interpellated with their own thoughts and expressions. However, the most difficult yet necessary step to take was to form their own language out of the omnipresent official culture. Like the German-Jewish writers who faced a situation of impossibility against the dominating German language—“the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise”, early 1990s avant-garde practitioners also found it impossible not to produce artworks, not to use the major artistic language, and not to use it otherwise. First of all, having emphasized so far the characteristics and aspirations of early 1990s avant-garde, it is worth mentioning the reason that Chinese avant-garde practitioners found art “a destined choice”—a frequently used phrase among the artists. For one thing, at a time of the sudden loss of the utopian political ideal, art and literature became the object of the psychological transference both of the not yet diminished humanistic enthusiasm of the 1980s and the repressed traumatic feelings of the 1989 massacre. For another, avant-gardes for those practitioners had the significance of insisting on their profound personal choices, or what they themselves called a “choosing the destined”, which also marked the point of their deepest empathy. Although the same aspiration of “demanding the impossible” was not uncommon in avant-gardes in the 1980s—especially in mystic poetries like those of Bei Dao and Shu Ting,
the difference lies between them is that of comedy and tragedy, whereas the destined choice in the 1980s referred to a tragic ideal doomed to fail, that of the early 1990s avant-garde was formed on the faith of their impossible possibility, that is, the belief that this avant-garde ideal must be put into practice since the practitioners had no choice but to follow their inner-voice. Secondly, thanks to the omnipresent official culture in which the practitioners themselves had been trained and still largely enveloped the entire society, they had no language to adopt except that of the major one. It was this fact that prompted the artists to use the major language in a distorted, absurd and awkward way to express their self-consciousness rather than being assimilated by the homogeneous voice of the Other on the one hand, and to announce this stands to the whole world on the other. While all the three impossibilities—not to produce artworks, not to use the major language and not to use it in another way—also applied to the audiences in terms of appreciation and the entire avant-garde community in terms of ideology and lifestyle.


For Deleuze and Guattari, the deterritorialization of minor literature goes through three stages of development, i.e., “the letters and the diabolical pact; the stories and the becoming-animal; the novels and the mechanic assemblages”20. Driven by the desire to escape from the symbolic order, deterritorialization is regarded as more absolute in each of the latter stages than its immediate former and reaches its climax at the becoming-molecule, which marks the successful elimination of allegory, symbolism and metaphor. However, becoming-molecular isn’t a satisfying solution for two reasons. On the one hand, as an embodiment of ecological diversity, the becoming-molecule has to legitimize all kinds of desires and to guarantee their realizations. The problem is that before disintegrating the much stronger and more stable dominating discourse, it risks disintegrating the subjectivity of the marginal groups themselves while with the same movement legitimizing the dominating powers. To borrow Lacan’s words, Like the Borromean knot that chains together the three major physiologically development—namely, the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary 21, the structure of deterritorialization entrapped the minor individual without leaving its any possible way to escape. While the entire structure resembles the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father, the “Real” that lies in this structure is the law of the jungle—as Alenka Zupanic points out, the only guarantee of the coexistence of all desires in Deleuze and Guattari’s structure of deterritorialization is presuming a super power that keeps the balance of all parties, which itself contradicts the objective natural condition driven by pure individual desires22.

On the other hand, lacking free choices is another deficiency of becoming-molecular. For Deleuze and Guattari, the desire of the molecule is “the highest desire” “both to be alone and to be connected to all the machines of desire” 23. However, while the movement of each molecule is driven by certain uncontrollable natural forces unmediated by their self-consciousness, their connections are equally contingent and arbitrary. In short, by abolishing meanings and significances all together, Deleuze and Guattari simultaneously diminished the very distinction of minor and major by designating both of them as arbitrary Signifiers without the signified.

Nevertheless, there lies in this seemingly hopeless structure of deterritorialization a “very particular intermediate situation” that provides a real possibility of breaking through the impasse. This fourth status is the “still being an animal and already being an assemblage” 24 or what I call “becoming-inanimal”. In-between the becoming-animal and the becoming-molecule, the intensively minor quality of this fourth status is partially demonstrated by the fact that it is proposed in an uncertain tone even by Deleuze and Guattari themselves, who only mentioned it briefly with hesitation and uncertainty. The merit of this becoming-inanimal lies in its potential to open itself up without giving up its subjectivity, which overcomes the shortcomings of the

20 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 40.
22 Alenka Zupanic, The Odd One in on Comedy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2008), 160.
23 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 71.
24 Ibid., 37.
becoming-molecule by not only getting rid of an omnipresent God but also by presuming the necessary condition of a free-will. Differs from both the definite family-triangle of the animal and the random situation of the molecule, the inanimal is a transitional status at which the relationship between individuals and the Other becomes loose and unstable, which not only enables but prompts the individuals to make their own choice—whether to be trapped in the desire of the Other or to transcend it by adhering to their own desires 25. Those who chose the latter thus simultaneous gained and exerted the power of deterritorialization. Therefore, while Deleuze and Guattari regarded any status other than the becoming-molecule as a failure, it is exactly by failing to constitute “a unique method that replaces subjectivity” 26 that the becoming-inanimal witnesses an effective deterritorialization. When conditions are mature, this profound individual choice of becoming-inanimal is also able to extend itself as the common aspiration of a community, which is exactly the case of the early 1990s Chinese avant-garde third space.

On the one hand, Chinese avant-gardes departed from their previous status of the animal to further proceed along the line of moleculezation in the early 1990s. This development was above all incarnated in their ever-increasing enthusiasm in presenting the mutual metamorphoses between the human-animal and the animal-human, either in avant-garde painting, rock lyrics or avant-garde poetries. In hope that a clear line of change can be shown by their consecutiveness and compatibility, let us take the single medium of avant-garde painting for example. It is true that the 1980s avant-garde painting witnesses both the depictions of the human being and the animal in a broad sense—i.e., animals, plants and ghosts. Furthermore, the former always mingles with the latter rather than being presented independently in these depictions. However, the combination of human elements and those of the animal in avant-gardes in the 1980s didn’t result in an inner-con-

25 Ibid., 37-38.
26 Ibid., 36.
attention crucial to metamorphosis between the two statuses, but in a harmonious whole that betrays either a nostalgia of the pre-modern pastoral or a longing for the conciliation of body and soul. For example, in the work Ceaseless Love (picture 1), Zhang Xiaogang dealt with the theme of death and human diversity that led to class struggle with an Eastern wisdom of tranquility, eternity and reconciliation. Another example is from Ye Yongqing, in whose painting Notes in the Forests and the sound of Spring (picture 2) human and animal become a harmonious and undifferentiated whole in nature.

In contrast, the 1990s avant-gardes witnessed an intensification of the becoming-animal, which marked a simultaneous transformation to the next status of the inanimal. The animals and divines in the texts of early 1990s avant-gardes were, to borrow Zizek’s phrase, "inhuman" rather than "not human" by not only being animals bestowed with human emotions, but were also animals as the incarnation of the excess of the human, i.e. the part of the human nature tempting to escape into the state of the animal in hope of getting rid of all the anxiety, fear and restlessness of being human yet ever fails. For instance, in Xia Xiaowan’s Pastorale exactly depicted such a moment of metamorphosis, in which the strong emotion of horror and vulnerability of the shepherd are transferred to the horse and make it the real protagonist whereas the title indicates the identity between the pastorale and the horse (picture 3). Side by side with these “inhuman” or animal texts were texts that depicted the inanimal—humans, in which the animal nature of human beings were exposed. For example, both Liu Wei and Song Yonghong’s works highlight the animal nature of man, whose eyes, teeth and gestures were filled with the animal desires of eroticism and vulgarism despite their neat dress and the civilized social surroundings (picture 5-6). Zeng Fanzhi even went as far as directly depicting human bodies as meats in the butcher’s (picture 4). In both cases of “the becoming-human of the animal and the becoming-animal of

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the human”29, early 1990s avant-gardes challenged the progressive official discourse of a prosperous civil society whereas also questioned the becoming-animal of the avant-gardes in the 1980s New Era, when they absorbed all sorts of western philosophies and styles and mediated them with the same ontological and metaphysical logic, by means of they kept fallen back into the logic of Mao’s era in their struggling to escape from it30.

On the other hand, early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes had never arrived at the absolute stage of becoming-molecular. When it did accomplish this process in ca.1996-1997, it was no longer the “early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes” or even avant-gardes at all, unless we adopt a wider definition of avant-gardes. Singling out 1996-1997 as the watershed isn’t to suggest that all avant-gardes experienced a molecularization on the same time and in the same way, an assumption that contradicts the very idea of deterritorialization with its homogeneity. Rather, different avant-garde mediums accomplished this molecularization in their own ways, just as they played different roles in constructing an avant-garde third space at the status of the inanimal.

Nevertheless, 1996-1997 witnessed an intensive opening up of all avant-garde mediums, which had much to do with the broader social-historical context, in which the state, and the global market reached a dynamic balance after years of contestation and negotiation, and disintegrated the utopian avant-garde third space by commercializing the entire society and dissipating the last reminders of the humanistic enthusiasm. The direct result of this structural transformation of Chinese society is the dissipation of the spirit of the avant-garde third space—being one while being in a community—which was based on an optimism of an impossible possibility on the one hand, and an empathy of a group of marginalized idealists on the other. From a broader perspective, if the becoming-animal and the becoming-inanimal were particular to the development of the Chinese avant-gardes as minor cultures, the becoming-molecular applied to the cultural sphere and society as a whole. In the context of contemporary China, it is a process that had been initiated in 1994, became prevalent in1996-1997 and has not yet been accomplished up to now.

In short, if 1980s avant-garde had been the becoming-animal trapped in the official discourse despite its temptation to break through it, if post-1996 avant-garde

29 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 35.
30 For more examples of avant-garde paintings in the early 1990s, please refer to Hanart T Z Gallery. ed., China’s new art, post-1989 (Hong Kong: Hanart T Z Gallery, 1993).
has been the becoming-molecular radically abandoning subjectivity while driven by neutral desires, early 1990s avant-garde was at the intermediate status of the inanimal and thereby gained the greatest potential of deterritorialization. This potential came from the inanimal’s character of opening itself up to new possibilities yet without giving up its subjectivity, which prevented it from collaborating with the dominating ideologies whereas also retaining the power to counterbalance them. In each chapter of this project, I will introduce how different mediums extended their deterritorializing powers to different spheres, which combined together as the deterritorializing power of an avant-garde their space.

AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY: EARLY 1990S AVANT-GARDE THIRD SPACE IN LIGHT OF THE IDEAL OF THE INANIMAL

By actively projecting their desires into avant-garde artistic forms, the avant-garde practitioners and their alliances constructed a third space that questioned and negotiated against—the state and the market. This third space of the early 1990s avant-garde is not a sphere without a fixed identity or unity as the third space in the sense of Homi K. Bhabha, which was also echoed in Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the becoming-molecular as “the third science” transcending “the properly animal pole and the properly familial one”. Rather than being an unstable machine temporarily formed by the assembling of multiple molecules, the avant-garde third space is the an entity composed of free individuals taking the initiative to project their inner desires into the world of signs rather than being controlled by the symbolic order. Moreover, like the inanimal spirit it embodied, the avant-garde third space was not formed according to certain plans or scandals, but only came into self-consciousness in the specific practices of the avant-garde practitioners, audience and alliances—i.e., the curators, the critics and the sponsors. This spirit of being one while being in a collectivity was manifested at different levels in the avant-garde third space whereas also facilitated the formation of the latter.

First of all is the relationship between each individual medium and avant-garde third space as a whole. Working together to compose the organism of the avant-garde third space, each medium manifested the avant-garde inanimal spirit in its own way—from the particular way of cooperation among the practitioners to extending its deterritorializing powers to a particular sphere. Various in history, art forms, relationship with the state and the market, etc., since all the mediums could be regarded as the most marginal from different perspectives, each medium occupied an irreplaceable place in the avant-garde third space, which enabled it to abandon the hierarchy in the larger society oriented by the official discourse and the mechanism of the capitalism.

The second aspect is the relationship between the avant-garde third space and the broader society. Different from the ambiguity and inundation of the 1980s avant-garde experiments which resulted in their temptation to break through the official ideology yet always being trapped in it, early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes extended their deterritorializing power to different spaces while nonetheless remaining a relative clear distinction between the otherness and the self, i.e., the spheres that they intended to disintegrate and the avant-garde third space as a marginal community and the place where they could return to. Under this assumption, among the four mediums that are the most influential, most productive and having the greatest number of practitioners, oil painting extended its deterritorializing power into the western art sphere, rock music to the popular culture, avant-garde poetry to the intellectual sphere, and independent films to the future. Meanwhile, photography, experimental drama and performance art practiced these four patterns and their interactions in a smaller scale. In this way, early 1990s Chinese avant-garde preserved its own identity while evolving into dialog with different spheres in and outside the mainland, by means of which in the development of history became an indispensable part in the modernization and globalization of China.

The third aspect is the relationship among different avant-garde mediums. In this aspect, the inanimal ideal of the avant-garde third space was manifested as intersubjectivity. However, this intersubjectivity isn’t mere-

31 Homi K. Bhabha. The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 37.
32 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 36.
ly founded on intension to ensure the freedom of each self-sufficient molecule as in the case of the bourgeois ideology, but also based on mutual empathy and understanding. Therefore, the relationship among different mediums can be described as intersubjectivity based upon comradeship, which were the natural results of being minor cultures representing the same sub-society. Besides the fact that avant-garde practitioners of different mediums were mostly acquaintances or friends living in compacted communities, the cooperation among them betrayed more profoundly in their cooperation in the production of art works. On the one hand, they incorporated artistic elements from mediums other than their own, either using them as objects of presentation or as structural components of their works that facilitated the delivery of the central messages. In either case, avant-garde practitioners always contributed to the accomplishment of each other’s works, either by writing a theme song for another’s drama or by playing a role in another’s films. On the other hand, different avant-garde mediums shared similar themes, aesthetic tastes and methods of presentation, including the theme of insanity and minority in common lives, the obsessiveness of details and gestures, and the excavation of the deterritorializing power and political significance of the objects of their depiction. In short, avant-garde practitioners were—like Deleuze’s generation of Kafka—interested in things that were small. But rather than being attracted by small things alike, they were particularly attracted by those marginal details that had the deterritorializing power of the homogenous historical process in official-academic culture and the commodity-oriented ethos in the early 1990s larger society.

Finally, the inanimal spirit of the early 1990s avant-garde third space was also manifested partially in those established works within the contemporary official-academic culture. As Deleuze and Guattari contended, “minor no longer designates specific literatures, but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” 33, so was the inanimal spirit that concentrated on but also went beyond the avant-garde third space. On the one hand, from the perspective of the relationship between the avant-gardes and the official-academ-

33 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 18.

36 Good Morning, Beijing, directed by Zhang Nuanxin, 1990.
mutual exclusion, what is more important than external standards like job positions and income resources is the manifestation of the inanimal spirit at all the four levels mentioned above.

Having said much so far, there are three relating characters that are crucial to the very existence of this anarchist avant-garde third space: (1) This is a romantic imagined community rather than a practical one; (2) even in imagination, it was rather small; (3) it lasted only very shortly in a highly unstable period. These characters are crucial in that they guaranteed that the latent tension between community and individuality in the ideal of the avant-garde third space and communist-anarchism at a whole never really came into self-consciousness or was at least not intensified. In the history of Chinese communist-anarchism, the tension between the individual and the community had never been fully dealt with, which partially betrayed its romanticist and idealist nature. If Lu Xun under the influence of Nietzsche nevertheless presumed a superman to dominate his “human nation”, Ba Jin and his peers relied their ideal ethic society entirely on the mutual trust and respect of its memberships which, as Hegel and Wolff suggested, is practically only sustainable conditionally in small communities such as the family and the ancient Greek society. The fact that “the community, however, can only maintain itself by suppressing this spirit of individualism” was even more crucial to understand the paradoxical ideal of the early 1990s avant-garde third space because—as I have indicated above and will constantly return to in each of the following chapters—the individual these avant-garde memberships had in mind was not the universal and rational human being as in the case of Ba Jin, Lu Xun and even avant-gardes in the 1980s New Era, but the existential individual that was fundamentally isolated from universal and communal ethics. Therefore, what made this avant-garde third space a glorious utopia that actually encouraged and prompted early 1990s avant-gardes was exactly the fact that it was an imagined community that came to its premature end due to radical external changes before all problems manifested themselves in the self-movement of the community.

CONCLUSION: THE CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AVANT-GARDE THIRD SPACE

The year of 1996-1997 was a turning point for Chinese avant-gardes, witnessing the final collapse of the avant-garde third space together with the very category of early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes, which negated itself by finally reaching the status of the becoming-molecule. Substituting subjectivity with “a single process” driven by desire and aspiration of each individual, today’s avant-gardes as a whole lost its progressiveness by flattering with products of mass culture in competing with it as commodities that have been even under stricter control of the state. While the idealism of taking avant-garde as a destined choice may be still preserved in individual practitioners, what is lost once for all is the inanimal spirit of being one while being in a collectivity, a spirit that founded upon a belief in the existence of an imagined community, which was dispelled by the general trend of commercialization permeating into every part of the society. Their function of avant-garde practitioners insisting on critical thinking are reduced to the maintenance of the fantasy of diversity and free choice in the market economy. While cooperation still existed occasionally, it was closer to the assemblage of machine by independent elements molecules, which disintegrates after it exhausted the value of utility for the components as the capitalist society composed of independent free individuals. The only solid power in this general condition of moleculeization is the combination of the state and the market, which is generalized by Terril Jones as

38 For Ba Jin’s anarchism and the relationship between Lu Xun and Ba Jin in Chinese intellectual history, please refer to some key works of Chen Sihe, who took the initiative to start investing Ba Jin’s anarchism in the early 1980s. It’s also worth noticing that Chen Sihe didn’t identify Lu Xun as an anarchist for both practical and intellectual concerns. These works include but are not limited to: Chen Sihe, “the Desperation and Contention of Practical fighting Spirit” (Xianshi zhandou jingshen de juewang yu kouzhang), Fifteen Lectures on Famous Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature (Zhongguo xian dang dai wenzue ming pian shi wu jiang) Beijing: Peking UP, 2003.
39 Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 36.
EARLY 1990S CHINESE AVANT-GARDE

“we’ll let you prosper; you let us stay in power”\textsuperscript{40}. In short, avant-gardes in the status of becoming molecular marked both the end of deterritorialization and the beginning of a new round of reterritorialization caused by the state-market conciliation.

In this context, a central question to be asked is the contemporary significance of the early 1990s avant-garde third space after its diminishment for nearly 20 years. Despite the artistic and historical values of art pieces they produced or the foundation they set for avant-gardes afterwards, the most precious legacy they left is the possibility of a third space beyond the binary relationship with dominating ideologies. The way the early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes made it was occupying the inanimal status of retaining subjectivity while opening up, with the spirit of being one while being in a collectivity as its core. Once existed—despite being temporarily excluded from the contemporary Chinese cultural context—this possibility has to be taken into account by the Chinese culture in its constant self-negation, a latent “impossible possibility” that threatens to return when conditions are mature. Before then, it functions as a disjuncture that threatens the homogeneity of the dominating discourses and forces them into a state of constant reflection and renovation. It is at this point that Lacan and Derrida finally reach a conciliation: both of them regard the excluded as the structural component of the social order, which forced the symbolic network to open up to possible changes and constantly adjust itself.\textsuperscript{41}

To go a step further, I would even argue that the specters of early 1990s Chinese avant-gardes has already re-


turned in today’s cultural sphere. It is worth remembering that this inanimal spirit of early 1990s avant-garde itself marked the return of the specters of early 20th century Chinese communist-anarchism, which was mediated by the 1980s New Era and the early 1990s Chinese cultural sphere before manifested as the inanimal spirit of the early 1990s Chinese avant-garde third space. Like the early 20th century anarchists who occupied solid social positions to promote their ideal step by step after their utter failure in the political sphere in the mid-1920s, the spirit of the early 1990s avant-gardes has returned at in the late 2010s after its exclusion from the public attention for more than ten years. Examples as such include the LGBT communities, the independent philosophical societies, the shi she—or university-based traditional poetry clubs, to name only a few. I would like to end up by quoting a short paragraph of Chen Sihe’s comments on Ba Jin’s anarchist ideal, an ideal that had been initiated in the Chinese anarchist movement in late Qing period, iterated in the 1930s anarchist practical deeds, manifested in the early 1990s Chinese avant-garde third space, and returns in today’s non-governmental, non-profitable associations and fraternities. This paragraph perfectly generalizes the merits of this “impossible possibility” of constructing a community based on each member’s profound personal choice:

Ba Jin always stands by the poor and the subaltern, and his ideal is that all the emblems of power like the government and state should disappear. Whether or not this ideal can be achieved is not our concern (since it is utterly impossible in today’s context). My point is that it embodies something noble that always exists in the spirit of human beings, something that prompts people to pursue forever equality and freedom… no matter in which country, which nationality and which race.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{42} Chen Sihe. The pictorial bibliography of Ba Jin (Ba Jin tu zhuhan), 139.
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JAPAN-ROK RELATIONS:  
DO THEY ALWAYS GET BETTER  
WITH NORTH KOREAN PROVOCATIONS?

Historically Japan and South Korea have exhibited a well-coordinated response to North Korean threats, as early as 1994 when bilateral defense ministerial meetings commenced. If North Korean provocations instill close bilateral cooperation, then why was GSOMIA (General Security Military Information Agreement) so difficult to attain in 2012? The paper introduces the Insult Diplomacy Model, which suggests that the ups and downs of Japan-ROK relations are not only determined by the timing of North Korean provocations but also the state of internal affairs of party politics in Japan and South Korea.

Keywords: Japan-ROK relations, North Korea, provocations, domestic politics

Word Count (omitting abstract, subheadings, captions, block quotes, and references): 7,968

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INTRODUCTION

JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA: THE COMMON THREAT OF NORTH KOREA

The North Korean provocation history is a headache for all countries involved in the region: North Korea would sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1985, only to declare official withdrawal in 1993; it would sign a pact with the United States to freeze its nuclear program in 1994, only to nullify in 2002; despite the progress of the Six Party Talks since 2003, it would conduct another nuclear weapons test in 2006; by 2009, it would declare that it is “fully ready for battle” against the United States who has granted concessions in fuel oil and aid to the country in 2007; it would sink a South Korean ship Cheonan and shell the Yeonpyeong island in 2010; and most recently there was the 2012 missile launch and the third nuclear test in 2013. While no neighboring country welcomes the provocations with open arms, the provocations do provide one silver lining: in the presence of such incessant security breaches, it becomes natural for the leaders in East Asia to conduct a close regional cooperation, such as joint military exercises and multilaterally-enforced economic sanctions on North Korea.

In fact, the North Korean provocations make up one of the main converging interests between Japan and South Korea, and encourage a genuine bilateral cooperation beyond historical animosity. In face of North Korean threat, Japan and South Korea began their defense ministerial meetings in 1994, with South Korean naval ships’ first-ever visits to Tokyo; Japan’s navy followed up with a visit to Busan in 1996. In 1999, South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. established the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) to trilaterally pressure North Korea. The same year, South Korean and Japanese navies conducted their first bilateral field exercise near Busan. By 2008, South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. renewed the senior-level tripartite talks and Japan’s military officers observed U.S-South Korean naval exercises. More joint military observations followed in 2010 and 2011. In June of 2012, the first trilateral naval exercise took place in Jeju Island of South Korea. More multilateral naval exercises followed in Hokkaido in July, and in Hawaii in August of 2012.  

As North Korea’s provocations heightened in intensity, it was only expected of Japan and South Korea to continue to strengthen their military ties and keep their dangerous neighbor in check. However in the summer of 2012, the bilateral agreement to share classified military information—more commonly known as GSOMIA (General Security Military Information Agreement)—fell through when the news of the agreement reached the South Korean public. The military pact would have been one of the 23 others that South Korea has already signed with other countries. This first-of-its-kind agreement between South Korea and Japan since World War I would have contributed significantly to bilateral cooperation against North Korean provocations, and have led to resumption of dialogues for bilateral economic partnership. President Lee Myung-bak only exacerbated the tension when he visited the Takeshima/Dokdo island that summer, marking the first-ever visit by a South Korean President to the island.

Why did GSOMIA fall through in 2012 despite the heightened threat from North Korea after the sinking of Cheonan and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island? What is more, 2012 was not the only time when a North Korean provocation failed to induce a close Japan-ROK cooperation. After the first nuclear test by North Korea in 2006, Japan and South Korea shared a brief phase of cooperation that was soon forgotten after Prime Minister’s Abe’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine. The factor of historical animosity is not a sufficient answer to the failures of bilateral cooperation in the wake of North Korean provocations. While historical animosity causes periodic fire between the two nations, it does not constantly dominate Japan-ROK relations. For one, it cannot explain the tight bilateral military cooperation for the past two decades.

Yet these recurrent aggravations are not randomly placed in the history of bilateral relations, either. This study observes the patterns of ups and downs in Japan-ROK relations, and makes a case that the main factors shaping these patterns are the North Korean provocations and the state of Presidential and Prime-Ministerial power and stability within party politics in Japan and South Korea.

WHEN TO COOPERATE AND WHEN TO INSULT

There is a tendency for the leaders of South Korea and Japan to resort to insulting each other and jeopardizing Japan-ROK bilateral relations to gain a better footing in domestic party politics. This is increasingly the case since the nature of party politics have shifted after Koizumi’s term and his electoral reforms, and after democratization of South Korean politics. Both systems are vulnerable to sudden party splits and merges, and are exposed to public popularity. For South Korea and Japan, historical animosity makes bilateral relations an easy target for political leaders to manipulate. By swaying the public’s nationalist sentiments, the leaders can gain an upper hand in popular support and secure a strong party base at home.

Unfortunately for the political leaders, the nationalism card cannot be used without its limits, especially in times of North Korean provocations. Very often after North Korean missile launch or nuclear test, the Japanese and South Korean governments would seek joint military exercises, trilateral meetings with the United States, and higher level of cooperation in cultural and economic areas. But many scholars and news media have noted that the provocations do not always lead to high-level Japan-ROK cooperation. Should there be a lame duck President or Prime Minister, insult diplomacy might easily spoil the bilateral relations despite a recent North Korean provocation. Thus the level of bilateral cooperation is not only contingent upon North Korean provocations but also the standing govern-

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ments—that is, how much power and stability the Japanese Prime Minister and South Korean President have in maintaining control in their respective party bases at the time.

In this paper I introduce the Insult Diplomacy Model with two variables: the domestic political stability of the respective Japanese and South Korean governments, and the common external threat in the form of North Korean provocations. As the two variables cannot be measured in exact quantities, the following data were collected to represent the variables: the Japanese and South Korean governments’ stability is estimated through media reports and survey results on popular support of Presidents and Prime Ministers; the North Korean threat was measured by the length of time passed since the last provocation, and estimated that the threat loomed the largest to the Japanese and South Korean leaders within a year of the provocation. The two variables influence the decisions South Korean and Japanese leaders make, either to conduct insult diplomacy to improve their domestic standings in difficult times, or to improve the bilateral relations in the wake of North Korean provocations.

THE INSULT DIPLOMACY MODEL

Quadrant I: Should the Japanese Prime Minister and the South Korean President hold a strong stance in their respective party politics, and should they face a high level of threat from North Korea, then the bilateral relationship is at its best. The leaders are not weighed down by pressures from domestic constituents and opposition parties if the leaders have a strong party base at home. With this, the Prime Minister and President can dictate foreign policy more freely and pursue bilateral and multilateral cooperation in times of North Korean crisis.

Quadrant II: When the leaders of Japan and South Korea remain strong at home as North Korean threat dwindles, the temptation to conduct insult diplomacy increases. When the leaders want to hedge against expected falls of domestic popularity in the future, insult diplomacy provides a preemptive protection. At the same time, Japan–ROK relations may remain neutral if the leaders perceive no benefit in stirring up nationalistic sentiments which may backfire and jeopardize the leaders’ domestic standings. At this stage, bilateral relations remain neutral or less cooperative than the ones under conditions of Quadrant I.

Quadrant III: When the leaders of Japan and South Korea are weak at home and when the North Korean threat is high, the level of bilateral cooperation is not as high as it once was when the leaders maintained strong party bases. The leaders are heavily weighed down by their domestic constituents, which slow down national decision-making process and hinder bilateral cooperation in times of high North Korean threat. The level of Japan–ROK cooperation is not as structured or cohesive as that under the conditions of Quadrant I.

Quadrant IV: When the leaders of Japan and South Korea are weak at home and when the North Korean threat is low, the level of cooperation plummets. At this point, most that the leaders are concerned about is their political status at home. Without the imminent threat of North Korea, the leaders are more likely to choose insult diplomacy, opting to improve their domestic standings at the expense of bilateral relations.

CASE STUDIES

CASE #1 KIM DAE-JUNG AND KEIZO OBUCHI IN 1998-2000

When South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi were in office from 1998 to 2000, Japan–ROK relations saw one of their best in history. Two incidents highlight the positive relationship: the conclusion of the New Fisheries Agreement, and the summit “New Korea-Japan Partnership Co-Declaration.” In 1997, the fisheries discord took hold of both countries. South Korea claimed that Japan’s straight baseline for its 12 nautical-mile sovereignty and 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone had expelled South Korean fishermen out of their own territory. Japan claimed that South Korea failed to prevent repeated violations of South Korean fishermen into the Japanese territorial waters, and did not keep to the self-policing principle agreed to in the treaty. Japan notified South Korea its intention to terminate the agreement in January of 1998. Then in February, some Korean fishermen were arrested by Japanese police, and the

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Japanese fishing boats were rammed. 8

The disputes that could have escalated were resolved quickly by Kim and Obuchi. Kim invited Sato Koko, the head of LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) fisheries caucus, to Korea in June and treated him as an honored guest. As Sato began talking with his caucus to reestablish the treaty, the group faced a deadlock on where to draw the line. Obuchi stepped in, inviting the negotiating parties to his official office on September 24, and he worked with them until an agreement was reached on the morning of the 25th. 9 The fisheries case was resolved peacefully under the leadership of Kim and Obuchi.

After the Fisheries Treaty resolution, more bilateral cooperation followed. At the summit “New Korea-Japan Partnership Co-Declaration” in October of 1998, the two nations declared bilateral partnership, and Obuchi issued an apology for the Japanese annexation of South Korea. 10 The apology was unlike the previous ones given by Japanese officials, for the statement was included in the joint declaration of the summit. The wordings were similar to then-Prime-Minister Tomiichi Murayama’s apology in 1995, but Murayama’s apology had been a personal one. Kim responded by lifting the cultural bans on Japanese music and movies. 11

How did the two leaders induce such positive bilateral relations in 1998? The answer lies in the combination of strong domestic politics and imminent North Korean threat (Quadrant I).

DOMESTIC POLITICS

In 1998, President Kim Dae-Jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi stood with strong domestic bases. A common theme between the two leaders was that both were able to pull through the Asian financial crisis of 1997, turning the economic crisis into an opportunity to prove themselves as trustworthy leaders. Both also

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8 Michael J. Green, “Japan-ROK Security Relations: An American Perspective,” p. 11.
9 Ibid., p. 12.

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Table 1: Case Studies Summary of Insult Diplomacy Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination of strong Japanese and Korean governments</th>
<th>Recent threat from North Korea</th>
<th>De-escalation of imminent threat from North Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I) Most cooperative</td>
<td>Case #1 Kim Dae-Jung and Keizo Obuchi in 1998-2000</td>
<td>(II) Less cooperative or neutral Case #2: Kim Dae-jung and Junichiro Koizumi in 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of weak Japanese and Korean governments</td>
<td>(III) Less cooperative Case #3: Roh Moo-hyun and Shinzo Abe in 2006</td>
<td>(IV) Least cooperative Case #3: Roh Moo-hyun and Shinzo Abe in 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Case #4: Lee Myung-bak and Yoshihiko Noda in 2011</td>
<td>Case #4: Lee Myung-bak and Yoshihiko Noda in 2012</td>
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</table>
maintained a stable standing in the midst of party politics through party coalitions and dominations.

Kim Dae-jung was elected in the wake of the financial crisis. Kim's economic policies did not disappoint his voters. Even before being officially sworn in as the president in February 1998, Kim carried out IMF-mandated reforms through the National Assembly, including greater monetary policy independence for the central bank, a new structure for financial regulation, and lifting of the 50 percent ceiling on foreign ownership of some Korean companies by April 1998.

In addition to the economic credentials, Kim also came into office with a strong party base. Before coming into office, Kim's party National Congress for New Politics (NCNP) had 77 seats out of 299 seats in the National Assembly. Through the coalition with Kim Jong-pil and the United Liberal Democrats (ULD), Kim built a stronger domestic power base.

Keizo Obuchi also came into office in 1998, when the Japanese economy was recovering from Asian Financial Crisis. Much was expected of the new incumbent, and Obuchi fulfilled the expectations. Like Kim, Obuchi had economic credentials before he was elected by the Diet; his new “economic reconstruction cabinet” included members such as former Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi, who was an acknowledged expert on financial matters. Once elected, Obuchi introduced six new pieces of legislation to the Diet to solve the banking crisis. With the new legislation, the Long-Term Credit Bank of Japan (LTCB) transferred its ownership to the government temporarily. As major financial institutions found a more secure environment under public management, the Japanese economy stabilized, and by the summer of 1999, Obuchi's public approval rating soared to 51 percent.

Obuchi began his political career with a stable party base. Obuchi was the strongest candidate during the elections, as he was the head of the largest faction in the LDP. He received 225 of 411 votes by the LDP lawmakers, and he had served in the LDP for thirty-six years. As evidence to his strength in his party, Obuchi launched and successfully completed major political reforms while in office. In 1999 August, he assembled the largest governing coalition that Japan has seen in decades and pushed through Parliament policies such as adoption of the Japanese flag and imperial anthem as official national symbols, and crackdown legal measures on terrorist groups like Aum Shinrikyo.

When both the Japanese and South Korean leaders stood strong in their respective political parties, they did not have a strong incentive to stir up nationalist sentiments and unleash the domestic constituents at the expense of the bilateral relations. Both were able to lead from a stable base, and bilateral cooperation became a more viable option than in times of domestic political unrest.

**NORTH KOREAN THREAT**

An imminent North Korean threat would only increase the inclination for South Korea and Japan to cooperate with each other. North Korea provided such an incentive on August 31, 1998: the Taepodong-1 missile launched by North Korea flew directly over the Japanese airspace. Tokyo immediately suspended all negotiations, food aid, and financial support for Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). The Taepodong-1 launch awakened the Japanese leaders to the possibility of North Korea’s direct attack on Japan.

Before the Taepodong-1 crisis, the cooperation be-

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12 “South Korea’s new start,” The Economist, January 3, 1998.
13 Ibid.
18 Robert Uriu, “Japan in 1998: Nowhere to Go but Up?” p. 120.
20 Steven Butler.
between the Japanese and South Korean government mainly revolved around a third actor, the United States. The KEDO was established in 1995 as a trilateral consultation process between Japan, South Korea, and the United States. Trilateral defense dialogues were increasingly becoming a bilateral one between the United States and Japan, who would then explain the new guidelines to the South Korean government. The South Korean government supported the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, and maintained its attitude of “support with caution.” Japan, too, was wary of security engagements with the United States and South Korea, because the Diet constantly reminded the Japanese government of its constitutional ban on collective defense.

However, Japan and South Korea abandoned caution after North Korea launched the ballistic missile in 1998. The Japan Defense Agency (JDA) and ROK Ministry of Defense issued in October a joint declaration whereby the two nations agreed to increase defense exchanges and to establish regular bilateral cabinet meetings. In May of 1999, South Korea and Japan announced the establishment of military communications “hotlines” for the exchange of information in emergencies. The Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) Chief Yuji Hiroaka visited Seoul to meet with ROK Air Force Chief Park Chun-taek. The security ties encouraged cultural exchanges, and ROK lifted its 20-year old ban on import of Japanese commercial and cultural products, including drama, arts, and films.

In 1999, when North Korea launched another ballistic missile, the reactive measures that the Japanese and South Korean government took were a repeat episode of Taepodong-1 and its after-effects. The ROK defense officials reported near-completion status of North Korea’s missile launch site in North Hamkyong province in July 1999. Within two days of the report, the Japanese and South Korean officials met to discuss heightened security ties. By the end of July, South Korean and Japanese navies were planning joint search and rescue drills, and putting them into execution by beginning of August. Tighter security ties invited closer econom-

ic cooperation, and the two governments convened in discussions for an investment pact, an Asian Monetary Fund, joint-construction operations, and a free trade zone.

In summary, Japan-ROK relations from 1998 to 2000 demonstrated a mutual good-will, due to the leaders' strong ruling-party positions that did not succumb to constraints from domestic constituents and opposition parties, and due to palpable North Korean threat that pushed the Japanese and ROK governments to seek security assurance in their cooperative relationship.

CASE #2: KIM DAE-JUNG AND JUNICHIRO KOIZUMI IN 2001

The Kim-Obuchi cooperation came to a halt when the history textbook issues took hold of Japan-ROK relations on March 9, 2001. President Kim Dae-jung postponed the regularly scheduled annual ministerial meetings with Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori. In April, South Korean Foreign Minister Han Seung-soo filed a formal complaint, the heads of Korea-Japan Parliamentary Union (KJPU) suspended their annual general assembly, and South Korean Ambassador Choi Sang-yong left Japan—all in protest over the textbook issue. The escalation stalled temporarily when Prime Minister Mori was replaced by Junichiro Koizumi. Koizumi and Kim held a phone conversation agreeing to cooperate on the textbook issue. Yet the textbook issue flared up again within a month. Rather than listing the events, a timeline better illustrates the rapid deterioration of relations at the time:

May 8, 2001: South Korean Foreign Minister officially demands revisions of the Japanese junior high school history textbooks, pointing out 35 sections that should be revised.

May 8, 2001: The South Korean Defense Ministry announces that it has decided to put off the second Ko-


22 Ibid., p. 17.
23 Ibid., p. 18.
rea-Japan joint maritime search and rescue drills slated for early June to protest Japan’s approval of history textbooks.

May 29, 2001: President Kim, in a letter to Japanese PM Koizumi Junichiro, urges the Japanese government to respond swiftly to Seoul’s demands for textbook revisions. 27

July 8, 2001: ROK President Kim Dae-jung refuses to meet with high-level Japanese ruling party delegation carrying a letter from PM Koizumi asking to meet and for understanding on the textbook issue.

July 9, 2001: Riot police battle demonstrators testing at Japanese Embassy in Seoul against Tokyo’s refusal to change history textbooks.

July 12, 2001: ROK announces sanctions against Japan over textbook controversy, including postponing high-level military exchanges, postponing liberalization measures to open ROK markets to Japanese cultural imports, and canceling over 100 sports and private-level exchange programs.

July 18, 2001: South Korea’s National Assembly unanimously passes resolution calling on government to make comprehensive review of ties with Japan, banning Japanese associated with textbooks from entering ROK, urging blockage of Japan’s efforts to gain permanent UN Security Council seat.

July 20, 2001: South Korea officially demands that Japan remove names of Koreans who died in World War II from Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. 28

In order to amend relations, Japanese high-ranking officials met with Foreign Minister Han Seung-soo on July 9 to propose joint history research and teacher exchanges. But the attempts proved futile when the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education approved the use of disputed textbook at three public schools for disabled children. Making matters worse, Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine and honored the militarist regime of Japan on August 13—two days before the South Korean Independence Day. 29 More protests from South Korea followed, including official ones from vice Foreign Minister Choi Sung-hong and President Kim. The discord died down on October 15, when Koizumi offered his apology to Kim at Cheong Wa Dae (the Blue House). 30

What factors were behind Koizumi’s decision to visit the shrine in such an untimely manner, and the Kim administrations’ short-temper with the textbook issues? The Insult Diplomacy Model explains the escalation of tensions through a change of conditions in Japanese and South Korean domestic politics and the two countries’ perception of North Korean threat (Quadrant II).

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Prime Minister Koizumi and President Kim were a good match of strong leaders at home. Koizumi came into office in 2001 when Kim was in his third year in office. Koizumi’s strong domestic standing at home was of different nature than that of Obuchi. Unlike Obuchi who had a strong standing within the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party), Koizumi strengthened his power base through direct appeals to the electorate. He was a renowned speaker and communicator, and he soon became a star among the people in Japan. Koizumi was nicknamed “lion heart” for his hair and passionate spirit, and there was a “Koizumi fever” epitomized by commercial products such as Koizumi T-shirts and cell phone accessories. The strength of his leadership is also displayed in the length of his tenure. Most Prime ministers in Japan held office for two years or less. Koizumi filled a five and a half years of a term. Furthermore, he maintained the average approval rating of 50 percent by the end of his term in 2006. 31

Although Koizumi is generally remembered as a strong leader at home, he faced some major reforms in 2001. He put forth the Structural Reform on his political agenda and pushed forward new economic policy changes including higher focus on market forces and on bringing market disciplines into protected sectors. Within five years, Japan experienced a higher rate of economic growth. But the process was a difficult one, whereby Koizumi had to push his economic policies...


29 Ibid.


against the traditionalists in the government. Therefore it is likely that in 2001, Koizumi stood strong in his political party but was expecting heightened clashes with anti-reformists.

By 2001, Kim was also on the edge of implementing a change in party politics in South Korea. Kim had maintained his strong stance in the coalition of NCNP (National Congress for New Politics) and ULD (United Liberal Democrats). Once his stability in domestic politics was confirmed, he pushed for the creation of a new party directly under his leadership. On January 19, 2000, Kim officially inaugurated his new party, the Millenium Democratic Party (MDP). Through MDP, Kim commanded his policies more freely, including the Sunshine policy. If successfully reinstated, the new party base would bolster Kim's administration, and this provoked additional tensions with the opposition party and strained Kim's stance in party politics.

The combination of Kim Dae-jung administration and Junichiro Koizumi is interesting, because the deterioration of Japan-ROK relations with the onslaught of insult diplomacy did not result from leaders of weak domestic stances, but from leaders with relatively strong party bases. The catch is that Kim and Koizumi were expecting major clashes with the opposition parties. In anticipating domestic unrest, the leaders inched closer to insult diplomacy as a preemptive option. Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine in August 2000, and boosted public morale. By 2001—the year when Kim was expecting political turbulence following the creation of his new party and needed to direct the public's attention to international issues and nationalistic sentiments. Thus insult diplomacy provided a preemptive measure for Koizumi and Kim administrations in 2001.

NORTH KOREA THREAT

An external factor that made it easier for the two governments to succumb to insult diplomacy was their perception of a declined North Korean threat. On October 6, 2000, North Korea and the United States issued a joint statement agreeing to oppose all forms of terrorism, and to exchange information regarding international terrorism. This new development came to South Korea and Japan as a sign of lowered North Korean threat. As evidence, the Kim administration launched forward its Sunshine policy, proactively asking the international community for concessions toward North Korea. The Koizumi administration visited Pyongyang on September of that year as well.

With declining North Korean threat, the need for a closely coordinated emergency response to North Korea dwindled. This momentary lull from North Korean provocations coincided with the two strong governments' expectation of troubles in party politics, and provided fine ground for insult diplomacy. The happy golden years of Kim Dae-jung and Keizo Obuchi were soon forgotten.

CASE #3: ROH MOO-HYUN AND SHINZO ABE IN 2006-2007

Japan-ROK relations saw one of their worst times with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Roh Moo-hyun. Neither Abe nor Roh seemed to have their political parties in control, and insult diplomacy took a harder turn on the bilateral relations than during the Kim-Koizumi era. Below is a timetable of major events between Japan and South Korea in the spring of 2007. Unlike the period of insult diplomacy in Kim and Koizumi administration, neither country showed any sign of appeasement.

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between the former pair. In 2006, North Korea con-
but the attempts of cooperation were also more futile
administrations than during the Kim-Koizumi times,
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A
“private capacity” in late April. South Korea’s Foreign
Minister Abe sent o
peace” in an article in the latest issue of Global Asia.
A major stumbling block to regional cooperation and
is no evidence or testimony that the Japanese military
forced the so-called women to become sex slaves during
War II.
March 3, 2007: South Korean government criticizes
Prime Minister Abe for denying Japan’s responsibility
for the “comfort women” issue.
March 5, 2007: Seoul and Tokyo hold exclusive eco-
nic zone talks, but fail to reach an agreement.
March 16, 2007: Japanese Cabinet says in a written
statement that the Japanese government found no evi-
dence that foreign women were forced to serve in army brothels.
April 15, 2007: South Korea’s Korea Times reports
that President Roh Moo-hyun warned Japan “to stay
away from its misguided nationalism … to remove a
major stumbling block to regional cooperation and peace” in an article in the latest issue of Global Asia.
May 8, 2007: Japan’s Kyodo News reports that Prime
Minister Abe sent offerings to Yasukuni Shrine in a
“private capacity” in late April. South Korea’s Foreign
Affairs and Trade Ministry says it was “very regrettable”
and calls for a “correct perception of history.”
The degree to which insult diplomacy overtook bilat-
eral relations was not only greater during the Roh-Abe
administrations than during the Kim-Koizumi times,
but the attempts of cooperation were also more futile
between the former pair. In 2006, North Korea con-
ducted its first underground nuclear test. Despite the
international uproar, the spark of cooperation between
the two close neighbors of North Korea died within a
year.
The Insult Diplomacy Model explains the mecha-
nism behind the lukewarm results: both administra-
ations had common a weak domestic political standing
in 2006. The Model predicts that if two governments
that are of weak standing in their domestic politics face
a common external threat, then the level of bilateral co-
operation will not be as sturdy as that between govern-
ments maintaining strong stances at home. Japan-ROK
relations from 2006 to 2007 shift from Quadrant III to
Quadrant IV, as North Korean threat dwindles while
both Abe and Roh remain without a firm grasp on party
politics at home.
DOMESTIC POLITICS
South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun’s domestic
standing began to slip within a hundred days of his in-
auguration. The public poll conducted by the Gallup
Korea revealed that Roh’s popularity decreased from
59.6 percent in May, to 40.2 percent in June, and to 30.4
percent in September. The main popular expectations of
Roh administration were economic improvement (38.3
percent majority) and domestic political reforms (52.8
percent majority). The GDP growth had been slipping
from 2002, decreasing from 6.3 percent to 3.7 percent
by spring of 2003. As the growth rate continued to slip,
and as the rates of private consumption and business
investment slowed down, Roh was harshly criticized by
the opposition party for his failure to deliver the eco-
nomic promises. Within two years of his inauguration,
Roh faced constant criticisms from the conservatives.
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was not exactly
having his best days in the office, either. Unlike Keizo
Obuchi who had served in the LDP for thirty-six years,
Abe had only a thirteen year political career. He did not
own a faction, nor did he have any ministerial appoint-
ment before his position at the Koizumi cabinet. Abe’s
initial high popularity plummeted three months after
his inauguration. The media blamed Abe’s lack of clear
agenda on national economic reform. He allowed par-
liamentarians who had opposed Koizumi’s postal pri-
vatization bill to join the party again, and almost abol-
ished the road budget reform, one of Koizumi’s projects.
Even when the public realized that not all of Koizumi’s
reforms were effective, Abe’s project on “Re-challenge
Society” barely floated. Abe gained 67 percent of

David C. Kang and Ji-Young Lee, “The Honeymoon is Over.”
David C. Kang and Ji-Young Lee, “Treading Water, Little Progress

36 “노동당력 취임 여론조사 [Survey Poll on President Roh’s Inaugura-
or.kr/data/bbs/kor_report/200911271124036.pdf>, accessed November
38 Abe won 54 percent public approval before the elections in 2006.
40 Mishima Ko, “Explaining Japan’s Fragile Premierships in the
Post-Koizumi Era,” p. 286.
the public’s vote as “leading an unreliable cabinet” in 2007. A-part of the explanation for Roh and Abe’s difficulties remains in the nature of party politics in South Korea and Japan. When South Korea was in the midst of democratization process, Presidents Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung created and dissolved political parties freely according to their political needs. While Kim Dae-jung was trained to manipulate the system of party politics from his experience as a “fighter,” having begun his political career as early as 1954, Roh Moo-hyun was a human-rights-lawyer-turned-president. He was labeled the lame duck president within two years of his inauguration.

The evolution of party politics in Japan painted a similar picture. Ever since Koizumi’s term in office, the Prime Ministers began to bear higher expectations from the public, whose support translated directly into intraparty support. From 1994 electoral reform, LDP factions lost power due to replacement of multi-member district system to single-member district and proportional representation system. Without a strong factional system, much of intraparty support was determined through public support. Thus post-Koizumi Prime Ministers in Japan tended to have a weak domestic base if they could not win the public, as illustrated in

When both Japanese and South Korean leaders suffered weak domestic stances, party politics took over foreign policy objectives, and the external threat from North Korea could not instill a well-coordinated bilateral action in 2006.

NORTH KOREAN THREAT
On October 9, 2006, when North Korea conducted


Figure 1: Post-Koizumi Prime Ministers’ approval rates in the Asahi Shimbun polls

its first underground nuclear test, the usual frenzy between the Japanese and South Korean administrations for joint sanctions or military exercises was rather subdued. Prime Minister Abe did visit Seoul for a summit the same day, marking a first bilateral summit in eleven months. But the expected high-level cooperation did not materialize. South Korean Prime Minister Han Myeong-sook declared that it will not support any United Nations resolutions that contain military measures against North Korea in retaliation for the nuclear test.

Roh hardened his resolve to continue the Sunshine Policy, and Abe examined Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and contemplated Japan’s forgone nuclear power. The domestic affairs and shaky party politics preoccupied Abe and Roh. The lukewarm cooperation bled into insult diplomacy when North Korean threat significantly diminished the next year, moving the bilateral relations from Quadrant III to IV in the Insult Diplomacy Model. On February 13, 2007, the Six Party Talks reached an agreement that North Korea would be provided fuel oil and other incentives in exchange for disabling its nuclear development program. The agreement marked a breakthrough in the talks. With the North Korean threat somewhat pacified, a rapid deterioration of relations similar to that in 2001 with Kim and Koizumi took place, with added recklessness, as the timeline previously mentioned illustrates.

The escalation halted only when Abe was succeeded by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on September. Although the North Korean claim to denuclearize has not been credible for many years, the progress still provided South Korea and Japan one less common threat to worry about. Thus with Abe and Roh administrations, the bilateral relations only passed from a temporary cooperation after the 2006 nuclear test (Quadrant III) to their rapid unraveling in 2007 when North Korea helped ease the tensions by officially agreeing to denuclearize (Quadrant IV).

**CASE #4: LEE MYUNG-BAK AND YOSHIHIKO NODA IN 2012**

The administrations of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and President Lee Myung-bak tell a similar story to that of Abe-Roh pair. The weak stances of Noda and Lee in their respective party politics hindered bilateral cooperation in times of North Korean provocations, and once the threat declined, insult diplomacy overtook the bilateral relations. The Japan-ROK relations went as far as planning the first military information exchange in 2012, only to scrap the deal, have Lee visit the Takeshima/Dokdo Island, and end up with an embarrassing miscommunication concerning a letter that no one wanted to accept. The following timeline illustrates the bilateral relations at their worst in the summer of 2012:

**Aug.10, 2012:** President Lee Myung-bak visits the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima, sparking Japan to recall its ambassador from Seoul. This marks the first time that a Korean president has visited the islands.

**Aug. 14, 2012:** President Lee urges Japanese Emperor Akihito to apologize to Koreans that lost their life fighting for independence from the Japanese during the colonial era, if the Emperor is to visit South Korea.

**Aug. 15, 2012:** Two Japanese Cabinet ministers – National Public Safety Commission Chairman Matsubara Jin and Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Minister Hata Yuichiro – visit the Yasukuni Shrine on the 67th anniversary of Japan’s surrender in World War II.

**Aug. 17, 2012:** Japanese Prime Minister Node Yoshib
hiko sends a letter to President Lee via the embassy in Seoul, describing Lee’s visit to Dokdo/Takeshima and the remarks about needing an apology from Japan’s Emperor if he were to visit the South as regrettable. Noda also urges the territorial dispute be resolved at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Aug. 21, 2012: Tokyo sends Seoul a “note verbal” about jointly referring the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima to the ICJ. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan dismisses the proposal, claiming that it is “not worth consideration.” Seoul returns the note on Aug. 23.

Aug. 21, 2012: South Korean Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification adopts resolution pressing Japan to withdraw its territorial claims over Dokdo/Takeshima.

Aug. 24, 2012: Japan’s Parliament adopts resolutions “strongly condemning” South Korea’s recent actions regarding the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima and calling the successful landing by Chinese activists on Diaoyu/Senkaku “extremely regrettable.”

Aug. 24, 2012: Yonhap reports that the ROK military is looking to go ahead with its schedule to conduct regular military drills in waters near Dokdo/Takeshima in early September.

The Insult Diplomacy Model describes the change in Japan-ROK relations when Lee and Noda administrations perceive high and low level of North Korean threat while they are preoccupied with the affairs of party politics at home (from Quadrant III to IV).

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Both Lee Myung-bak and Yoshihiko Noda did not fare well in their offices. Lee was inaugurated in 2008, with 52 percent approval rating. But his popularity soon slipped to 30 percent within a hundred days in office. The main reasons included not listening to his domestic constituents (21.3 percent) and financial difficulties (16.2 percent). The untimely U.S. beef import policy did not help: 54.5 percent of the public picked the issue of U.S. beef import as Lee’s top policy mistake. Lee also faced the lowest approval rating a hundred days after the inauguration, compared to those of former Presidents. With the Cheonan sinking in March of 2010, Lee lost much of his popular support when his administration failed to give a decisive report on who exactly sunk the ship. In February of 2012, the public was asked to evaluate Lee administration’s performance: 41.5 percent rated it “not good” and 29.7 percent rated it “bad”, compiling to 71.2 percent negative rating on the whole.

Yoshihiko Noda entered office in September 2011, and maintained high public approval rating of 40 percent by November of 2011. But within a year, his approval rating dropped to 18 percent. In 2012 alone, Noda shuffled his cabinet three times, in hopes of bolstering public support for his administration. His opposition party LDP was also keeping a close watch on Noda lest he reneged on his promise to dissolve the Lower House in the near future. At the same time, Noda faced pressures from the public to pass the bills to issue deficit-financing bonds. Should DPJ fail to cooperate with LDP to pass the bills through the Diet by Octo-

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54 Yong-lim Hong, “‘하지만일로 54포로가 ‘미 쇼고기 수입’ 티어 [54% of the public votes ‘U.S. beef import’ as a mistake],” Chosun Ilbo, June 2, 2008, accessed November 1, 2012.

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ber 2012—when the government funds would likely be depleted—Noda expected much outcry from the public and the opposition party. 60 It is clear that by 2012, both Lee and Noda administrations were losing public support and control in party politics.

NORTH KOREAN THREAT

The Insult Diplomacy Model suggests that when both the Japanese and South Korean leaders sit rather poorly with the people and in their party, then the external threat of North Korea cannot ignite a close bilateral cooperation like the Kim-Obuchi coalition, because leaders with weak domestic bases have more difficulty pushing forward their desired foreign policy objectives through the domestic constituents. Such was the case of Japan-ROK relations in 2012.

After the North Korean sinking of Cheonan in March 2010, and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island on November 23, 2011, the domestically frail Lee and Noda administrations initially attempted a closer bilateral cooperation. These attempts included joint military exercises with a U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft in the Yellow Sea. South Korea and Japan also reached a civilian nuclear pact and an open skies agreement for civil aviation. 61 The two governments then began to consider bilateral sharing of military information, especially in regard to North Korea.

Unfortunately, the unruly domestic constituents of South Korea cut short further bilateral cooperation. When the ROK government publically revealed its plan to sign General Security of Military Information Act (GSOMIA) with Japan in June 2012, there was a sharp public objection in South Korea: survey polls in July of 2012 indicated that 61.2 percent of the public opposed the act. Lee’s approval rating declined to 28.2 percent in July. This was the third time his approval rating had fallen below 30 percent. 62 The Lee administration scrapped the plan to the embarrassment of both South Korea and Japan.

Aware of his weak domestic stance, Lee tried to garner the public’s support through a row of insult diplomacy with Japan. As the Insult Diplomacy Model implies, the rousing of nationalistic sentiments to boost domestic morale becomes a viable option when the North Korean threat has somewhat subsided. And indeed, South Korea’s general hostility to North Korea had reduced from 61.6 percent in 2011 to 45.5 percent in 2012. 63 If it was indeed Lee’s strategy to instigate nationalistic sentiment to boost his standing at home, it proved successful. After his visit to Takeshima/Dokdo and his demand for apology from the Japanese Emperor, the public approval rating for Lee rose from 17 percent in the first week of August to 20 percent in the second week, and to 26 percent in the third week. 64

Meanwhile, the Noda cabinet did not exactly sit on its hands and wait. Proving the theory that the underlying condition for relapse in Japan-ROK relations is the low perceived threat of North Korea, Japan had resumed bilateral meeting with North Korea by August 29, 2012, marking the first since the August of 2008. 65 The Japanese officials adopted more controversial measures to bolster their public standing, such as visiting the Yasukuni shrine.

In sum, the Insult Diplomacy Model explains that in times of high North Korea threat, the weak Lee-Noda administrations could not sustain bilateral cooperation through their domestic constituents (Quadrant III); in times of low North Korea threat, the two governments lost a major reason for bilateral cooperation, and the option of insult diplomacy loomed within reach as an easy way to improve one’s standing at home (Quadrant IV).

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS
NGOS AND PURE NATIONALISM

Rather than using the mechanism of the Insult Diplomacy Model to explain the cooperation and discords in Japan-ROK relations, some scholars argue that the growth of NGOs is the underlying factor behind the cooperation and disputes. The argument is that, with a growing movement of NGOs in both countries, the organizations are increasingly capable of lobbying and networking with the public, and can exert pressures on the governments. While true in some cases, the NGOs do not usually dictate government-level cooperation and disputes. There had been instances when NGOs’ promptings on historical or comfort women issues were ignored by the Japanese and South Korean governments, especially during times of intense bilateral cooperation. An example mentioned earlier in the paper can speak for itself. On September 23, 2000, the civil society known as The Korean Council For Women Drafted into Military Sexual Slavery by Japan petitioned to the ROK government to convince Japan against publishing the controversial textbooks. If the NGOs had the power to influence a major government action, then the South Korean government should have heeded this request. But on the contrary, President Kim Dae-jung proposed to Japan a trilateral cultural exchange between Japan, South Korea, and North Korea, and on September 25, President Kim and Prime Minister Mori agreed to conclude a Bilateral Investment Treaty by the end of the year. 66 The NGOs do not often determine government-level affairs, and the argument that the growth of NGOs serves as the answer for ups and downs in Japan-ROK relations remains insufficient.

Other scholars argue that it was the public’s nationalism and historical animosity that drove the nations apart at times. They would argue that the concept of GSOMIA was unacceptable for some South Koreans simply because it would mean a contract with Japan. If this argument were to hold true, then the decision to jointly hold World Cup 2002 should have led to public outcry, or there should have been cases where one government official or one player carried the patriotic sentiment a step too far in the games. This was not the case.

Throughout the planning for the World Cup in 2002, both governments worked hard to forgo self-seeking nationalistic sentiments and focused on bilateral cooperation. The two nations began the preparations by November of 2001, if not earlier, and by January 18, 2002, they resumed military exchanges and joint exercises that were suspended in the midst of insult diplomacy in the summer of 2001. Even when Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni shrine on April 21, 2002, South Korea and Japan steadfastly held the panel for joint history research committee the next day. 67 When the two governments genuinely desired close bilateral cooperation, nationalistic sentiments could not overtake government control and their policies.

Therefore, the dynamics of Japan-ROK relations are not conditional on NGOs or nationalistic feelings and historical animosities, but are contingent upon the conditions within which leaders choose to conduct insult diplomacy at the expense of bilateral relations—that is, whether the leaders are struggling to gain an upper hand in party politics and whether there is a North Korean threat to preclude the option of insult diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

Will the periodic insult diplomacy and ad-hoc agreements continue to define Japan-ROK relations? The answer depends on how long the two variables of the Insult Diplomacy Model will last. The tendency to resort of insult diplomacy will never be completely eliminated unless there is a deep structural reform to replace the current system of party politics in Japan and South Korea. As the party system is rooted in many other Asian and European countries, it seems unlikely that such a fundamental change will occur anytime soon.

In April 2013, Japan’s Ambassador to South Korea Koro Bessho rekindled the media’s attention to GSOMIA as he expressed Japan’s willingness to sign the military intelligence-sharing pact with South Korea to counter the recent North Korean ballistic missile test and nuclear test. 68 The prospect of resuming GSOMIA and other high-level cooperation is unclear, as South

66 Victor D. Cha, “What’s Behind the Smile?”
67 Victor D. Cha, “The Roller Coaster of Experiences.”
Korean President Park Geun-hye is in the process of consolidating her party standing at home. In a way, Park has already exhibited an inkling of insult diplomacy in the meeting with the U.S. Congress. In such a time as today when North Korea shows no sign of denuclearization, cooperative Japan-ROK relations is critical to the region's security, yet the actual implementation of such a cooperation would be highly conditional on President Park and Prime Minister Abe's stances among their people and their party politics at home.

THE PRICE OF RICE

THE PRICE OF RICE: AN EXAMINATION OF JAPAN’S POSTWAR AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

This paper closely examines existing scholarly explanations and empirical evidence to determine why the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan has continued to cater to domestic farmers throughout the postwar period despite the sector’s decreasing salience in national politics. It is evident that strong support for Japanese farmers as well as very gradual and limited attempts towards liberalization have been successfully carried out by the LDP due to the presence of several factors, including the nature of the Japanese electoral system that serves to favor rural districts, the power of the farm lobby, and the cultural significance of Japanese agriculture that allows for a domestic consensus that is amenable to this policy trend. This unique combination of factors has essentially allowed for a declining number of farmers to maintain a high degree of salience in national politics, survive decades of mounting pressure to open domestic markets and resist policy change despite remaining economically weak. Hence this research aims to provide a wide perspective on the changing nature of the agricultural sector in Japan, which is becoming less protected and no longer constitutes sacred ground in national politics that is off-limits to political criticism. This research also seeks to demonstrate how Japanese farmers are no longer powerful enough to continue forestalling increasing external pressures from globalization, and therefore proposes that the LDP eventually reorient national policy away from the rural sector towards urban majorities over the long term, even though this strategy would likely result in short-term electoral losses.

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently boasting the third-largest GDP in the world, the small island nation of Japan has deftly managed to overcome the widespread devastation that it experienced immediately following World War II and has since emerged as a veritable economic leviathan within the international community. This rapid economic success has been attributed to decades of dynamic growth that was fostered by the state’s focus on key sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, technology, and exports. Accordingly, the growth of the agricultural sector has fallen sharply behind that of other sectors of the national economy in recent years, which would ostensibly serve to diminish its role within the overall political landscape of Japan. And yet, the dominant political party throughout the postwar period, the LDP, has continued to cater to domestic farmers throughout the postwar period by advancing a framework of support and protection for Japanese farmers that has resulted in an increasingly uncompetitive agricultural sector that remains ill-equipped to compete at either a domestic or international level.

The root causes for this contradictory policy trend are not readily apparent given a number of considerations that are present in the case of Japan. For example, the size of the national agricultural electorate has gradually diminished over time as the sons and daughters of farm households have migrated to the cities and an increasingly aged farm population has abandoned the

Consequently the overall political and economic standing of the leading farmers’ organization, Japan Agriculture, is steadily collapsing due to declining rates of membership. Moreover, levels of agricultural representation in the Diet have plummeted as the number of LDP politicians linked to farming areas has decreased. And yet, despite the materialization of these unfavorable political circumstances that would seem to torment Japanese farmers, the LDP has maintained unyielding protection and support for the agricultural sector during its tenure. For this reason the postwar agricultural policies of the LDP demonstrate a unique framework that seeks to confer significant support and protection for a very narrow sector of the national economy and an even narrower sector of the country’s overall political landscape.

Therefore, the primary dependent variable that is going to be addressed in this paper is strong support for Japanese farmers by the LDP, as well as very gradual and limited attempts towards liberalization. In doing so I will argue that the LDP has continued to cater to the Japanese farm sector despite its decreasing salience in national politics in response to several factors, including the nature of the Japanese electoral system that serves to favor rural districts, the power of the farm lobby, and the cultural significance of Japanese agriculture that essentially allows for a domestic consensus that is amenable to this policy trend.

To that end I will first provide a brief historical analysis of how the Japanese government has treated domestic farmers in the past and how the LDP’s current agricultural policy stands in sharp contrast to this broader historical narrative. Second, I will address how the LDP has catered to domestic farmers by examining the ways in which protection and support has been bestowed upon the agricultural sector by way of farming subsidies, high import tariffs on agricultural products including rice, wheat, beef and poultry, dairy products,
and sugar, and a general reluctance to participate in multilateral free trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Third, I will present several independent variables to account for this contradictory policy trend, including the electoral system, the farm lobby, and the cultural significance of agriculture. Fourth, I will address more recent developments in Japan’s postwar agricultural policies, including the wave of agricultural reform that took place during the 1990s. Finally, I will discuss whether or not this particular policy trend involving protection and support for Japanese farmers is ultimately sustainable within the increasingly interconnected nature of the global economy.

II. A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT TREATMENT TOWARDS FARMERS IN JAPAN

The LDP’s paradoxical support for domestic farmers cannot be explained in terms of a historical linkage between the government and this particular sector simply because government treatment of farmers in Japan has not always been as favorable. Contrary to notions formed on a historical basis, the level of protection and support that is currently afforded Japanese farmers by the LDP stands in sharp contrast to the discriminatory treatment that farmers experienced during the Meiji Restoration. In fact, the agricultural sector faced severe discrimination throughout the Meiji Period from a government that appeared to place highest national priority on issues related to industrialization and military security as opposed to the narrow interest and welfare of the rural sector, which resulted in both disproportionately heavy taxation of and denial of benefits for domestic farmers. Even after WWII the Japanese government remained hesitant to grant protection and support to the rural sector until the growing need for domestic stability made such a strategy politically advantageous for conservatives.


5 Ibid.

Number of Farm Households in Japan 1990-2010

Consequently the overall political and economic standing of the leading farmers’
In this regard the LDP adeptly identified a niche in the postwar political landscape that prompted the party to pursue a unique strategy aimed at reversing the discrimination and neglect that Japanese farmers had faced throughout the prewar period. While the land reform carried out during the American occupation of Japan following WWII certainly played a role in the development of this policy trend given its ability to bring down a class structure that had been based upon landholding, this reform also inadvertently restructured Japan’s rural society in a way that made the farming population uniquely supportive of the ruling conservative party. This is because the reforms effectively transferred land ownership from landlords to tillers of the soil, allowing small tenant farmers to essentially become small owner-cultivators. This changeover served to abolish the dominance of landlords in Japanese society, and instead prompted a more equitable income and asset distribution across rural areas, thereby weakening the economic and political supremacy that landlords had enjoyed during the prewar period. It is important to note that such reform, though innovative, was fundamentally driven by exogenous forces via the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers as opposed to endogenous forces via the LDP. Nevertheless, this distinct strategy of catering to farmers remains just as salient within the realm of Japanese politics today, as agriculture continues to be a central source of the LDP’s postwar political dominance.

The necessity of this strategy aimed at catering to farmers was partly due to the fact that the mass base of the LDP had not been predefined or fixed, and therefore the party was immediately tasked with identifying and winning mass bases of support in order to win electoral majorities. In this context winning the farm vote became especially important for the electoral success of the LDP, given that the postwar land reforms established a large number of swing voters in the form of new masses of smallholder farmers. In contrast, the urban middle classes were viewed as a politically weak group that tended to vote left throughout the early postwar period. This pragmatic strategy aimed towards winning the farm vote effectively enabled the LDP to organize farmers, marginalize urban interests and labor, and use the political space gained by these actions in order to consolidate the new conservative regime.

III. EXAMINING THE LDP’S RECORD OF PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR DOMESTIC FARMERS DURING THE POSTWAR PERIOD (1945-1990)

The LDP has advanced a political and economic agenda that has bestowed a number of unique benefits on the agricultural sector throughout the postwar period. Such benefits have subtly manifested themselves in a number of ways, including the deployment of farming subsidies, a favorable tax status towards farmers, the continuation of high import tariffs on agricultural products, and a general reluctance by the Japanese government to make concessions in multilateral agreements. However, the most noticeable policy trend carried out by the conservative coalition has been the increased protection and support for rice, a commodity that constitutes nearly half of Japan’s domestic agricultural output by value.

The enormously high and steadily rising price of rice remains among Japan’s most striking policy trends in the agricultural sector. Because the consumer price does not equal the producer price, the consequences of this policy trend are discernible not only domestically but internationally as well. For example, in Japan the steadily high prices of rice have often resulted in a huge surplus, which in the 1980s created the political necessity for a consumer subsidy that cost the national government $585 million in 1984 alone. Additionally, the complex price support system that Japan currently employs has been in place since the 1960s and has served to protect domestic farmers whilst reducing incentives for improvements in productivity. To that end, the LDP

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6 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 33.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Calder, 236.
has kept the producer price of rice at a comparably high level by purchasing rice from producers at a support price\(^\text{13}\), thus encouraging small-scale part-time farmers who often encounter high production costs as opposed to larger farms often associated with lower production costs. This continued emphasis on small-scale farming accounts for the relatively high level of production costs in Japan and massive deployment of government subsidies aimed to curtail domestic rice production. From an international standpoint, the widening gap between the domestic and global price for rice has created mounting economic and political pressure from abroad for Japan to liberalize its markets. \(^\text{14}\)

This pattern of overt and continuing protectionism aimed at domestic farmers stands in sharp contrast to a number of far more rapidly changing policies that the Japanese government has implemented with respect to trade in manufactured goods, especially in regards to tariffs and quotas. \(^\text{15}\) This contrast is particularly noticeable between agricultural protectionism and LDP policy regarding certain commodity industrial projects, such as cotton textiles. However a number of scholars have been quick to point out that the textile industry is not considered strategic to Japan's industrial future and therefore lacks powerful domestic political constituencies. \(^\text{16}\)

In addition to generous price support programs and high levels of agricultural protection, the LDP has also aided Japanese farmers in a number of indirect ways, as redistributive support for relatively low-income agricultural groups has been a hallmark of progressive public policies throughout the LDP's tenure. This is perhaps best made evident by the low rates of taxation on agricultural land, which has effectively allowed farmers in suburban areas to shelter huge amounts of real estate from taxation until an ideal time for sale. \(^\text{17}\) Additionally, most of the LDP's heavy public works spending has been concentrated towards rural areas in an effort to channel employment for farmers. Another subtle yet effective mean of protection can be found in the exceptionally favorable income tax treatment conferred upon the rural sector by the LDP throughout the postwar period, which has effectively allowed Japanese farmers to shield much of their income from the government.

### IV. Existing Explanations for Continued LDP Support and Protection for Farmers

#### 1. The Nature of the Japanese Electoral System Under the '55 System

A preeminent explanation for continued LDP support and protection for domestic farmers lies in the nature of the Japanese electoral system, in which the LDP remains critically dependent upon electoral support from rural communities to stay in power. This is largely because rural communities, despite having far lower population shares than urban areas, remain over-represented and tend to vote more consistently with the LDP. Furthermore, even though farmers represent less than twelve percent of the overall population and only a fourth of them actually farm full-time, the nature of the multi-member electoral system has placed a premium on organized voters that tend to vote in a predictable manner. \(^\text{18}\)

Certainly Japan's agricultural sector is characterized by a dense and highly organized “old middle class” social structure that makes it particularly well suited to serve as the hard vote for conservatives. \(^\text{19}\) This is evident by the fact that approximately eighty percent of Japanese farmers voted for the LDP in the 1980s, \(^\text{20}\) thereby supplying nearly one quarter of the LDP's support base during that period. These factors have effectively provided Japanese farmers with a level of political influence that far exceeds what their numbers alone would traditionally suggest \(^\text{21}\) because the LDP's heavy reliance upon votes from the agricultural sector has allowed Japanese farmers to play a disproportionate role in domestic political processes. \(^\text{22}\)

Therefore, I argue that the farming community’s pre-

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\(^{13}\) This support price refers to a government subsidy system known as the gentan, which has effectively paid Japanese landowners to reduce crops since 1970.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 120.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 240.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
dictable voting patterns partly account for the LDP’s continued willingness to forego long-term economically beneficial reforms in favor of appeasing its core constituency and achieving short-term electoral success at the polls. The organization of the Japanese farming community is starkly contrasted with the new middle class in Japan, which is marked by low levels of organization, low interest in politics, diffused policy demands, limited participation in party organizations, and a general lack of interest group advocates. 23 Hence, this unorganized, uncommitted, and unstable new middle class vote stands in sharp contrast to the hard vote that has consistently been supplied by the Japanese farming sector.

2. The Cultural Significance of Japanese Agriculture

Another explanation for continued LDP protection and support for domestic farmers points to the role of agriculture in the traditions and culture of Japan, which some argue extends to the very beginnings of recorded history. This is perhaps best illustrated by the paddy fields of Japan, which seem to be the definitive image within the domestic agricultural sector where rice is grown with great care and attention on small plots that are each painstakingly cleared, leveled, and watered.24 From this perspective the cultural significance of rice can be linked to the country’s damp and mountainous topography that contains a noticeable absence of pasture or arable land, all of which points to a strong national emphasis on small plots of vigilantly cared-for land.

While the continued productivity and abundance of rice has indeed remained crucial for the well-being of the population throughout much of Japanese history, an explanation predicated upon cultural significance cannot alone account for the continued support and protection of other agricultural commodities that do not enjoy a similar level of historical import such as wheat, dairy products, and sugar. Nevertheless, the status of rice within the national cultural landscape remains secure despite the fact that Japan no longer depends on the rice paddy for its survival. Therefore, I argue that the deeply rooted cultural significance of rice serves to foster a strong domestic consensus for preserving the physical, cultural and traditional aspects of agriculture, thereby allowing the LDP to expend considerable resources in order to do so.

3. The Power of the Farm Lobby

Another common explanation for continued LDP protection and support for domestic farmers points to the power of the national farm lobby as led by Japan Agriculture, which demonstrates several key characteristics. First, it is highly unified and organized within a single dominant grouping that consists of a three-tiered organization of national, prefectural, and local level agricultural cooperative groups. 25 Second, its membership encompasses the vast majority of farmers and is strongly secured by its all-encompassing economic, social, and community role in farming areas. 26 Third, it does not embody a traditional lobby group that merely seeks to influence legislation in favor of a specific cause. 27

Therefore, the term “farm lobby” itself does not fully capture the unique features of the representation of agricultural interests in Japan, largely because such a definition presupposes that the government and farm lobby act as two separate institutions, whereas in the case of Japan there has been considerable overlap. 28 For example, while Japan Agriculture outwardly urges politicians and bureaucrats to create policy that is favorable towards farmers, it has in some respects actually functioned as part of the government’s administrative and policymaking apparatus.

29 Moreover, while Japan Agriculture officially remains politically neutral it has in fact functioned as the largest electoral support organization for the LDP throughout the postwar period. 30 The continued electoral support of the farm lobby has effectively translated into LDP dependence on the farm vote and an increase in the overall power of Japan Agriculture as a vote-gath-

23 Bullock, 186.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
ering organization. As a result of this steady increase in power the LDP has incurred an electoral debt to farmers throughout the postwar period, which explains one of the principal reasons as to why the government has continued to cater to farmers despite the group’s decreasing salience in the overall political landscape of Japan.

Consequently, pressure from the Japanese farm lobby has focused primarily on policies that affect farm incomes, namely agricultural support, stabilization prices, and other types of agricultural subsidies including those for the provision of farm infrastructure.\(^3\) However, one of the most sensitive policy-related issues for Japan Agriculture has been bilateral and regional free trade agreements surrounding agricultural trade liberalization and associated market access at the World Trade Organization.\(^3\) This is because the policy position of Japan Agriculture has consistently been to resist any further lowering of import tariffs on agricultural products due to the threat that it ostensibly poses to domestic agricultural prices.\(^3\) To that end agricultural organizations such as Japan Agriculture have utilized their political influence in order to exact adverse state policies that include a virtual ban on rice imports that was partially lifted in 1993 and a state-set rice price that is approximately seven to twelve times that found on global markets.\(^3\)

V. Recent Developments: Addressing Post-1990 Efforts Towards Reform

It would be amiss to attempt to account for the LDP’s continued protection and support of the Japanese farm sector without taking into account the veritable wave of reforms that took place throughout the 1990s. This includes the electoral reform of 1994 that aimed to reduce electoral malapportionment favoring rural areas,\(^3\) the Uruguay Round that was considered virtually synonymous with agricultural liberalization,\(^3\) and the Food Supply Law of 1995 that sought to implement drastic deregulation of the farming sector. However, while such reform efforts should have collectively served to weaken the political influence of Japanese farmers, the agricultural sector remains as heavily supported and protected as ever by the LDP.

Because the nature of the multi-member electoral system placed a premium on organized voters such as farmers that would vote in a predictable manner, the political power of domestic farmers was indeed a central target of the 1994 electoral reforms that sought to substantially reduce malapportionment favoring rural districts.\(^3\) Additionally, Japanese involvement in the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture was depicted in domestic media reportage as being virtually synonymous with rice market liberalization.\(^3\) While this particular reform effort did aim to reduce the market-distorting domestic support for agriculture and convert all import restrictions to a single, measurable, transparent indicator (tariffs), the punitive nature of the tariff arrangements that were put into place effectively meant that import quantities of certain agricultural commodities failed to increase after liberalization and in some cases even declined.\(^3\) Thus, implementing the market access provisions of the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture and the tariffication of rice imports only served to change the regulatory structure governing agricultural imports by substituting quantitative import barriers with tariffs.\(^3\) Furthermore, the minimum access formula\(^3\) for rice imports that Japan accepted as part of the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture represented only a very minor concession and failed to demonstrate a larger willingness to undergo necessary change.

Similarly, the introduction of the Food Supply Law in 1995 was aimed to free up the farm sector through drastic deregulation by essentially treating rice as a normal commodity as opposed to sacred commodity.\(^3\) However, Japan has

\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Bullock, 182.
\(^3\) Mulgan, Aurelia George. “The Farm Lobby.”
\(^3\) Bullock, 176.
deftly proven that domestic market liberalization does not necessarily translate into deregulation. For example, while the Food Supply Law of 1995 was promoted as introducing market principles into the realm of rice agriculture by essentially allowing prices to reflect the basic laws of supply and demand, this reform essentially allowed the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) to redefine its control over the rice economy by way of regulation. Therefore, this moderate attempt at reform not only failed in its initial objective of making Japanese rice competitive on the global market, but also allowed Japanese farmers to enjoy more protection and support than ever.

These limited efforts to implement agricultural reform both individually and collectively demonstrate how agricultural policy in Japan appears to be undergoing a process that can only be described as reform regression, in which the methods by which agricultural support and protection are delivered have changed while the overall level of government intervention has not. These failed attempts also demonstrate how agricultural reform in Japan has occurred in a far more gradual and incremental manner than would likely be expected, especially given the antipathetic policy environment and overall perception of wasteful spending that was prevalent throughout the 1970s and 1980s. For instance, these decades presented an unprecedented level of hostility towards agricultural support and protection and yet the gap between the rhetoric of LDP policy to implement necessary structural reform and the actual reality of policy outcomes remain wide. Therefore, I argue that the process of agricultural reform in Japan throughout the postwar period has served to demonstrate far more resistance to change by the LDP than an acceptance and willingness to implement necessary change aimed at achieving long-term economic growth and productivity.

CONTINUED RESISTANCE TO STRUCTURAL REFORM

The national farm lobby by way of Japan Agriculture remains a chief obstacle towards realizing meaningful agricultural reform, as this organization has consistently and effectively utilized its political and economic power to block reform efforts throughout the postwar period. Specifically, it has opposed structural reforms aimed towards establishing large-scale farms that would encourage a shift towards corporate-style farming operated on a business basis. This is largely because Japan Agriculture has developed a vested interest in small scale, part-time farming given that the individuals involved in this particular type of farming remain the principal source of the organization’s economic and political power. Hence, any meaningful attempts towards engaging in structural reform would be antithetical to the success of the organization itself, as it would inevitably reduce the membership of Japan Agriculture as well as farmers’ patronage of its services, thereby shrinking its revenue. Furthermore, because of the one-member-one-vote system that Japan Agriculture employs and given the fact that this relatively small and unrepresentative group comprises a majority of the organization’s membership, the narrowly held views of small-scale and part-time farmers remains strongly reflected in the overall business priorities and policy interests of the organization.

Japan Agriculture also shares a common policy standpoint with MAFF and the LDP in terms of maintaining a vested interest in the continuation of small-scale farming. This claim is made evident by MAFF’s continuous efforts to maximize government intervention in the agricultural sector in terms of its own regulatory and budgetary powers. Additionally, in pursuit of the LDP’s goal to stay in power, conservative politicians have remained excessively concerned with winning the votes of small-scale farmers given that they form a significant portion of the rural vote.

IS THIS POLICY TREND SUSTAINABLE? EXAMINING FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC PRESSURES FOR CHANGE

The continued support and protection of Japanese

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
THE PRICE OF RICE

farmers by way of high tariffs surrounding certain agricultural commodities seems particularly bewildering considering that Japan is a nation whose wealth has largely been achieved due to trade and the exploitation of its comparative advantage. Hence, it should come as no surprise that this policy trend has served to hinder Japan's national economic growth in a number of ways. Ever since external pressures in the form of gaiatsu were applied to strong-arm the Japanese government into opening its domestic markets, the LDP has been forced to address external pressures for liberalization and, to some extent, accommodate the interests of foreign agricultural exporters. Moreover, in an era of globalization it is becoming increasingly important for the LDP to demonstrate an internationally defensible agricultural trade policy.

Instead, the LDP is finding itself increasingly constrained by the requirement to observe the membership obligations of international rules-based trading institutions such as the WTO. In this regard the legitimacy of LDP policy with respect to both domestic and international trading communities remains largely dependent upon its observance of the internationally agreed upon rules of trade. However, this presents a fundamental dilemma for the LDP, as it is on the one hand required to promote and preserve agricultural support and protection in order to stay in power, while on the other hand it must be seen as adopting policies that are ultimately in accordance with the goals of its major trading partners.

Moreover, the LDP has faced international pressure since the 1970s and 1980s to open Japan's markets to foreign competition. From this perspective, some would argue that LDP policies have begun to shift away from protecting agriculture in an effort to accommodate the interests of Japan's most important trading partners such as the United States. The United States has indeed been aggressive in its demands for domestic rice market liberalization, and LDP leadership has gradually opened the citrus and beef markets and has hinted at opening the rice market.

In addition to the prevalence of foreign pressure aimed at liberalizing Japanese agriculture as outlined above, there currently exists a number of domestic pressures that also serve to encourage such reform. With Japan's ongoing economic difficulties brought about by the recession, it should come as no surprise that agricultural subsidies and protection programs have come under fire, as agriculture is routinely becoming singled out for its extreme dependence on state support. For example, because agriculture remains a government-managed and subsidized industry in Japan, the subsidies that are distributed by the LDP to farmers in an effort to narrowly protect their income has managed to attract newfound criticism.

This weary sentiment of the national electorate was perhaps best illustrated by the resounding victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) during the lower house election of 2009, which signaled a significant step towards a new political environment in which the farm lobby would face increasing pressure to assume a less partisan position. While the DPJ in fact targeted farmers during the 2007 Lower House elections, it aimed to formulate an agricultural policy during its brief tenure that was free of the vested interests that marked the old, established agricultural policy iron triangle.

This strategy inevitably meant the loss of the close ties between the farm lobby and the Japanese government, as well as the automatic policy access and influence of the agricultural sector. Thus, the DPJ sought to actively pursue nationally oriented policies that were intended to both destroy the agricultural cooperatives as an electoral support base for the LDP and to remove a

52 The term gaiatsu refers to any type of foreign pressure that is placed on Japan by other nations, often inducing Japan to enact policies it would not otherwise enact.
54 Ibid, Ibid.
55 Ibid, Ibid.
56 Ramseyer, 56.
57 Bullock, 184.
58 Ramseyer, 193.
59 Bullock, 185.
62 The agricultural policy iron triangle refers to the strong relationship that was forged during the post-WWII era between the LDP, the agricultural sector, and the Japanese bureaucracy.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
potential obstacle towards achieving agricultural policy change in the future.

Although the DPJ sought to undermine the political and economic power of Japanese farmers in national politics in an effort to break the enduring ties between the agricultural sector and the LDP as well as to fundamentally alter the political climate that had characterized decades of uninterrupted LDP rule, its ambitious agenda ultimately failed and the conservative commitment to protecting the agricultural sector has only since increased. 65 Any efforts by the DPJ to undermine this power have been swiftly reversed by the LDP, namely in the form of massive farm subsidy packages. 66

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL REFORM

Outwardly, the LDP under the Abe administration has vowed to carry out a number of structural reforms that would increase the competitiveness of the farm sector. For example, the LDP has engaged in negotiations regarding the TPP, a multilateral trade agreement aimed at eliminating tariffs and trade barriers between member states. While the LDP is expected to come under extreme foreign pressure to make certain concessions on agricultural products during negotiations, the party has thus far vowed to protect certain agricultural products as “sanctuaries,” and appears to remain primarily concerned with protecting the interests of domestic farmers who fear that a multilateral free trade agreement such as the TPP will generate an influx of cheaper imports and threaten their livelihood.

However, a decision by the Japanese government to lower or eliminate import tariffs on any of the five sacred agricultural products (including rice, wheat, beef and poultry, dairy products, and sugar) remains highly unlikely, as the LDP has instead pledged to continue protecting these agricultural commodities. Nevertheless, involvement in the TPP would complement Abe’s three-tiered economic policy aimed at revitalizing the national economy, as trade liberalization would facilitate his broader plan to reform the agricultural sector. However, it is important to note that any liberalization efforts to be carried out in accordance with the TPP could be combined with compensation, as was the case of the DPJ’s farm income policy in 199467 that proposed to offer direct income compensation to all commercial farm households in an effort to drive a wedge between the LDP and its rural constituency.

Even though engaging in multilateral trade agreements such as the TPP would spur a shift towards economic competitiveness in Japan, there currently remains fervent domestic opposition to continued negotiations in the form of agricultural lobbyists who seek to avoid any potential damage to their livelihood. Such opposition has proven quite powerful thus far, which was made evident by the LDP’s pledge to promptly withdraw from TPP negotiations if the five agricultural sanctuaries were not to be defended. This guarantee was made just prior to the Upper House elections that took place in July 2013, and was therefore likely prompted by the LDP’s fear of a potential electoral backlash from powerful agricultural lobbying groups. This implies that appeasing the agricultural sector in order to ensure an electoral victory remains the LDP’s central objective as opposed to engaging in meaningful structural reforms.

From an international perspective the TPP is often viewed as the vehicle for implementing necessary domestic change in Japan. Although the Abe administration has itself indicated that the TPP is a key feature of its requisite “third arrow” policies 68 relating to pro-economic growth, it is estimated that any reforms agreed upon by the LDP will do little, if anything, to make Japanese agriculture a more competitive sector. 69 This is largely because any such policy changes will be based on a proposal by the MAFF instead of the suggestion by members of the Industrial Competitiveness Council to end rice acreage reductions altogether. 70 Alternatively, a proposal made by the Industrial Competitiveness Council would have allowed domestic rice prices to fall, whereas the actual outcome simply substitutes the current price maintenance system with another one.

66 Mulgan, Aurelia George. “Farm Reform Shell Game.”
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
Instead, the LDP has reasserted its stance of not permitting tariffs to be abolished on key agricultural items, and continues to pursue policies that obstruct tariff liberalization by making domestically produced rice uncompetitive against lower-priced imports. In this regard, artificially high domestic prices for rice remain the biggest obstacle to eliminating rice import tariffs and improving overall economic efficiency.

Ultimately, the current agricultural policies in Japan are primarily concerned with the manner in which the government supports and protects domestic farmers, and not with reducing either agricultural subsidies or import barriers. The Abe administration has merely rearranged farm policy measures in an effort to engineer the appearance of reform, rather than engage in any substantive reform. For these reasons the fundamental principle of government intervention in agriculture has not yet come under attack, nor has the overall level of government intervention and its cost to the average Japanese taxpayer.

Even so, it is important to note that Japanese farmers only represent a small segment of the country’s economic interests, and therefore the LDP should move forward with TPP negotiations and broader economic reforms even if it means breaking ties with key constituencies in the process. In addition, reducing import tariffs and eliminating trade barriers, as would be required under the TPP, would effectively force the LDP to end long held domestic protections for inefficient and uncompetitive sectors of the economy, which would help spur a shift towards long-term high economic growth. While such a strategy would likely weaken the LDP’s political favorability in the short-term with a core constituency, it could also reinvigorate the LDP as a more consumerist urban party and provide a powerful impetus for the kinds of domestic changes that are necessary in order to return to global economic competitiveness. In this regard, there are many reasons for the LDP to overcome the internal pressures that have long since prevented much-needed structural reforms from being implemented.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is evident that strong support for Japanese farmers as well as very gradual and limited attempts at liberalization have been successfully carried out by the LDP despite the sector’s decreasing salience in national politics due to the presence of several factors. This includes the nature of the Japanese electoral system that serves to favor rural districts, the power of the farm lobby, and the cultural significance of Japanese agriculture that allows for a domestic consensus that is amenable to this policy trend. It is precisely this unique combination of factors that has essentially allowed for a declining number of farmers to maintain a high degree of salience in national politics. For this reason the agricultural sector has managed to survive decades of mounting pressure to open domestic markets and resist policy change despite remaining economically weak.

This was made evident throughout the postwar period through generous price support programs and high levels of agricultural protection, coupled with redistributive support for relatively low-income agricultural groups and low rates of taxation on agricultural land. Furthermore, the period of greater political and policy change that took place during the 1990s and beyond serves to demonstrate far more resistance to change by the LDP than an acceptance and willingness to implement necessary change aimed at achieving long-term economic growth and productivity. At present, while the LDP’s ongoing efforts to resist necessary reform serve to benefit the electoral interests of the party, I argue that these incentives simply cannot replace a national production strategy in the long term.

Additionally, the continued protection and support as provided by the LDP indicates the existence of a mutually beneficial relationship between the Japanese government and the agricultural sector. In this regard the distributional payoffs by the LDP to Japanese farmers constitute mutually beneficial exchanges between fundamentally rational and self-interested actors. There will always be mounting pressure for change and the terms of this unique relationship will be subject to constant negotiation, but these pressures do not necessarily

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Bullock, 194.
79 Calder, 240.
80 Bullock, 194.
indicate that meaningful reform will take place.

Even so, the fundamental problem with such agreements is that they are prone to break down, as they are subject to demands to renegotiate terms, outside attack, and a range of additional pressures to undergo change. This fundamental political reality is evident as Japan's dominant conservative coalition has largely persisted throughout the postwar period and yet pressures for change have only increased. In particular, conservative elites have faced increasing pressure to shift away from agriculture and towards the new middle classes of urban elites.

Therefore it is evident that the agricultural sector in Japan is becoming less secure and no longer constitutes sacred ground in national politics that is off-limits to political criticism. The LDP should recognize that Japanese farmers are not powerful enough to continue forestalling increasing external pressures emanating from globalization, and therefore must eventually reorient national policy away from the rural sector towards Japan's urban majorities over the long term, even though this strategy would likely result in short-term electoral losses.

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
“I have no interest in normal humans. If there are any aliens, time travelers, sliders, or espers here… join me!”

This bold declaration made by Suzumiya Haruhi to her classmates on the first day of high school is met with complete silence and more than a few questionable looks in her direction. Our narrator (and the audience proxy) Kyon, can’t figure out if the beautiful girl in the seat behind him is joking or not, but knows that meeting this girl is more than mere coincidence. And so begins The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi (Suzumiya Haruhi no Yuutsui), the first light novel in a series of eleven that revolve around Suzumiya Haruhi and her strange ability to manipulate the world at her whim. Eleven books based on the same character is certainly a sign of success, but it does not stop there, as the Haruhi universe has since expanded to include two anime seasons (for a total of 28 episodes), four separate manga series (totaling 35 volumes), two online anime series (with 38 episodes averaging 2-8 minutes in length), a feature length film, four radio drama CDs, and eight video games (across 6 platforms). This is in addition to commercial tie-ins with Lotte gum, Asahi coffee, and Pokka fruit juice (to name a few), as well as official character goods including countless figurines, t-shirts, towels, and tissue boxes. In addition Haruhi can be found in the extensive and exciting fan-made scene. Doujinshi (a term meaning a work produced by like-minded people) of the Suzumiya Haruhi universe are ever present at events like Comic Market, the Mecca of anime and manga culture, held twice annually at the Tokyo Big Sight convention center in Odaiba, Tokyo. Devoted fans create their own stories based on Haruhi and her world, selling them at Comic Market to other fans in the form of manga, illustration sets, video games or any other medium in which the fans wish to work. This inundation of “Haruhiism” is part of a marketing strategy employed by media conglomerate Kadokawa Shōten, which Marc Steinberg has dubbed the “anime media mix.” How is this concept different from other mixed media products like Harry Potter, for example? How is this “anime media mix” unique to the Japanese context? And how does Suzumiya Haruhi leap through media? To get there, I will first look at the origins of this particular media mix, which date back to the origins of anime and manga as we know them today – to Tetsuwan Atomu, known here in North America as Astro Boy.
Atomu, was launched in 1951 following the adventures of a robot boy, Atom, made to replace the deceased son of Dr. Tenma. The manga proved successful, but it was not until the animated television series in 1963 that we begin to see the power of the media mix. On January 1st, 1963, Tetsuwan Atomu took to the airwaves, eventually reaching 40% of the television audience in Japan on a weekly basis. It saw “the installation of character merchandising and the dissemination of the character image into the lives of Japanese children, and eventually, citizens of all ages.”¹ Seizing on the popularity of the Atom character, the Meiji Seika Company struck up a relationship with Mushi Productions, the animation company behind Tetsuwan Atomu that was run by Tezuka himself. Meiji’s product was Marble Chocolates, an M&M- or Smarties-style chocolate, which was aimed at children who would likely be watching the Tetsuwan Atomu anime. The chocolate would appear occasionally in the anime, and Atom would be featured prominently in all marketing for Marble chocolates. This led to a hugely successful sticker campaign in the summer of 1963, where inside the Marble chocolate containers were stickers of Atom and characters of the Tetsuwan Atomu universe. The proliferation of this character’s image through different media – from the original manga, to anime, to Marble chocolate – hit on something that is particularly powerful in the anime media mix. The continuity of Atom’s image is a key component of the anime media mix formula. Manga are laid out in storyboard-style panels guiding you through a scene using only a few images to tell an entire story. Tezuka saw his Tetsuwan Atomu anime as “the manga image as moving image,”² and with that image employed filmic techniques to create that effect. This included filming the anime at a maximum of 8 frames of animation per second (in some cases even less) – a far cry from the 12 to 18-frame average for animation. With the limited frame approach, characters are left in a temporary stasis, with their character model not changing, remaining static on screen, and often striking trademark poses for a longer period of time. Tezuka also used stop-images (where a single frame would be held for close-ups or crowd scenes), as well as deftly employing pull-cels (where a single image is pulled across a background) and repetition creating movement loops from the lowest number of images necessary. By making Atom’s movements not fluid, his image becomes more powerful through its repetition, repeatedly exposing viewers to specific poses that then become synonymous with the character. When he strikes a pose and holds it, and when that same image is then later used in a Meiji Chocolate ad campaign, Atom bridges the gap from anime to advertisement with the consistency of his character image. This play between Atom’s seeming immobility and the ease with which he can migrate between media worlds is what sets anime apart, a characteristic that Thomas LaMarre alludes to, stating, “Attention to movement in anime potentially leads beyond aesthetics to considerations of experience and spectatorship, and what is sometimes called cultures of consumption.”³ This “dynamically immobile anime image,”⁴ and its relation between motion and stillness, is echoed by Steinberg as “the condition of possibility for its communication with other images and media-commodities, which in turn bound the world of daily consumption closer than ever to that of media consumption.”⁵

From Tezuka Osamu and the world of Tetsuwan Atomu, we shift our attention to giant media conglomerate Kadokawa Shōten, which adopted a philosophy of promoting a character, or possibly a franchise, in their “holy trinity”⁶ of media – print, film and music. In the years following the war, Japan shifted towards a consumer society, largely influenced by American practices. In a capitalist society, there is production and consumption, but there must be something that mediates the space between the two, and this is where marketing comes in. Initially, the media mix in Japan was focused solely on the marketing of products through specific media. There was only one goal in this mix – purchase of the product. The medium acts only as a vehicle and has no relation to the product; it functions as a promotional

² Ibid., 14.
⁴ Steinberg, 33.
⁵ Ibid., 36.
⁶ Ibid., 150.
tool towards an end point of consumption. As for the difference between a marketing media mix and the anime media mix, Steinberg notes, “The anime media mix has no single goal or teleological end; the general consumption of any of the media mix’s products will grow the entire enterprise.” An example may be necessary to illustrate what this difference is, so I will point to the ongoing Progressive Insurance advertisements featuring the character Flo, first seen in 2008. Flo can be seen on TV, in a magazine, or on a poster at a bus stop, but there is no world for her outside of selling you insurance. She exists exclusively to sell you insurance. Though there is certainly fan fiction of Flo (which can be found with relative ease online), it is not recognized as being part of any official narrative for the character. On the other hand, Atom might be selling Marble Chocolate in a television commercial or in a print ad, but his world does not end there. He can also be found in manga, anime, or as character goods sold in toy stores. His world is one that transcends the bounds of the medium in which he finds himself – he inhabits the world of the manga, but is also connected to the world of the anime. Kadokawa Shoten seized on this idea to promote commodities across media, wherein the goal was for consumers to experience any part of the commodity’s universe.

Kadokawa expanded from a book publishing company to include film production in 1976, and their transition into a multimedia firm began. The idea was that films would be made based on books published under the Kadokawa Books label, and that the novel would work as advertisement for the film, and vice versa. In addition, Kadokawa would produce the soundtracks of the films and release them alongside the novel and film. One such case was the popular story The Girl Who Leapt Through Time (Toki wo Kakeru Shōjo), a novel about a girl who gains the ability to travel back in time (and also the inspiration for the title of this very paper). The novel was released in 1967 and was made into a film in 1983. A second film was made in 1997 and a feature length anime was made in 2006. At the time of each of the film projects, the book would be re-released featuring cover art from the movie; a soundtrack would round out the trinity. The idea still behind this was that consuming any part of this multimedia assault would be considered a strengthening of the franchise, and they were all cross marketed to be enjoyed in any order. Steinberg calls this approach, as well as the social and medial transformations wrought from it, “a shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of capital accumulation and media practice.” In other words, a move from consumer desire of the durable goods that constitute a certain lifestyle, to the consumption of experiential or cultural goods through which a consumer can participate in narrative and character worlds, thus producing new channels of social communication. This participatory aspect takes shape in the form of doujinshi, or fan-made projects, and events where fans gather to circulate their own unique narratives created by them for characters they love.

Before delving further into fan culture, which adds another element to the anime media mix, it is time to return to our so-called “Girl Who Leaps Through Media,” Suzumiya Haruhi. Author Tanigawa Nagaru wrote a light novel in 2003, published by Kadokawa, called The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi, featuring a girl who has the ability to manipulate (and essentially rewrite the narrative of) the entire world at her whim. The book was well received, but did not make a large impact until an anime was commissioned in 2006. According to the theory of Gilles Deleuze, this newfound popularity is no surprise, as “the second origin is more important than the first, since it gives us the law of repetition, the law of the series, whose first origin gave us only moments.” Steinberg states that by simply changing the word origin with iteration this statement accurately describes how the anime media mix works. By presenting us with a second version of something, this second version retroactively takes away the origin status of the first iteration and, instead, consigns it to just one part of the world’s narrative. In the case of Haruhi, with the release of the anime, her light novel origins become only a piece, or segment, of the Haruhi universe. The best mediator of

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7 Ibid., 141.
9 Steinberg, 153.
10 Deleuze, Gilles. Desert Islands and Other Texts. ,13.
11 Steinberg, 161.
these different segments is the character of Haruhi herself, as she takes us between the segments that make up her world so that we may see how the manga and the anime are both part of her world. Once it is established that there are segments of Haruhi’s world fragmented across media (which in 2006 included a manga adaptation and a plethora of character goods in addition to the anime and light novels), it is the link between media that becomes a key driving force for consumption – the link being, in this case, the character of Haruhi herself. The idea that Suzumiya Haruhi is the driving force of her world comes as no surprise to Ian Condry, who, upon interviewing various anime creators, came to the conclusion that “the story was often a secondary concern... it was only one element...” and more central to the creation of a new anime project was “the design of characters, the establishment of dramatic premises that link the characters, and the properties that define the world in which the characters interact.” This sentiment was echoed by people I interviewed in Japan about anime preferences, with many respondents mentioning Condry’s three key components – character (kyarakutaa), setting (settei) and worlds (sekaikan) – as determining factors in choosing which shows they would watch. With less emphasis on story, where does narrative lie in the anime media mix? Condry agrees with Henry Jenkins that the consumer plays a part in the creative process, as transmedia storytelling relies heavily on a spirit of “collaborative creativity,” to be successful, which Jenkins lays out with seven tenets: 

**World Building** – How use of different media builds the grand narrative of a world  
**Seriality** – How the fictional world has a narrative, even though its main points might be dispersed across media  
**Subjectivity** – How the viewer is given multiple perspectives, perhaps from secondary characters, to enhance the world  
**Performance** – How fans can insert their own contributions

Though not every one of these points is present at all times in a transmedia world, they do offer fans the opportunity to engage with the world in a way that is not limited to being a spectator.

In the case of Suzumiya Haruhi, there is certainly a focus on the subjectivity of secondary characters, as we commonly gain insight into how the alien girl, Nagato Yuki, sees Haruhi’s universe, or how the time traveler Asahina Mikuru attempts to affect Haruhi’s world by making narrator/proxy Kyon aware of future events. There are also two spin-off manga series that follow secondary characters, not only giving us key narrative points presented in another medium, but also allowing for additional subject positions that further enhance the world of Haruhi. And there is the possibility for fans to find sites of performance in which to add their own narrative to the world. In one story arc that takes place in the second season of the series, known infamously as “Endless Eight,” the main characters are enjoying their summer vacation, but just as it draws to a close, the anime delivers eight episodes of the same events, with only slight differences in each. This makes a good case for Jenkins’ Drillability tenet, as fans watched more intently with each passing episode in an effort to spot differences. This also allowed for fan narratives to be inserted. This is because the endless loop is repeated more than eight times, as revealed by the character Nagato Yuki, who retains her memories through each iteration of the world – a total of 15,532 loops before the characters find a solution that sets them free. (It is interesting to note that in the original light novel, the characters solve the mystery on the 15,498th attempt.) Alex Zahlten proposes that this

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12 Condry, Ian. The Soul of Anime. () .  
repetition and variation creates a “system that is part of the ongoing and increasing interlinking with fan labor. The modular structure of various loops provides an ideal pattern for allowing fans to produce their own add-ons.” 15 By creating a world that has looped 15,532 times – but one where the reader/viewer only bears witness to eight of those specific storyworlds –15,524 storyworlds are created that we have not seen and where, essentially, anything could have happened. These unknown worlds are ones in which collaborative creativity takes over and fans may insert their narratives, any of which could be valid interpretations of what happens during Haruhi’s summer break (so long as it ends with a reset on August 31st in the story). Steinberg (referencing well known otaku, anime, and manga scholar, Otsuka Eiji) agrees that variation is a key component of the anime media mix. He says of Otsuka’s own manga MPD Psycho, “[It] provides a prime example of a media mix based on the principle of infinite, and schizophrenic-variation on a single worldview. MPD Psycho offers multiple, often conflicting narratives across multiple media forms that are nonetheless anchored around a strong worldview. It is the connections that fans make between these that invoke collaborative creativity; as Zahlten says, “What becomes the object of consumption (and the overlap of consumption and production) is exactly the gap between different worlds and, in the same vein, the gap between different media.” 17

This leads to my final point on Haruhi, which is how the fans of a character such as Haruhi are part of the creative process in building the media mix around her. An endlessly looped world provides fans with an opportunity to put their own spin on the Haruhi universe. Though a looped world is not essential for fan creation, it is easy to see how gaps in a world’s structure allow for additional narratives to be inserted. Based on the very rough figures compiled by the Doujinshi and Man- ga Lexicon, there have been at least 291 fan-produced works based on the Suzumiya Haruhi universe. 16 There is no solid figure on the amount of fan-made manga, but this serves as a guide to indicate how many different narratives have been added to the Haruhi universe. Though many of these doujinshi are crude and may seem far removed from the main narrative of the series, they fall under established Haruhi universe and are recognized by Kadokawa as canonical – or, at least, accepted as part of the world. Steinberg looks to the works of Maurizio Lazzarato and Gottfried Liebniz to explain why Kadokawa (and other anime/media companies) have taken this approach to their creations. Lazzarato, referencing Deleuzian control societies, says that there has been a noted shift in the workings of capitalism, which Steinberg summarizes, saying, “Control societies rely on the creative faculties of subjects in producing value… this transformation of capitalism is accompanied by a proliferation of worlds.” 19 In a disciplinary society there can only be one world, and typically this would fall into the category of a Fordist view. In post-Fordism, however, there is no longer a convergence towards one disciplinary world, but instead towards deviation; the world we now occupy is one where any and every world can exist. Leibniz would describe this world of multiple deviations as a place of “compossibility” 20 with the monad 21 acting as mediator. These monads work much like Jenkins’ subjective secondary character view, and the worldview of these monads are variations on

16 Steinberg, 181.
17 Zahlten, “Media Mix and the Metaphoric Economy of World.”
19 Steinberg.
20 Compossibility is a philosophical concept employed by Leibniz, which he uses to discuss the relations between things in a possible world. All things in a possible world must be able to co-exist without contradiction (i.e. there cannot be two “World’s Tallest Man” as only one man can hold that title). If all things in a possible world are congruent, they are deemed to be “c”
21 The monad, as theorized by Leibniz is a simple substance that makes up all things. Each monad is unique and continually changes in order to reach perfection. God selects from these monads, those that will be used to make up the possible world out of the near-infinite possibilities that could exist. In this context however, we look at one particular point in monadology, and that is an analogy Leibniz makes between viewing a town and monads view of the universe. From different sides, a town may appear to be very different depending on where one stands, and Leibniz posits that from the point of view of each individual monad the universe appears different, thus making it seem as if there were multiple universes.
the predominant worldview. “The entity that guaran-
teed the noncontradictory coexistence of these multiple
monads within the same world – what Leibniz termed
their compossibility – was none other than God.” 22 In
the case of the Haruhi universe, this God figure is Ka-
dokawa Shoten, the company in control of all official
media relating to Suzumiya Haruhi. “The company, the
brand, and the character become points of connection
between incompossible worlds. The company thus con-
stitutes the environment in which all relationships de-
veloped are compossible at some level, even as it allows
a proliferation of differences and the active participa-
tion of the consumer-producer in the constitution of
the world in question.” 23 The creation of fan narratives
is, in fact, encouraged by some companies as a way to
promote the brand through unofficial channels, like
doujinshi sold at Comic Market. Doujin artist Miyasaka
Nozomi has stated, “Circles [a term describing a group
of people who work on fan projects together] are asked
to present their works because many companies see it as
a plus to their own advertising. The word ‘synergy’ (sou-
jour kouka) is often used.” 24 This idea that fans, too, may
take part in the creative process is another linkage be-
tween media that strengthens the character image and
the world of that character – and hints at the shift in
capitalism that Lazzarato and Steinberg describe, namely
that creativity is needed to produce value, which all
capitalist societies require.

Is this phenomena unique to Japan? That is harder to
establish, as components of the anime media mix are
found elsewhere. Examples may include books reprint-
ed when a movie is released with new cover art to reflect
the style of the film, or characters, such as Harry Pot-
ter, who transition from book to film while staying in
the same character world. But, in the context of Harry
Potter, it would be nearly inconceivable that author J.K.
Rowling would allow for fan fiction of Harry Potter to
be considered a part of the character's world. The film
adaptations must follow the one narrative for which the
God-figure allows; there could never be a Harry Potter
universe where the Sorting Hat chooses Hufflepuff for

Harry instead of Gryffindor, for example. In this sense,
the Harry Potter universe still exists in a disciplinary
society and in a Fordist model of capitalism.

Suzumiya Haruhi’s ability to leap through media
can be attributed to an evolution in the marketing style
preferred by Japanese anime companies, which strayed
away from a marketing style that separated medium
and product, to one that looks at the gaps between me-
dia and searches for ways to connect them. The answer
came in the form of the character. By creating char-
acters that have a stable image and are anchored to a
strong worldview, marketing becomes focused on the
character and gets consumers to follow them wherever
they may appear next. By using cross-promotion in this
way, a franchise is strengthened through the consump-
ton of any part of the character’s world. The final piece
brings fans into the creative process, allowing consum-
ers to switch hats and become producers as well. Not
only does this proliferate the character further, but it
also creates a strong sense of community within the fan
base, which is brought together by a character in whose
creation they can share in. From Kadokawa Shōten’s
offices in Tokyo’s Chiyoda ward, to Kyoto Animation’s
studios in the city of Uji just outside of Kyoto, to the
halls of Tokyo Big Sight convention center on the man-
made island of Odaiba in Tokyo Bay – where fans trade
doujinshi of their favorite characters – Haruhi effort-
lessly leaps from medium to medium, garnering new fans
across Japan and around the world.

She has jumped between eleven light novels, two an-
ime seasons, four separate manga series, two online an-
ime series, a feature length film, four radio drama CDs,
and eight video games. Nevertheless, wherever her next
adventure takes her, she will still be Haruhi, her world
will be the same, and the narrative will be canon. She
remains a “Girl Who Leapt Through Media.”

22 Steinberg, 185
23 Ibid., 187
24 Miyasaka, Nozomi. Personal Interview, 14 August 2013.
DROPLETS, by MEDORUMA SHUN:
PERSONAL GUILT AS COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

In 1997, the Japanese writer of Okinawan descent, Medoruma Shun, was awarded the Akutagawa prize for his story Droplets (Suiteki). In this tale, Tokushô, a veteran of the Battle of Okinawa, wakes up one day to find his leg turned into a gourd melon. His toe bursts, and water slowly drips from it. Every night Tokushô is visited by the ghosts of his war comrades, who take turns sitting down to drink from his appendage. Tokushô is now forced to revisit those memories of the war he had been repressing for over forty years. This paper studies how Droplets functions as a work on personal trauma and on collective memory. Trauma and collective memory are addressed from two parallel perspectives: the narrative and the metanarrative. On the one hand, the story of Tokushô involves traumatic experiences and war memories in postwar Japan. On the other hand, this paper argues that Medoruma constructs his short story using particular devices to engage with the problematic issue of representing traumatic experiences and discussing war memories in postwar Japan. Specifically, these devices include fantastic elements to represent trauma and the use of culturally symbolic and referential to discuss war memory narratives in Japan.

It was during a dry spell in mid-June, the rainy season, when Tokushô’s leg suddenly swelled up. He lay napping on a steel-frame army cot in the back room, away from the scorching sun of the cloudless sky. The heat had subsided down now that it was past 5:00, and he was sleeping comfortably when he was awakened by a feverish sensation in his right leg. He looked down and he saw that the lower half of his leg had swelled up bigger than his thigh. Frightened, he tried to sit up, but his body wouldn’t move, nor could he speak. [...] Tokushô’s leg had already swelled to the size of an average gourd melon and turned pale green. His toes reminded him of a family of poisonous habu, the mother snake lying beside her offspring, spread like a fan. The sparse hair on his leg made it look lewd. 1

Medoruma sets off his short story Droplets (Suiteki) with quite an unusual conundrum. A start that seemingly recalls Kafka’s Metamorphosis, the similarities between the two tales go beyond the transformation of the flesh after the defenselessness of sleep. In the wake of such transfiguration, the mutated hero questions not how this impossible change happened, but what he can do under this new condition and, especially, why it has occurred. Is it fate’s arbitrary malice? Is he being punished? If so, by whom? And for what reason?

While the identity of Gregor Samsa remains rooted in the uncanny of the familiar yet ambiguous, the reader of Droplets gets to know Tokushô better throughout the story. He cultivates a small piece of land in a village on the islands of Okinawa. He has lived for sixty years, give or take. He has a wife, Ushi, with a strong temper. He has a good-for-nothing cousin who pesters the poor family for money. The couple has no offspring. Tokushô likes to drink and gamble, too much for his own good. And the first night after the transformation, Tokushô is visited by the ghosts of Japanese soldiers who died during World War II. Tokushô recognizes them as his de-

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comrades, and from that we learn that Tokushô fought during the Battle of Okinawa in spring of 1945. He was 16 years old, drafted to defend the islands from the invading American troops.

The toe in Tokushô's melon gourd leg bursts and water slowly drips out of it, sliding down his foot. During their nightly visits, the ghosts take turns sitting down and sucking the water that springs out of Tokushô's toe. The specters disappear at dawn, only to return again after midnight. With every visit Tokushô unveils memories of the war kept buried for decades. Tokushô had a friend during the battle of Okinawa, Ishimine. This friend died, and he feels responsible. Tokushô struggles with these memories, with active recollections and impossible reminiscences. He begins describing those final days of combat. He has fought the burden of carrying traumatic experiences for years, having rejected dealing with them until they surface out of his control. He also reflects on his relationship with the war during the postwar period. He conducted speeches on his war actions to students at local schools, but was led consciously and unconsciously to embellish them and to portray himself as a tragic hero, a hardened victim, a courageous survivor. This public persona helped in his desire to keep concealed a different narrative for his war memories, the traumatic experience.

The private and the collective are intertwined in Droplets. This is a story of personal trauma that echoes issues on collective memory. This paper studies how Droplets functions both as a work on personal trauma and as a work on collective memory. Trauma and collective memory are addressed from two parallel perspectives: the narrative and the metanarrative. On one hand, the story of Tokushô involves traumatic experiences and war memories in postwar Japan. On the other hand, I argue that Medoruma constructs this short story using particular devices to engage with the problematic issue of representing traumatic experiences and discussing war memories in Japan. In particular, Medoruma uses the fantastic to represent trauma, and the culturally symbolic and referential to discuss war memory narratives.

In this paper I first introduce key points and general ideas on war memories in Japan, focusing on the representation of the war and war memories through the 1990s. Plenty of work has been done on this issue, and my objective is not only to sum up the most essential and most common characteristics of war memories in Japan, but also to highlight the most relevant traits among them in relation to my analysis of Droplets. I then move on to a close reading of this story, engaging with my two research questions: How Droplets functions as a work on trauma and cultural memory, and how Medoruma's employment of the fantastic and the referential function as devices for engaging and discussing broader issues on trauma and cultural memory articulation.

THE REPRESENTATION OF WAR MEMORIES IN POSTWAR JAPANESE DISCOURSE

The principal defining aspect of Japanese war memories is the lack of an agreed cultural discourse on how Japan should address this particular historical episode and its consequences. The void produced by a missing dominant narrative is filled with a clash of different interpretations. The existence of counternarratives in constant dispute with each other impedes the settlement of social and personal conflicts, the closure of wounds, and perpetuates the myth of Japan as an amnesic country that avoids addressing the past. Japan has been struggling since the end of the war from this lack of a unified discourse that would clearly articulate war memories.

There is no clear consensus among scholars when it comes to classifying these different discourses, but I find Philip Seaton's categorization the most useful among the sources consulted. I will synthesize his view with some clarifications of my own.

Since the end of the war, the Japanese state has tried to impose an official narrative on war memories based on portraying itself as the unique carrier of war remembrances. The Japanese state has attempted to convince its people to accept that the only way to articulate war memories is through official institutions. This approach is ideologically conservative in the sense that it proposes a static and uncontestable interpretation. State commemoration sites reflect the “official” narrative position and its inherent contradictions: A rendition to military service (the ever polemic Yasukuni shrine as the most prominent example) and Japanese victimhood and repentance (the Hiroshima Peace Museum). The Achilles'
heel of this “official” narrative approach is the inability to recognize and incorporate opposing interpretations. Social dynamics are ignored for the sake of portraying an image of national cohesion. Historic revisionism and peripheral narratives are silenced in a failed attempt to sustain the illusion of having a unique, centralized, state managed interpretation of war memories.

The “official” narrative is confronted by multiple and independent narratives articulated through groups and associations outside and against the state monopoly over war memory. Called “the social agency approach” by Seaton, it consists of highlighting the existence of activists that work towards healing, reconciliation, and recognition of issues and themes that have been left outside of the state’s narrative. These civil groups have proved their strength several times in the past when contesting and destabilizing the official war memory narrative. The most famous of these movements are perhaps the fight against censorship in secondary education history textbooks and the struggle to force the Japanese government to recognize the so-called “comfort women” (women in occupied areas forced into prostitution during wartime). Okinawan writers focused on articulating a local narrative of war memories for a great part of the second half of the twentieth century. Medoruma has a particular involvement with this movement and is reluctant to be identified as a member of a writer’s group, preferring instead to engage with this issue autonomously.

These alternative narratives are criticized by their inability to create a cohesive discourse that could eventually become normative. Their agents lack the structural framework of state institutions. In addition to these practical predicaments, alternative narratives also have ideological confrontations. Even though they are usually portrayed as liberal, some ultraconservative groups share the same means – public discussions – and goals – confront the official narrative and propose historical revisionism, while conveying diametrically opposing messages (military glorification, playing down war crimes).

Japanese have a vacillating relationship with war memories. Seaton coins this phenomenon “memory rifts” ideological fault lines within Japanese society that signal the existence of an underlying conflict. Depending on the historical moment, these faults clash and the dispute reemerges temporarily to dominate the agenda. Almost seventy years after the end of the conflict there is no assertive narrative, and a situation of constant conflict seems to constitute the status quo. As posed by Seaton, “war memories become openly confrontation-al as groups struggle to turn their disparate versions of the past into the dominant cultural memory. War memories become an issue of national division rather than national unity.”

State and alternative discourses clash over the interpretation of two main themes that characterize Japanese war memories: responsibility and victimhood. These two topics are two sides of the same coin, the edge of which bears the name “guilt.” Each interpretative community ascribes the label of “responsible” or “victim” to each case depending on whether there is “guilt” involved. Here I would like to make an important remark. When addressing Japan’s relationship with the Second World War, we should differentiate between legal, diplomatic, and even moral implications and consequences of the conflict and war memories. The former concerns the study of debates such as the adequacy of war reparations or the honesty of Japan’s institutional apologies. The latter involves ways through which the war and postwar periods are remembered and articulated discursively. Both are related but still different. The superposition of one over the other should be avoided, and in this paper I will only refer to war memories.

Victim consciousness or victim mentality (higaisha shiki) dominates war memories once Japanese actions are not only analyzed and recognized but also judged. The Japanese individual bears multiple and contradictory identities: the roles of perpetrator and victim, re-

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2 Philip A Seaton, Japan’s Contested War Memories: The ‘memory Rifts’ in Historical Consciousness of World War II. (London: Routledge, 2007), 7.
3 Ibid., 11.
5 For a better insight into these two controversies and how activist groups work in Japan see for instance The Politics of War Memory in Japan, by Kamila Szczepanska, who reviews these two episodes at length from different angles throughout the process of protest.
6 Seaton, Japan’s Contested War Memories, 9.
7 Ibid., 15.
sponsible and blameless. The lack of a dominant narrative over war memories force the Japanese individual to drift between roles depending on the time and whether there is a public or private display of identities.

There is no consensus over the extent of Japanese responsibility. The Japanese have adopted a predominant attitude of taking the blame for their actions during the Second World War as a group, as a nation at war. Individually, however, responsibility fades away to be replaced by victimhood. To avoid guilt, the Japanese individual is portrayed as a victim of greater powers that pushed him or her to act beyond the limits of the morally questionable. This is described by Maruyama Masao as the "ladder of guilt." The guilty and the responsible were always the hierarchically superior. In the military, the private blamed the sergeant, the sergeant the lieutenant, the lieutenant the captain, the captain the colonel, and so on, until the top of the ladder – those generals prosecuted, imprisoned, or executed as war criminals, officially taking to their graves the blame of the entire nation. The civil population was expected to be exonerated through the reprieve granted to Emperor Hirohito. Hideki Tōjō, general of the Imperial Japanese Army and Prime Minister from 1941 to 1944, was held liable instead, even though technically he answered to the emperor. The shift of the perception of America from enemy to ally happened too quickly, leaving the memory of the war as an enemy-less conflict, and Japan as a country of victims.  

To encourage this reasoning, the state promoted the open circulation through media and commemoration sites of personal stories that would endorse the image of the Japanese as victims. Seaton calls these people "worthy victims," and he argues their stories were potentiated to construct a narrative through empathy and relatedness. Outside of this model were left those stories that portrayed the Japanese as guilty, the "unworthy victims." The voice of the "unworthy victims" were articulated by activist movements that denounced the presence of other war memory narratives. The framework proposed by the 'official' narrative based on collective responsibility and personal blamelessness ended up failing to represent and articulate Japanese war memories. It seeks to silence personal guilt and falls short of closing the debate over war responsibility.

In this situation, private and public memories intertwine, balancing and counterbalancing any interpretive discourse. Recognizing the war as an "aggressive conflict" would make the veterans responsible for their actions and would turn their families into accomplices, opening the wounds of personal guilt. Individuals lack any cultural framework of reference to work through guilt, as the Japanese state had to deny such feelings to face the sudden change of paradigm that transformed the United States into an ally. The state does not recognize PTSD victims, and veterans were invited to take defeat as a "good loss," a release from the temporal collective madness that according to the official narrative suffered the Japanese nation because of some wicked leaders.

Under these circumstances, the traumatized individual has no cultural memory narrative that would recognize his existence. He is expected to reshape his experiences to fit into the proposed cultural pattern. Moreover, traumatic experiences, as Pierre Janet explains, resist integration into any meaningful scheme.  

The lack of any working framework makes the trauma virtually unrepresentable. The subject is unable to recall the traumatic experience at will and under normal conditions.  

The traumatic experience happens outside of space and time in the sense that the subject is unable to situate it as a past event and is condemned to revisit it as an ongoing incident, an undisclosed episode.

After the war, Japanese writers and visual artists engaged with the representation of the conflict and its consequences. Several subgenres emerged during the 1950s and 1960s around the issue of war memories: soldier diaries, wartime and postwar civilian life, and “atomic” literature were the most popular themes in literature. Most of these authors were interested in how Japanese adapted to the end of the war and their relationship with

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9 Seaton, Japan’s Contested War Memories, 27.
11 Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: the Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma”, in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 160.
the conflict. Some of these works were translated into English and were acclaimed by foreign readers and critics – works like Fires on the Plain (Nobi) [1951, 1957], 12 by Ōka Shōhei; The Setting Sun (Shayo) [1947, 1956], by Dazai Osamu; and Black Rain (Kuroi Ame) [1965, 1966], by Ibuse Masuji. These stories, like many others, had film adaptations. 13

The large amount of artwork produced around the theme of wartime and postwar life adds a new layer of complexity to the study of war memory representations. As Stahl and Williams discuss in their work, language and images articulate cultural memory so it may be shaped, recognized and worked over. 14 The way the war and the postwar are represented has an effect on how Japanese construct their memories over time. In literature, many writers have shown their commitment with reaching a better understanding of society by departing from the “official” narrative and “objective” histories to focus on excluded episodes, with a particular interest in traumatic experiences and traumatized individuals. This interest has a two-fold objective: Address issues untreated by the “official” narrative to provide as much of a meaningful framework as possible and to act as a moral reminder. By embracing the issue of individual responsibility and guilt and presenting the conflict as it was, belligerent and aggressive, this literature functions as group conscience.

Form determines content. Art embodies the experience, stressing the communicative part, and it becomes a form of confession, both for the author as an individual and for his or her own cultural group. Art also creates and reifies tropes that articulate cultural memory and blur the distinction between historical fidelity and historical representation.

The survivor must survive in order to tell, but at the same time he survives due to telling. The necessity of narration reassures survival; otherwise the survivor is trapped in a never ending conflict without closure. We should avoid considering confession literature as a way to ‘treat’ or ‘cure’ the traumatic experience. For instance, the writer Nosaka Akiyuki struggled throughout his life to reconstruct his past experiences in the war in order to overcome the sense of guilt that came from letting his little sister starve to death during the last days of the conflict. 15 Even though Nosaka addressed literature at a confessional level, he was unable to overcome his trauma. For Nosaka, writing was the only way to feel as if he were engaging with his past and with the traumatic experience, albeit attempting the impossible of representing trauma. 16 Art is a device for the individual and society to address an issue, independently of whether it is possible or not to solve the problem.

This step, however, wasn’t possible after the end of the war. As with Holocaust representation, both the individual and society as a whole need a buffering period. During this period, the victim seeks to come to terms with an identity unsettled by uncontrollable reasons, since trauma may not yet have materialized. As time elapses, the widening generation gap casts light on the way the Japanese engage with memories of the war. Artists who have lived through the war revolve around the two roles of victim and victimizer, reflecting on this dichotomy from their own experiences. Second generation artists, however, can only relate to the war through the way it is remembered socially. Their works expose the discursive and artificial nature of cultural memory. The engagement with memories of the war made by second-generation artists casts light on which topics, themes, and dynamics have been integrated as cultural memory.

Family dynamics have been a force that has sustained the “official” narrative. It is hard to see your relatives as perpetrators and victimizers. The family is also one of the main vehicles through which the individual connects with cultural memory. The way memories of the war are presented is partially influenced by how families have engaged with it. In this context, the concept

12 Year of original publication, year of first publication in English.
13 Fires on the Plain was adapted twice, once in 1959 and the second time in 2014. The Setting Sun became a film in 2009, and Black Rain was brought to screen in 1989. As we can see from these dates, the interest for war representations has prevailed throughout time.
14 David C. Stahl and Mark Williams, Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 6.
15 He described his ordeal in a semi-autobiographic story called Grave of the Fireflies (Hotarku no haka), published in 1967. It became a popular animated film in 1988, and in 2005 and 2008 it was remade into two live-action productions.
of postmemory can be useful in understanding second generation artists’ involvement with memories of the war. Postmemory, according to Marianne Hirsch, is a structure of transmission of memories that connects second and further generations with the previous generation through the creation of affective bonds between individuals and within groups. The goal of postmemory works is to establish affective, trans-generational bonds using the already emotional frameworks of family memories. That is, the creation of an aesthetic and consciously mediated way of both linking particular memories to a narrative of cultural memory – the broader group – while at the same time asserting a particular uniqueness confined within the realm of the family – the closer group.

Christopher Nelson cautions that by engaging with a conflictive past, second generation artists risk stirring past ghosts and endangering their present, unrightfully appropriating an incomprehensible loss. In the case of the Japanese, however, the conflict is not confined to the past but is understood as an ongoing struggle, a present dispute. Second generation artists that deal with memories of the war, like Medoruma Shun, denote the unsettledness of this issue. As Stahl and Williams indicate, by talking about war memories, Medoruma (and by extension, second-generation artists) builds a bridge between the generation who lived through the conflict and those did not, yet still bear the cultural consequences, reaching out for empathy and understanding and creating emotional bonds.

A CLOSE READING OF DROPLETS, BY MEDORUMA SHUN

Medoruma Shun represents in spirit second-generation postwar Japanese artists while remaining an exception in the particularities of his style and approach. Born in 1957 in Nakijin, a remote district in the northeastern part of Okinawa, his first literary attempts were a claim to defend his local dialect from the imposition of standardized Japanese language. Through this act of cultural demonstration he connected with the grassroots Okinawa writers’ movement. These artists portrayed themselves as nativists and made it their quest to defend Okinawa’s particularities from mainland Japan’s cultural imperialism. Medoruma soon became disenchanted with this movement. He has always refused to be labeled a writer of Okinawan literature, since he believes this grassroots literary movement is merely exotizing the land and creating reified categories.

Medoruma’s literature is concerned with the residual reminiscences of the war in Japan, the effects of the Battle of Okinawa on the individuals who were affected, and its cultural presence in subsequent generations. He seeks to illustrate that the war is not completely over as long as people continue, even years later, to suffer from the inability to disclose their experiences, and as long as Japanese society is unable to provide a meaningful framework for them to work it out. Medoruma’s stylistic distinctiveness is his use of fantastic and imaginative elements in familiar and quotidian settings. I would like to avoid calling this “magical realism,” as most scholars do without giving it much thought. “Magical realism” is the inclusion of the fantastic as diegetic in a setting otherwise almost naturalistic and close to costumbrist. In Medoruma’s fiction, “magic” invades reality and is considered a foreign and irrational element, infused with a message and a meaning the characters must unveil.

In 1997, Medoruma received one of Japan’s most prestigious literary awards, the Akutagawa prize, for Droplets. It was the first time an Okinawan writer received such distinction, a detail particularly remarkable given the fact that it is partially written in local dialect. From then on, Medoruma became quite popular in Japan, and he has continued to publish short stories, novels and plays to this day. Droplets contains the key elements to understand Medoruma’s engagement with both war memories in Japan and with fictions of memory and trauma. It also casts light on the ways Japanese second-generation artists are relating to postwar memories.

I argue that Medoruma’s use of the fantastic is aimed at helping a wider audience avoid the debate surrounding the tension between historical fidelity and historical...

18 Christopher T. Nelson, Dancing with the Dead: Memory, Performance, and Everyday Life in Postwar Okinawa. (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 4
19 Stahl and Williams. Imag(in)ing the War in Japan. 227.
representations. This discussion has haunted the representation of problematic cultural memories since Adorno’s famous predicament on the impropriety of writing poetry about the Shoah. The problem lies in the fear of transfiguration, of loss of truth and meaning by means of its literary or artistic representation. The anxiety to appear truthful creates what is called “rhetoric of fact”: if an artist wants to persuade his audience of his moral integrity, he must present his artwork with a sense of realism and reject the subordination to aesthetic conventions. Medoruma avoids this issue altogether by including the fantastic in his fiction, reinforcing fiction’s sense of suspension of disbelief. He is not interested in historical consistency but in the historical and cultural narratives that have articulated war memories in Japan and that are represented through cultural tropes. His fiction reveals how these cultural conventions have articulated Japanese war memories regardless of whether or not they are historically accurate.

In my close reading of Droplets I will focus on two aspects: How Droplets functions as a work on personal trauma and cultural memory, and how fantasy and the referential function as symbolic ways to expose how war memories are articulated in contemporary Japan. I engage with this story by studying the ways Droplets serves as a piece on trauma and memory, and by examining the most relevant cultural references reflecting on their presence.

Droplets is, first of all, a tale of personal trauma. Tokushô, a veteran of the Second World War, is forced to face the memories of a traumatic episode that happened at the end of the conflict – one he had been trying to forget and repress for fifty years. During the last days of the Battle of Okinawa, Japanese soldiers and civilians took refuge from American shelling in the caves spread across the island. Cut off from the rest of the military, without supplies and technically defeated, they went from one point of the island to another, risking being torn apart by bombs, gunned down by stray bullets, shot by either side or, in the best scenario, captured by their enemies. Most starved to death or perished from their wounds. Amidst this chaos, Tokushô’s duty was to treat his injured comrades and raid the jungle and deserted towns for water. He was only a sixteen-year old student, drafted in the general levy announced at the end of the war. Tokushô abided by his duties, mostly because his best friend Ishimine was among the wounded. In the end, however, Tokushô abandons him and escapes the caves to wander the jungle until he is detained by the invading troops.

The reader of Droplets uncovers this story through Tokushô’s recollections. His memories are not presented right away in a complete and coherent fashion, but appear in the work as fragments, set in a more or less chronological order. Tokushô goes through a process of memory recall that resembles a journey into the depths of his own mind. The reader knows only what Tokushô’s memories allow. Even though the story is narrated in an almost omniscient third person, Tokushô’s past is only accessible through his filter. The reader is never given a historically accurate or official version of the Battle of Okinawa. The episode is presented through the mediation of memories, which at the same time are patchy, incomplete, and altered by time and Tokushô’s feelings of guilt.

Besides the fragmentary and sketchy features of his memories, there are other indications of trauma. Tokushô is unable to recall the memories of the war at will. This is a symptom of traumatic experience. Narrative memories are mental constructs that humans use to give meaning to experience. When meaning is impossible, the experience cannot turn into memory but becomes a traumatic experience instead. As Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart point out in their analysis of Pierre Janet’s work, “Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions.”

The traumatic experience appears suddenly and without apparent motivation after years of attempted,
yet impossible, atonement. The fact that Tokushô took so long to face his traumatic experience is also part of the nature of traumatic reenactments. Van der Kolk and Van der Hart discuss this, as do Stahl and Williams. Nelson puts it beautifully:

The past can even return without any apparent prompt, the result of some chthonic process, slipping through the deep rhythms of repression. It arrives unexpectedly, urgently, stirred by the silent call of an ancestral spirit or deity ... These are remembrances that are wrenching and traumatic, tearing the fabric of daily life, plunging those who experience them into despair and even madness. They demand attention.

Medoruma embodies this rush of traumatic experience as fantastic elements: Tokushô’s leg swells up to take the shape of a gourd melon, leaving him convalescent and unable to communicate with the outside world. The ghosts of his comrades come every night to ritualistically drink from his foot, in an obvious performance that symbolizes Tokushô’s need to address his past. Despite the evidence of this message, Tokushô tries to resist this obligation, unprepared as he is to give meaning to these memories:

“What did I do to deserve this?” Tokushô lamented dozens of times each day, yet he never sought the answer. He was afraid that once he started to think about it, all the things he had kept buried deep within him over the past fifty years would burst out like floodwaters.

Slowly, and almost as if drifting down a river of memories, Tokushô digs deeper into the episode and takes a less detached and more judgmental approach to it. During the first recollections, the ghosts are just regular soldiers, most of them from mainland Japan (yamanotchu). Once Ishimine appears among them, Tokushô recognizes the rest as the ones “who have been left behind that night in the cave.” This impersonal point of view changes in the last fragments. Once Tokushô starts feeling guilty about what happened he becomes the subject responsible for the event, declaring that he “left them in the cave.”

Tokushô’s first reaction is fear: he feels the ghosts have come to kill him. Then he changes his mind and comes to the conclusion that letting them drink the water “was the only way to atone his sins.” The reason behind his guilt changes and evolves through the story due to his engagement with the repressed memories. Tokushô’s first interpretation of the symbolism behind the apparitions is linked to his actions during the war. His cowardice led him to not abide by his duty of bringing water to the wounded in the caves, so they have come back in the present to remind him of this misdeed.

The wrong, however, is not in the failing of his duty, but in Tokushô’s attitude of repressing the past. The soldiers’ thirst is for Tokushô to embrace that past and come to terms with it. Both aspects are related: Tokushô buries these memories because there is no functional and meaningful framework that would recognize an identity with guilt as an aspect of the experience of war. His greatest fear is if people were to discover that he left Ishimine (and the rest of his comrades) behind in the caves, so he conceals that from everyone and lied about his actions. For ten years after the end of the war he is a sullen figure. He marries Ushi mostly to comply with social conventions.

One day around that time, a discovery surprises him and worsens his relationship with his war memories. During those days back at the caves, he has another friend, Setsu, a member of the Himeyuri Gakutotai (Lily Corps), a unit made of high school girls that acted as nurses for the Japanese army in Okinawa. Ishimine is too badly wounded to keep moving from one cave to the other, so Tokushô hides with him from the rest of the troops. Setsu spots them, but instead of reporting them she gives them water and supplies and rejoins the front. Once the war ends, Tokushô guesses that Setsu had gone with the rest of his platoon to the south, with an uncertain fate. In reality, however, Setsu and some other Himeyuri Gakutotai decided to halt their escape. They went to a nearby cliff and blew themselves up with
hand grenades. Once Tokushô discovers Setsu’s fate, he stops sulking and starts silencing his pain with a life of alcohol and vice. In addition to the sadness of her unjust death, he feels even more guilty about his decision over Ishimine, because no one is left who knows the truth of his actions besides himself, and the burden of his memories was put solely on his shoulders. This gives him slight relief, but curses him with a life of constant fear and resentment:

Sadness and then rage welled up inside him, and he was suddenly overcome by a desire to kill those who drove Setsu to her death. At the same time, he was forced to acknowledge a sense of relief that no one was left who knew the truth about Ishimine. Tokushô wanted to sob, yet no tears would come. It was then that he began drinking heavily. Since that time he thought he had succeeded in forcing the memories of Ishimine and Setsu from his mind.  

During those decades of repressed memories, Tokushô tries to comply with the “official” narrative that portrayed veterans as blameless and dramatic heroes. At the request of local authorities, Tokushô starts making speeches describing his experience during the war to high school students. Even though he is at first reluctant to partake in this, he gets drunk with recognition and embellishes his tales in order to comply with the public’s expectations. He is aware of the manipulation, but the money and the fame are too good to pass up. Ushi warns him of the consequences and foretells the curse if he keeps on with the lies, but Tokushô, although uneasy and to some extent repentant, keeps on conducting the lectures. While lying in bed convalescing, some children come to bring him flowers, and he feels the need to confess his misleads, but cannot bring himself do so: “For a moment Tokushô was ready to apologize for all of his lies, and he almost confessed about what he actually did on the battlefield. Almost, but not quite.”  

Tokushô is unable to effectively structure his memories and work through the traumatic experience with the framework provided by the “official” narrative since guilt and responsibility, the two feelings Tokushô feels the most, are not part of it.

Tokushô’s redemption eventually comes when he wholeheartedly embraces his need to address his past. The ghost of Ishimine is sucking his foot, and all his repressed memories have been dug up. Tokushô acknowledges all his suffering throughout the years and asks for forgiveness. The scene is painted with an unexpected homoerotic tone, which could be related to the overwhelming power of emotions. Ishimine notices the change of attitude in his friend and decides to leave:

‘Ishimine, forgive me!’
The color had begun to return to Ishimine’s pale face, and his lips regained their luster. Tokushô, despite his fear and self-hatred, grew aroused. Ishimine’s tongue glided across the opening on his toe, and then Tokushô let out a small cry with his sexual release.

The lips pulled away. Lightly wiping his mouth with his index finger, Ishimine stood up. He was still seventeen. A smile took shape around those eyes that stared out beneath the long lashes, on the spare cheeks on the vermillion lips.

Tokushô burst into anger. ‘Don’t you know how much I’ve suffered these past fifty years?’ Ishimine merely continued to smile, nodding slightly at Tokushô, who flailed his arms in an effort to sit up.

‘Thank you. At last the thirst is gone.’

Tokushô recovers from his condition, but this is not the same as being “cured” from the effects of his traumatic experience. His success lies in opening up his past to confront the repressed memories. Tokushô starts visiting the caves, but he still feels disconnected from other Japanese people. He feels unable to explain his past even to his wife. With this ending, Medoruma reflects on the necessity to facilitate a functional narrative for veterans where guilt and responsibility are addressed. Individual triumphs are not enough if the subject cannot relate to his cultural background.

Droplets is also a work on cultural memory and memories of the war for second-generation Japanese. Tokushô is a fictional character, and his story is not based on Medoruma’s personal or familiar experience. The author directly or indirectly shows how cultural

29 Ibid., 281.
30 Ibid., 272.
31 Ibid., 281.
referents from war memory tropes can be put together to give a sense of authenticity in a story with fantastic and paranormal elements. These symbols come from the cultural memory depository, and demonstrate how the Japanese articulate memories of the war with themselves, independent of whether or not these are historically accurate. Droplets can be read in this light as a reflection on the cultural mediation of memories. These references are never explained because identifying them is in most cases an unconscious act for the Japanese reader.

In Droplets nothing seems arbitrary. Right from the beginning, the action is set “in mid-June” 1945. The Battle of Okinawa ended the twenty-first of the same month. It was during that time that Tokushô’s traumatic experience occurred. Tokushô’s leg turns into a gourd melon. This vegetable, endemic to Okinawa, appeared in unprecedented numbers in the years after the end of the Second World War, this abundance attributed to soil richly fertilized with corpses. The swollen foot echoes the secondary effects of failing to die from ingesting rat poison, a decision some Japanese families made when news of the defeat was broadcast. The transformation of the body is in itself a postwar trope, as argued by Igarashi Yoshikuni. Igarashi’s thesis is that Japan remembered its war memories discursively through the bodily trope. Bodies are used to articulate Japan’s understanding of the war, from the suffering and decay of the direct aftermath, to the will of promoting a healthy body that came during the 1960s and 1970s, to the return of the rotting body when addressing repressed memories and traumatic reenactments:

The malnourished and lice-infested bodies present immediately after Japan’s defeat were physically and discursively recast as clean and productive by the late 1960s; bodies were detached from the memories of Japan’s loss and cleanness of the nation’s dirt, its memories of war. 33

The water that springs from Tokushô’s toe is analyzed by the town’s doctor, who comes back with results that indicate the liquid is just water “with some lime,” like the water in a cave. The doctor suggests taking Tokushô to the hospital, but Ushi refuses. She is convinced that old people are used as guinea pigs in hospitals, a rumor that echoes the medical experiments the Japanese military conducted during the Second World War. The caves and the Himeyuri Gakutotai are the most popular tropes related to the Battle of Okinawa, present in virtually any depiction of the episode.

Parallel to the main story, Medoruma develops a subplot with Seiyu, Tokushô’s good-for-nothing cousin, as protagonist. Seiyu discovers the water that sprouts out of Tokushô has miraculous powers and starts selling it to the locals. Once Tokushô awakens, however, those who have benefited from its properties start experiencing weird rashes and physical deformations. This story line symbolizes the double-edged economic strategy of Okinawa in profiting from the American presence on the islands and living through war returns. It may have given the island some initial benefits, but in the long run it becomes cystic and hazardous. Droplets ends with Tokushô discovering a huge gourd melon in his back yard, where Ushi had been throwing buckets of the “leg water.” The gourd would not bulge when hit by a stick. A vine connected it to a hibiscus whose yellow flower shined strongly in the sun to the point of blinding Tokushô. The hibiscus is the symbol of Okinawa, and the gourd melon, fattened by the memories of war, is feeding it, reinforcing the criticism expressed in Seiyu’s subplot.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the lack of a dominant cultural narrative but the existence of working tropes and structural schemes, Droplets emerges as a reflection on cultural memory and memories of the war from the perspective of a second-generation artist. Medoruma shows that the reification of these tropes is culturally normative. Included in this is also the object of criticism, the traumatized veteran. By telling a story of personal trauma on a stage made out of consciously crafted cultural references, Medoruma denounces the inclusion of unsettled issues as another element of the cultural landscape. Instead of being a subject deserving active involvement, the traumatized element becomes another
Medoruma aspires to raise concerns over this issue. Personal trauma cases can only be engaged with through social processes that include them in cultural memory not as unavoidable and marginal consequences, but as an unresolved debt, a call of duty. Personal trauma, according to Medoruma, should be addressed as a collective responsibility.

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Stahl, David C., and Mark Williams. Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film. Leiden: Brill, 2010.


SPEECH LEVELS IN DPRK SOCIETY

This study examines the use of speech levels in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), in comparison with the system in use in the Republic of Korea (ROK). Korean speech levels encode certain facts about the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the listener, and reflect or perpetuate aspects of DPRK and ROK societal structure. I use a multi-part analysis encompassing a quantitative study of verb endings within works of fiction from both countries, a qualitative study of books on language and metalinguistic commentary, and fieldwork with a native DPRK speaker, to produce several new results. The DPRK speech level system is found to have several features that set it apart from the ROK, most notable among them being the continued use of the “semiformal” level (hao-chey), which is rarely seen in the ROK. In these data, this semiformal level is used mostly by male speakers, particularly when they are addressing female listeners. It also appears to express a hierarchical relationship between the speaker and listener in which the speaker projects the more authoritative stance. Placing these findings in the context of the present and historical political environment on the Korean peninsula, there are many parallels between differential speech level usages and differential state ideologies in the two Koreas. In contrast to the ROK speech level system, the DPRK system grammaticalizes the interpersonal differences relevant within the DPRK’s traditionalist, nationalist, and neo-Confucianist society.

INSTRUCTION

This is a study of the life of one linguistic variable – the speech level – in two countries: the Koreas. Although there have been changes throughout all levels of the Korean language since the partition of the peninsula, speech levels were specifically chosen for this study because they hew so closely to issues of society, culture, and politics. Through speech levels, every sentence in Korean must grammatically encode the relationship between the speaker and the listener – how much respect, how much formality, or how much politeness is required – and so to study speech levels, we must also consider how interpersonal relationships are formed and maintained. To that end, this paper will include some analysis of language, including how the speech levels are formed and how they can be parsed, and also of society, including how speakers and listeners from each country view each other and themselves.

The 1945 division of the Korean peninsula led to divergent ideologies, divergent policies, and, in turn, divergent languages in Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north. In both of these systems, language is both guided by and conflated with politics, and the other Korea’s policies are seen as the drivers of divergent change, while one’s own country remains as the last bastion of the “true” Korean language. This is part of what some scholars have called an ongoing “legitimacy war” between the DPRK and ROK – a sort of battle of wills to determine which state is the legitimate representative of the Korean people (Jager, 2013). The DPRK standard language (munhwae) is therefore defined in opposition to Seoul-centered phyocwone.

1 Perhaps the largest difference in language ideology between the DPRK and ROK, then, is how it relates to the state. Though the ROK government has made some fairly feeble stabs at devising language policy, it has generally allowed evolution to take its course, resulting in large numbers of loanwords, a spelling reform to match changes in pronunciation, and some syntactic and morphological transformations. The DPRK government, conversely, has taken a

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1 Throughout this paper I have used the Yale romanization system for transliterating Korean words and for rendering the names of Korean people who have not already expressed a preferred spelling. The Yale system is more common in linguistics than in other fields, so if the reader finds it unfamiliar, I sincerely apologize.
very active role in language planning, and so munhwae has come to be associated not just with national identity, but also with state identity, communist identity, of course the state’s leadership – the Kim clan (Yim, 1980). ROK standard language, though it may project some sense of ethno-nationalistic identity, has no such ties to the state.

There are now many points of difference between the languages of the two Koreas, from phonology to the lexicon to syntax and morphology (see e.g. Kim 1978, 1991; King, 2007; Lee, 1990; Yeon, 2000, 2006). However, differences in speech levels remain relatively understudied. The speech level system grammatically encodes the level of respect shown by the speaker toward the listener – typically, older and higher-status listeners will command more respect and higher speech levels. What then might happen to the speech level system when one Korea undergoes a socialist revolution and attempts to destroy the traditional hierarchy? How much of a difference can we expect to see?

1.1 HONORIFICATION IN KOREAN

Speakers of every language need ways to express politeness toward the listener; however, the ways that politeness and formality are encoded differ cross-linguistically. Korean differs from many other languages in that its honorific registers are clearly delimited through matrix verb morphology, meaning every complete sentence must express a speech level. But the true uniqueness of the Korean system, at least as far as this study is concerned, is not any particular aspect of its construction per se, but the overall context in which it is spoken. Asif Agha (1994) writes that “in languages containing elaborate register systems, virtually any act of speaking is evaluable for social consequentiality in a manner much more transparent to native speakers than in languages which lack such formations.”

A few other languages fall within this category, but Korean is the only one that has been so completely and suddenly divided into separate social environments, with divergent frameworks for determining social consequentiality. This puts us in a unique situation where, by comparing the structure of the Korean speech level system north and south of the 38th parallel, we can see very clearly how culture and language intersect.

Korean honorific language can be divided into two categories: referent-honorifics and addressee-honorifics (also called “speech levels”). Referent-honorifics are binary and optional ways to show respect for the subject or object of the verb. Meanwhile, speech levels show respect (or lack of respect) for the listener, who might not be referenced by any of the verb’s arguments. They are realized as morphemes attached to the end of the matrix verb (always sentence-final in Korean), and have many levels of distinction.

(1) a. ce-nun nayil sewul-ey ka-pnita
   I-TOPIC tomorrow Seoul-to go-FORMAL

b. ce-nun nayil sewul-ey ka-yo
   I-TOPIC tomorrow Seoul-to go-POLITE

Sentences (1a) and (1b) have identical meanings, but the verb ending in (1a) makes it more appropriate for formal conversations or speeches, while the ending in (1b) is more appropriate for informal conversations with elders or strangers. These differences are a function of the relationship between the speaker and the listener, not the speaker and the referent(s) of the verb.

Mainstream South Korean scholars conceive of the Korean honorific verb endings as occupying no more than six “levels,” though there are minor variations between different grammarians’ categorizations. Two of these levels – {S} and {N} – are now rare in the ROK, and are sometimes omitted from grammars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Korean name</th>
<th>Example with mek- ‘eat’</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>{P}</td>
<td>hapsyoche</td>
<td>meksupnita</td>
<td>Formal, deferential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{Y}</td>
<td>hayyoche</td>
<td>mekeyo</td>
<td>Polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{S}</td>
<td>hachoche</td>
<td>mekso</td>
<td>Semiformal, blunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{N}</td>
<td>hakcyechey</td>
<td>mekney</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{E}</td>
<td>panmal</td>
<td>meke</td>
<td>Intimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{T}</td>
<td>haylachey</td>
<td>meknunta</td>
<td>Plain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The six-level model of Korean speech levels

In the DPRK, some have claimed the six or so levels of Seoul Korean have been “simplified” down to just three (Yeon, 2006). However, a closer look at the studies published by DPRK authors provides a more nuanced picture. For example, although Kim Yeng-hwang (2013) and the Language Research Institute (2010) describe the system as being divided “broadly” to three parts for “real-life” (silcey-

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2 Javanese speech levels, for example, are realized through separate sets of lexical items, but vocabulary at the polite level is not complete (Poedjosoedarmo, 1968; Smith-Hefner, 1988). Japanese speech levels are more similar to Korean (see e.g. Matsumoto, 1988).

3 From Brown (2011). The list in the brackets is taken from the initial sound of a representative affix from each level, transcribed according to the Yale system. These are -pnita, -yo, -so, -ney, -e, and -ta respectively.

4 These are the commonly-used Korean terms for each speech level.

5 From Lee and Ramsey (2000); Strauss and Eun (2005).
SPEECH LEVELS

ck) usage, they still break it down further into five or six levels, much like ROK studies do. In terms of how speech levels are chosen by speakers, Kim (2013) writes that it is determined by (in order from most to least important): age, social position, gender (of both speaker and listener), closeness of speaker-listener relationship, level of “cultivation” (swuyang) or educational level, and style of writing or usage.

Speech levels, like many other things, are also politicized in the DPRK. Most of the DPRK studies used in the preparation of this paper use the existence of the speech level system as evidence of their language’s merit and uniqueness (e.g. Kim, 2013). Perhaps more interestingly, a study by the DPRK’s Language Research Institute (2010) includes a quote from Kim Il Sung himself which explicitly connects honorific language to state ideology: “Because our language’s rules of etiquette [lyeylecmcel] are clearly established, the people’s Communist moral refinement is also very good.”

In this paper, my initial objective is simply to provide a description of which speech levels currently exist in the DPRK and ROK, focusing on the three highest levels {P}, {Y}, and {S} for ease of analysis and comparison. Based on this, I will examine the differences I find within and between the ROK and DPRK speech level systems in the context of each country’s cultural and sociopolitical makeup. This comparison will reveal the content of the DPRK’s speech level system and the ideologies and practices it encodes.

METHODS

This study makes use of three data sources: 1) metapragmatic commentary from DPRK and ROK linguistics books and papers, 2) dialogue from DPRK and ROK fiction, and 3) data from field interviews with a native speaker of Pyongyang Korean. Previous studies of DPRK language have used at most two of these sources (e.g. An, 2011) used metapragmatic commentary and some literary sources), but incorporating data from all three will hopefully allow us to get a better idea of the phenomena in question and evaluate how well they correspond with each other.

2.1 METAPRAGMATIC COMMENTARY

Four different DPRK linguistics books were used to gather primary data on how that country’s linguists conceptualize their speech level system. Mwunhwa enehak was published in China by a house that targets the Korean minority in China; the others were all apparently written with a domestic audience in mind.

2.2 DATA FROM DIALOGUE IN FICTION

Literature from both Koreas was used as a source of “spoken” data for this study. Ideally, a study of speech levels in society would be carried out through field interviews. However, this level of access is not feasible in the DPRK, and so we have to find proxies.

2.2.1 DPRK SOURCES

DPRK publishing is completely controlled by the state, and all literature must explicitly promote some aspect(s) of the state ideology. The website Uriminzokkiri, registered in China but administered by the DPRK government, maintains an archive of several magazines and novels, all of which are freely available. This was the primary source of DPRK literature for this study. One story was also found in a print copy of Cosen mwunhak, a long-running literary periodical.

These stories have some variation in their format and style, but they are all very recently published and they often have similar storylines. Recently-published stories were chosen partly out of convenience, since that is what is available on the Uriminzokkiri website, but also to give an idea of the state of DPRK language today. The common themes and plots are simply due to the fact that DPRK literature has to follow a certain structure in order to make it past the censors.

2.2.2 ROK SOURCES

Several ROK books and stories were also analyzed in order to provide a point of comparison for the DPRK sources. In order to minimize the effects of diachronic changes within

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Country of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim Yenghwang</td>
<td>Mwunhwa enehak Culture and language</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>China</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Science Research Institute</td>
<td>Wulimal lyeylecelpe Our language’s etiquette</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>DPRK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Tongswu</td>
<td>Cosemnal lyeylecelpe Korean language etiquette</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>DPRK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Literature Research Center</td>
<td>Cosene munpep Korean grammar</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>DPRK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: DPRK linguistics books
the data pool, only works published in the last 20 years were selected.

The ROK sources also vary in format (novel or short story), audience (young adult or adult), and setting. However, like the DPRK sources, all the stories take place in their country of origin – in this case, the ROK. Thus, there are a total of eight books and stories from each country.

2.2.3 ANALYTICAL METHODS

For each country, three sources were chosen for more in-depth data collection – 100 tokens were collected from each of these DPRK sources, and 50 from the ROK sources. For the rest of the sources, only 60 tokens were collected for DPRK literature and 30 tokens for ROK literature. Fewer tokens were collected from ROK sources because ROK language is already very well-documented. The ROK data were collected primarily to verify that the methods used here were reasonably effective in illustrating the phenomena under examination.

The tokens from each source were transcribed and coded for various contextual information about the speaker and the listener of each utterance. This contextual information included most of the factors said to influence choice of speech levels (e.g. from Kim, 2013), including speaker and listener gender, relative age, and relative “societal position.” The latter two categories were calculated by making a ranked hierarchy of the characters in each story with respect to age or “position.” When a character’s age was not mentioned in the story, it was approximated based on context, and the “position” was determined by taking into consideration the character’s job title and seniority within their workplace. Children were automatically given a lower “position” than adults. An example ranking, from the story Kummeytal (DPRK-3), is presented in Table 5.

To measure age and position relationships, the listener’s rank was simply subtracted from the speaker’s rank. Thus, Cwu-chel speaking to Yun-swuk would have a relative age

<table>
<thead>
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<th>#</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROK-1</td>
<td><em>Yulang kacok</em></td>
<td>Wandering Family</td>
<td>Kong Senok</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROK-3</td>
<td><em>Namukkwunkwa senny</em></td>
<td>The Woodsman and the Fairy</td>
<td>Sc Hacin</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK-4</td>
<td><em>Tomapaym</em></td>
<td>Lizard</td>
<td>Kim Yengha</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK-5</td>
<td><em>Kkachilhan Cayseikaka tolawassta</em></td>
<td>Feisty Caysek Is Back</td>
<td>Ko Cengok</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK-6</td>
<td><em>Micswu X</em></td>
<td>Variable X</td>
<td>Kim Cwunho</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK-7</td>
<td><em>Ciknyeuy Ikicang</em></td>
<td>Ciknye’s Diary</td>
<td>Cen Ali</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK-8</td>
<td><em>Ulachacha twawngpo khullep</em></td>
<td>The Rachacha Fatty Club</td>
<td>Cen Hyengeeng</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: ROK novels and stories used as data sources for this study

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These sources were ROK-2, ROK-4, ROK-8, DPRK-1, DPRK-3, and DPRK-6.
score of -2. However, these numbers cannot be made to be consistent across stories, since a rank of 3 would mean something very different in a story with 10 characters than in the story above. The relative age and position scores were therefore boiled down to three categories – all positive scores were recoded as “+1”, negative scores as “-1”, and scores of 0 remained the same. The +1 utterances can be thought of as situations in which the speaker was speaking “upwards” to a listener of higher age or positional status, while -1 would mean that the speaker was speaking “downwards” to someone of lower status.

The various verb endings were collapsed into the more general levels {P}, {S}, and {Y}; endings not belonging to one of these levels were simply marked “x.” These three levels represent the three highest (most honorific) levels under all interpretations – the others are usually described as being markedly more “familiar” or “informal” registers. These three levels were also chosen for analysis because they are the most easily identifiable, since their associated morphemes are more similar across tenses and moods.

Section 3 below focuses primarily on the {S} speech level. Factors influencing the use of this speech level versus all others were identified using a binomial logistic regression.

The potential predictors for the use of this speech level are speaker gender, listener gender, speaker-listener age relation, and speaker-listener position relation.

2.3 INTERVIEWS

The third source of data for this study was a series of interviews with a native speaker of Pyongyang Korean. These interviews took place in China, where the speaker attends university. He is in his twenties and was born and raised in Pyongyang. By living in China, he has been exposed to ROK and Yanbian (PRC) dialects of Korean, but he continues to use his native dialect with his family. When outside the DPRK, he avoids speaking Korean in public, preferring Mandarin Chinese or English instead.

The interviews occurred over a six-week period in summer 2013. He was asked about lexical, morphological, and syntactic differences between DPRK and ROK languages, and some recordings were made to measure phonetic differences. He was also asked about his impressions of ROK style and usage, and the pragmatics of certain expressions.

RESULTS

Analysis of metapragmatic sources, the data from literature, and field research produced a few interesting insights.
regarding speech level usage in the DPRK. The most striking of these insights is that the \{S\} level is very much alive and well in the DPRK. It appears throughout the literature corpus, and the metapragmatic and ethnographic data also attest for its presence.

The presence of \{S\} in the DPRK data leads us to wonder how and with whom it is used: perhaps if we understand the interactional work it is doing, we can understand why it appears in one country but not the other. Within the DPRK data, I find that gender and status has significant effects on choice of speech level. \{S\} is particularly associated with male speakers, female listeners, and a high-to-low position relationship between the speaker and listener. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Section 4.

3.1 COUNTRY [ROK-DPRK] EFFECTS

Figure 1 shows the distribution of speech levels in the DPRK and ROK literary sources. The most obvious difference between the charts for the two countries is the complete absence of \{S\} endings in the ROK. In the DPRK, on the other hand, \{S\} forms were used about 14% of the time, representing a robust part of the speech level system.

This difference is corroborated, in a sense, by DPRK grammars and linguistics books. All of the DPRK sources referenced here describe \{S\} as a distinct speech level, and none say anything about \{S\} being less commonly used. Studies of ROK language, however, sometimes leave out \{S\} entirely (e.g. Choo, 2006; Se, 1996), and if they do include it in their description, it is usually with a caveat emphasizing how infrequent it is in modern Korea. According to Noma (1996), 86.7% of ROK speakers reported that they do not use \{S\} at all, and he comments that \{S\} is “losing [its] qualification as a speech level form and [is] becoming a social dialect which is used within limited social groups,” i.e. “older-generation speakers” (Choo, 2006). As Noma’s study took place almost twenty years ago, the number of \{S\} users is likely even lower now.

But besides the small and shrinking number of older speakers who use it, the \{S\} ending is still occasionally found in the ROK in two specific contexts. First, it is used frequently in television dramas set in the pre-modern period to evoke a sense of historical authenticity and gravitas. But more surprisingly, Lee (2004) reports that \{S\} is making a resurgence on the internet, where young men (in their 20s and 30s) use it on message boards\footnote{Oddly enough, it is used particularly on message boards ostensibly devoted to discussing digital photography (though in reality the discussions are much more wide-ranging). Lee (2004) collected data from the website DC Inside (www.dcinside.com), but instances of \{S\} usage were also found on the SLR Club (www.slrclub.com) forums.} to emphasize their own strength and authority while showing a degree of deference to the other user(s).

Returning once more to Figure 1, another important difference to notice is the near categorical absence of the \{P\} level from the ROK data, compared to its frequency within the DPRK data. However, this should not be interpreted as meaning that \{P\} is never used in the ROK. It is, in fact, relatively common, just not in day-to-day conversation. \{P\}

![Graph showing distribution of speech levels in DPRK](image)

**Figure 2: Distribution of \{P\}, \{S\}, and \{Y\} in DPRK literary sources, divided by speaker gender. The columns labeled “x” include the data with endings not included in the aforementioned three levels. Labels above the columns indicate the percent of total tokens with that speech level (in DPRK sources) that were uttered by speakers of a particular gender.**
is the level used for speeches, very formal situations, and impersonal announcements, such as through public address systems. It is perceived as not just formal, but “heavily formal” in the ROK (Choo, 2006), so much so that it is gradually being replaced by \{Y\} in most situations. Based on the diversity of speech levels still present in the DPRK data, it appears that no such shift is happening in that country.

### 3.2 GENDER AND STATUS EFFECTS

Another major observation from the DPRK literary data is that there is a strong gender bias for the endings \{S\} and \{Y\}. Figure 2 displays the heavy gender imbalance among \{S\} and \{Y\} tokens, and a much slighter imbalance for \{P\} tokens. A logistic regression model reveals that speaker gender was a highly significant predictor of usage of \{S\} (p < .0001) and \{Y\} (p < .0001), but not quite for \{P\} (p = 0.0557). Speaker gender was in fact the only statistically significant predictor of \{S\} usage – p-values for relative age and relative position were all greater than 0.1. For \{Y\} and \{P\}, on the other hand, relative age and position were clearly significant predictors.

Adding listener gender into the picture also produces interesting results, as shown in Figure 3. We again see \{Y\} being used primarily by women and \{S\} primarily by men, but it also appears that \{S\} is actually the most commonly used form by men toward. This effect is not quite mirrored in the \{Y\} data among female speakers – \{Y\} is used quite commonly by women toward men, but it is also very common between women.

![Figure 3: Distribution of \{P\}, \{S\}, and \{Y\} in DPRK literary sources, divided by both speaker gender and listener gender.](image)

One may wonder whether the apparent tendency of DPRK men to use \{S\} more with women is actually due to the fact that women tend to have lower-status jobs or positions in society, and so the effect is really caused by “position” instead of gender per se. However, in situations where the speaker-listener “position” relationship was coded as negative – that is, situations in which the speaker has a higher socioeconomic status than the listener – there is still a marked tendency to use \{S\} forms to speak to women. This difference is statistically significant – in a logistic regression model, listener gender was a good (p = .0440) predictor of \{S\} (as opposed to any other ending), while relative age and relative position were not.

Narrowing the data set down even further to look only at male-male interactions, the importance of relative position actually increases: 80% of male-to-male utterances containing \{S\} were spoken by someone of higher position to someone of lower position (i.e. the “relative position” score was coded as -1). A logistic regression model reveals that this difference is significant: relative position was a good (p = .0240) predictor of use of \{S\} (versus any other ending) between male speakers and male listeners.

A more qualitative evaluation of the three DPRK stories from which I collected extra tokens (DPRK-1, 3, and 6) supports the quantitative findings above. The \{S\} ending is
often used by men towards women, and never by women toward men, even when there is no status difference between them and they are close friends or even husband and wife. In each of these stories, I find that \{S\} is primarily used by adult men toward adult women who are sometimes of lower age and position and greater distance (as in DPRK-6), but sometimes between close friends of roughly equal status (as in DPRK-3) or even husband and wife (DPRK-1). A few exceptions to this trend are found in DPRK-3, in a scene in which a schoolteacher is confronted by the Japanese colonial police. When one of the students (the hero of the story) stands up to the policeman, he also uses \{S\} endings, eliciting an annoyed reaction.

There are a few conclusions we might draw from these examples: 1) When men use \{S\} with men, the speaker is usually of a higher status than the listener, and 2) When a lower-status speaker uses \{S\}, it is taken as an attempt to subvert the existing power relationship. This sort of jockeying for power is absent from cross-gender interactions.

The DPRK linguist Kim Tongswu’s book Cosen mal ley-celpep (1983) addresses the issue of gender and its relation to speech levels, and while he does not mention how men and women use \{S\} differently, he spends some time discussing the gendered meanings of \{Y\}. He writes that \{Y\} is similar to \{P\} in that it elevates (i.e. shows deference to) the listener, but \{P\} is masculine and formal [kongsikcek], while \{Y\} is feminine and private [sasalowun].” Kim Yeng-hwang, another DPRK linguist, also briefly discusses gender in his book Munhwa enehak (2013). He places gender third on the list of the most important factors in determining which speech level is used, and notes that female speakers tend to use more “respectful” expressions.

In the field interview portion of this project, it was only possible to talk to one DPRK speaker, who happened to be male. He consistently rejected example sentences with \{Y\} endings as too “Southern” for his idiolect, and generally preferred using either \{E\} or \{P\} endings during our elicitation sessions. He also commented that ROK language as whole sounded very “feminine,” echoing DPRK sources. ⁹

**DISCUSSION**

Having established that there are certain consistent differences between distribution and usage of speech levels in the ROK and DPRK, the next question to ask is why? Why is \{S\} disappearing in the ROK but not the DPRK, and why do gender and status seem to play the role they do in the DPRK?

### 4.1 THE ROLE OF \{S\}

To begin with, we need to further clarify the social and ideological meaning of the \{S\} ending. Based on the results of this study, it appears that in the DPRK, \{S\} is primarily associated with male speakers, who use it most frequently toward female speakers and men of roughly equal or lesser age and position. In this respect, \{S\} indexes masculinity, and can be placed in opposition to the \{Y\}, which multiple DPRK sources describe as “feminine.” But this does not give the whole picture, because \{S\} seems to encode not just gender, but also some hierarchical information. We have seen that \{S\} correlates positively with position in male-to-male interactions, and in many cases it seems to be used in situations where the speaker wants to project authority and status. All three sources converge on this gender- and hierarchy-determined usage of \{S\} in the DPRK.

Further evidence of the \{S\} level’s “authoritative” meaning comes from looking at how ROK sources comment on the way this level is perceived in their country today. They generally do not have positive things to say about it, and their distaste usually is driven by the fundamental inequality implied by its use. \{S\} is understood to encode a traditionalist sense of hierarchy, masculinity, and authority, and so to some listeners, it sounds dated. Kim-Renaud (2001) comments that “[i]n today’s society, these self-important forms \{S\} and \{N\} are increasingly felt dated, pompous, artificial, awkward, and arrogant,” and Brown (2011) writes that younger people find \{S\} “high-handed and even insulting.”

Given all this, why was \{S\} preserved in the DPRK’s speech level system, but not in the ROK’s? Why is the ideological work done by \{S\} valuable in one country, but unnecessary or even detestable in the other? And could the case of \{Y\}, which is normal in the ROK but markedly “feminine” in the DPRK, be a related phenomenon?

### 4.2 DPRK LANGUAGE POLICY

The DPRK has had an unusually strict and extensive language policy program (see e.g. Kim, 1978; King, 1997; Kumatani, 1990). The raison d’être of this program was essentially political – the DPRK is a very new state, especially compared to its neighbors to the north (China, Russia) and east (Japan), and its leaders needed to quickly create a sense of national identity in order to legitimize their state. This was complicated by the existence of “another Korea” across the 38th parallel, and forced them to find a balance between

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⁹ For example, see an excerpt from a DPRK reference dictionary, cited in Kim (1991), which describes ROK language as a dialect “used today in [the ROK] by women flirting with men.”
maintaining traditional values and culture, which they had in common with the ROK, and differentiating themselves to prove their distinctness from (and superiority over) the ideologically opposite ROK culture. Thus, DPRK language policy evinces a combination of conservatism and various sorts of innovation. These innovations are along the lines of state ideology: ethnic nationalism and peasant- and worker-focused populism produced a conversion to hankul script, nativized neologisms, and the elevation of the Phyengang county’s dialect to standard; idolization of the Kim clan produced a standard language supposedly based on Kim Il Sung’s own idiolect and the repurposing of words like epei (original meaning: ‘parents’) for propagandistic purposes (‘the leaders’).

While there is no evidence that the preservation of {S} was a specific goal of DPRK language policy, its retention meets several of that program’s main goals. The conservative, traditionalist impulse means that in the absence of some ideological or practical reason not to, most forms would be preserved anyway in order to stay true to the language’s (and by extension, the people’s) history. In addition, it is clear from the attitudes expressed by DPRK linguists that speech levels are specifically seen as an expression of these very “national characteristics” unique to the Korean ethnic nation. If DPRK speakers had any knowledge of the disappearance of {S} in the ROK, then that ending would take on additional meaning as a distinctly non-ROK form. But DPRK identity need not be defined exclusively in opposition to ROK identity. {S} can still come to serve as a powerful in-group marker: a valuable asset in the construction of a new national culture.

4.3 THE CONFUCIAN LEGACY

Koreans adopted Confucianism with an enthusiasm that surpassed even the Chinese, and Korea has been called the “most Confucian” of the East Asian countries (Cumings, 2005; Kang, 2010; McBrien, 1978, inter alia). The DPRK state, though it does not officially recognize it, has also been characterized as essentially “neo-Confucian,” even more so than its Westernized and modernized neighbor to the south. Bruce Cumings (2005), for example, cites the “family-based politics, the succession to rule of the leader’s son, and the extraordinary veneration of the state’s founder, Kim Il Sung,” which tends to describe him using the language of the traditional Confucian virtues: benevolence, trust, obedience, respect, and reciprocity between leader and subjects.

There are two very important aspects of neo-Confucianism which, based on this and other analyses, are reflected in language. The first aspect is what Yum (1988) calls the “particularism” of Confucian interpersonal relationships. Confucianism values the correct maintenance of interpersonal relationships, but unlike in the West, these relationships are treated as fundamentally different depending on who the participants are. Yum writes that “[i]nstead of applying the same rule to everybody with whom they interact, East Asians differentially grade and regulate relationships according to the status of the persons involved and the particular context.” As a result, “[t]he importance of social relationships in Confucian societies has promoted the differentiation of linguistic codes to accommodate highly differentiated relationships.” The highly differentiated speech level system in the DPRK maintains this Confucian image; in the less differentiated ROK system, it becomes not quite so apparent.

The differentiation of social relationships brings about the second relevant feature of Confucianism: stratification, or hierarchy. Confucianism creates a strict structure within the family unit, centered around the father-son relationship, in which “age and sex formed the basis of hierarchy, with elder taking precedence over younger and male over female” (McBrien, 1978). All other relationships are built as extensions of this familial model, including the DPRK family-state (Kim, 2010). This system aligns with the gender and status effects present in the data.

4.4 DPRK NATIONAL CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

Still, the simple fact that {S} was historically present does not necessarily mean that it would be accepted by the DPRK state. It must still be congruent with the overall state ideology, which extends beyond just ethnic nationalism.

On the surface, the maintenance of a complex speech level system actually seems contrary to the ideological goals of the DPRK state. How is it ideologically consistent to have more speech levels in a communist country than in a bourgeois capitalist one?

The solution to this paradox may be to accept what many

10 It is generally referred to as “neo-Confucian” rather than just “Confucian” because although the DPRK inherited many aspects of traditional Confucianism, the addition of other elements like nationalism and socialism means it is not entirely the same philosophy as was practiced in pre-20th century Korea.

11 The pattern of hereditary succession was cemented when Kim Jong Un, the grandson of Kim Il Sung, was handed power after his father’s death in 2011.
scholars have claimed: namely, that the DPRK is not entirely a “communist” country. In 2009, the word “communist” was even eliminated from the DPRK’s constitution, and it now emphasizes “the Juche [self-reliance] idea and the Songun [military-first] idea, a world outlook centered on people, a revolutionary ideology for achieving the independence of the masses of the people” as guiding principles. The core elements, as transmitted through this excerpt, are essentially populism, militarism, and the unique blend of nationalism, particularism, and Kimilsungism that makes up the juche (Yale: cwuche) philosophy. Especially if militarism is connected to masculinity, these elements seem remarkably similar to the potential reasons described above for the retention of a variegated speech level system.

Additionally, although it is not acknowledged by state sources, hierarchy and class are extremely important in the DPRK. In fact, the DPRK social class organization is perhaps even more clear-cut and immutable than elsewhere in the world, as it has been systematized through the sengpwun system (Kim, 2012). The revolution that begat the DPRK did not actually destroy the traditional class system—it simply rearranged it, placing the most trustworthy elements at the top, and the least trustworthy at the bottom. The sengpwun system formalized this rearranged structure, and it became a determining factor in the assignment of prestigious homes, jobs, and assignments. In addition, it is a patrilineally inherited designation. The rigidity and inherent discrimination present in this system led the UN Human Rights Council to include a chapter on it in its most recent report on the DPRK human rights situation (UNHRC, 2014).

With respect to gender, there are also apparent inequalities, despite a theoretical commitment to supporting women’s rights. Suk-Young Kim (2010) describes a trope within DPRK literature and film in which women are freed from the traditional familial/social structure and join the larger socialist family, but she writes that this “strong image of women whose existence extended beyond the domestic realm” may be no more than part of the attempt to mobilize women as a labor force by creating an illusion of women’s liberation without addressing gender equality in the social and domestic areas. Relatedly, Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland’s survey data show the DPRK to be an “increasingly male-dominated state” and DPRK women to be a “vulnerable group that has been disadvantaged in North Korea’s transition” who “lack the tools or social capital to act collectively to improve their status” (Haggard and Noland, 2013).

This is all to say that despite outward appearances, the DPRK has use for the particular speech level system described in this study. In a society where gender and status within a rigidly defined hierarchy are important determiners of one’s life, it is not surprising that gender and hierarchy are key distinguishing elements of the speech level system, and within in a conservative nationalist culture, it is not surprising that the majority of the traditional speech levels are retained.

Although the ROK inherited an identical Confucian legacy and has its fair share of nationalism, the ideology present in the two countries is still markedly different. Several scholars cite societal reasons for a “collapse” of the ROK speech level system from five or six levels down to just three or four (Brown, 2011; Choo, 2006; Kim-Renaud, 2001; Lee and Ramsey, 2000). Choo writes that “[t]raditionally, honorifics in Korean were viewed as something strictly hierarchical, reflecting the various speech levels employed by speakers,” but in modern times, “[t]he overly power-laden forms of earlier days are becoming outmoded and are gaining a new semantics.”

Throughout this ROK metapragmatic commentary, there is no talk of the Korean language’s “superiority” or “unique characteristics,” unlike in the DPRK sources, where it is virtually always present. And regardless of what the actual conditions are with respect to equality and democracy in the ROK, the sentiment expressed by Kim-Renaud and others differs markedly from the DPRK narrative, which, through the sengpwun system and a network of propaganda, explicitly places some people above others and differentiates between the roles of men and women in society.

**CONCLUSION**

The Korean situation, where a single ethnic nation was kept separated and under opposite political systems for sixty years, provides a strange and compelling case study for anyone interested in the relationships between politics, society, culture, and language. Language was purposefully shaped by the DPRK state to promote its political and ideological goals, including nationalism, populism, and juche thought. Many distinctive linguistic phenomena in the DPRK are therefore easily traceable back to specific policies and programs initiated by the government. However, many linguistic differences are also products of the differing cultural environments that have arisen, partly due to politics, in each place. Because speech level usage is so closely connected to these cultural environments, they are the aspects of the Korean language that reveal the most about them. Every complete sentence in spoken Korean must have a speech level, meaning that every time a Korean speaker produces an utterance they are choosing how to define their relation-
ship with the listener. Through speech levels, language can not only mirror DPRK and ROK social ideologies, but also perpetuate them.

Veracity is a perpetual issue when studying the DPRK because objective sources are inaccessible, while accessible sources are heavily distorted. Public opinion, news, and even basic facts about the country are essentially only available through government sources or occasional defector testimonies, both of which may have political agendas to support. But as I hope this study has demonstrated, studying only the available data can still allow us to illuminate DPRK society for the outside world. In fact, even though this study relied heavily on state-sponsored or even propagandistic sources, the conclusions drawn actually do not follow from the state’s own stance on the matter. The DPRK state presents itself as a society of comrades, where women and men are valued equally and everyone works toward a new and modern form of social order; the data, on the other hand, describe a society where hierarchy is eminently important, women are treated in a measurably different way from men, and traditional values are carefully preserved.

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REFERENCES

China’s Complicity in North Korea’s Nuclear Program: Henry Kissinger for the Defense

Henry Kissinger is the brilliant archetype of an American foreign policy realist. He is also the co-architect, with Richard Nixon, of the United States’ China policy, and has been the most articulate and devoted defender of that policy over the ensuing four decades. As a perennial adviser to government leaders in both Washington and Beijing, his unique experience and insights have earned him the world’s respect as the foremost authority on China-U.S. relations. Having started his career as an expert on nuclear weapons and foreign policy, he has taken a special interest in, and expressed special concerns regarding, North Korea’s nuclear program. He has returned to the subject frequently in his writings, speeches, and interviews for more than twenty years but has been bedeviled by the role China has played in Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile programs. He has struggled to reconcile four tenets of his thinking: (1) North Korea’s programs threaten China’s strategic security interests at least as much as those of other countries in the region; (2) Beijing therefore shares others’ concerns about those programs; (3) China has unique economic, political, and diplomatic leverage over the policies of the North Korean regime; (4) China has generally declined to use that leverage to influence Pyongyang’s behavior. This article addresses Kissinger’s efforts to defend China’s posture by offering a series of often inconsistent and contradictory rationales that fall short of the intellectual rigor and strategic coherence that characterizes his work in other policy areas.

No one in America’s foreign policy establishment has been as consistent, persistent, and even prescient in identifying the threat to international peace and security posed by North Korea’s nuclear weapons program as Henry Kissinger. However, except for the persistence part, the same cannot be said for his unrelenting and misguided defense of China’s support for that dangerous program over the past two decades. In his latest book, On China, Kissinger manifests what can fairly be described as pervasive and longstanding credulity regarding China’s regional and global rise and its intentions toward the United States. In explaining Beijing’s attitudes regarding cooperation with Washington on critical international security concerns, he wrote earlier: “The issue of nuclear weapons in North Korea is an important test case.” Kissinger correctly outlines the right standard for judging China, but for almost twenty years he has struggled to avoid following the facts to their logical but painful conclusion: China is a major part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Having first made his mark in national security affairs with his book Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, Kissinger’s views on the dangers of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in regimes like North Korea’s carry great intellectual authority:

The spread of these weapons into hands not restrained by the historical and political considerations of the major states augurs a world of devastation and human loss without precedent even in our age of genocidal killings.  

It is therefore striking that in the 530 pages of Kissinger’s memoir he devotes little more than a paragraph to Beijing’s complicity in North Korea’s development of a nuclear weapons program and the missile technology

to deliver them. He first provides an apt context:

[T]he experience with the ‘private’ proliferation network of apparently friendly Pakistan with North Korea, Libya, and Iran demonstrates the vast consequences to the international order of the spread of nuclear weapons, even when the proliferating country does not meet the formal criteria of a rogue state. 3

While indirectly, but correctly, criticizing the Pakistani government's role, Kissinger neglects to mention that the original “proliferating country” and the source of Pakistan's own nuclear know-how was in fact China. Along with Pakistani protégé A.Q. Kahn, Beijing helped disseminate ballistic missile and nuclear technology directly to North Korea whose government “meets every definition of a rogue regime.” 4 Pyongyang has proceeded to further spread these lethal technologies to other anti-Western “rogue states.” Moreover, it has often transported the materials through China, which has proven to be both a proliferator in its own right and a proliferator of proliferators.

Kissinger also fails to note Beijing's critical diplomatic contribution to the successful development of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile program. China has never wavered from its support of North Korea, which it has called its Communist “little brother . . . as close as the lips and the teeth.” It joined the North in the Korean War against South Korea and the United States, earning United Nations condemnation for their joint “aggression.” In every available forum—the United Nations, bilateral and trilateral meetings, multilateral conferences, and the endless Six-Party Talks—China has unfailingly shielded North Korea from international pressure to halt and abandon its nuclear weapons program. Beijing weakened the 2006 and 2009 Security Council resolutions condemning North Korea's nuclear tests and has consistently failed to enforce them. It has also protected Pyongyang from meaningful sanctions for its repeated acts of aggression against South Korea such as the sinking of the frigate Cheonan, which caused the deaths of forty-seven South Korean sailors, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong island which killed three civilians.

Almost in parallel with China's enabling stance toward Pyongyang, Kissinger, in every public and private venue where he has had a voice over the decades, has consistently defended or excused Beijing's indulgence of North Korea's dangerous and often criminal behavior. In On China, the hardheaded pragmatic “realist” matter-of-factly offers this sweeping dismissal of China's responsibility for the emergence of the international crisis:

For the first ten years of North Korea's nuclear program, China took the position that it was a matter for the United States and North Korea to settle between themselves . . . it was chiefly up to the United States to provide [North Korea] with the requisite sense of security to substitute for nuclear weapons. 6

Kissinger offers no judgment on the moral or strategic merit of China's adamant position or its irresponsibility in fostering the emergence of a threat of “devastation and human loss without precedent.” According to Kissinger, Beijing eventually awoke to the danger: “With the passage of time it became obvious that nuclear proliferation into North Korea would sooner or later affect China's security.” 7 The fact that over that first decade it had already impacted the security of South Korea, Japan, the United States, and other states was of no consequence to China--nor, apparently, was China's untroubled tolerance of the threat to others a matter of great concern to Kissinger. Moreover, according to his argument, it was not North Korea's nuclear weapons that eventually aroused China's concern, but the prospect that others would follow its example:

If North Korea were to be accepted as a nuclear power, it is highly likely that Japan and South Korea and possibly other Asian countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia, would ultimately also join the nuclear club, altering the strategic landscape of Asia. China's leaders oppose such an outcome. 8

3 Ibid. (emphasis added).
4 “America’s Assignment: What will we face in the next four years?” Henry A. Kissinger, Newsweek, November 8, 2004.
5 In his meeting with Mao, Kissinger proposed that the UN censure be rescinded: “[T]hat was a long time ago, and our perception has changed . . . we shouldn’t change the UN resolution?” Mao declined the offer: “We have never put forward that request. We have indeed committed aggression . . . I consider that the greatest honor.” Kissinger, On China, 311.
6 Ibid., 496 (emphasis added).
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
Yet, even with its supposedly belated recognition of the danger, China’s substantive posture has not changed and Kissinger once again lets Beijing off the hook for its continued inaction: “China fears a catastrophic collapse of North Korea, since that could re-create at its borders the very conditions it fought to prevent sixty years ago.” 9 Kissinger has never explained how Pyongyang’s striking a lucrative financial deal with the West, trading nuclear weapons for massive economic and technological aid and security guarantees, would jeopardize the regime rather than solidify its hold on power. The claim absurdly seems to suggest that the starving North Korean population hungers more for nuclear weapons and missiles than for rice and fish. Kissinger has offered these arguments and other non-sequiturs on numerous occasions over the years in a continuing attempt to justify or explain China’s complicity.

1994

In his 1994 memoir, Kissinger wrote that the danger posed by North Korea’s nuclear program was that Japan would either develop its own weapons program or “seek to suppress North Korea’s.” 10 In an April interview publicizing his book on a Washington, D.C. radio program, Kissinger said the acquisition of nuclear weapons served to enhance North Korea’s regional and international stature:

North Korea cannot presently threaten either of its two neighbors, China or South Korea. But if it gets nuclear weapons, it enters into a new category of influence. If it proliferates these weapons it becomes a threat to the United States. Actually, North Korea is a bigger threat to China than to us. 11

The interviewer asked whether the United States needed China to negotiate with North Korea. Kissinger responded: “Absolutely, we cannot do it without China.” A former student of Kissinger’s called in to ask why, if North Korea’s nuclear program is so clearly adverse to China’s interest, it was doing nothing to stop it. Kissinger then gave a multi-faceted response that introduced several arguments he had not made previously and has for the most part not made since: (a) “The Chinese are as ambivalent as everybody is.” (b) “They’re afraid that if they bring too much pressure, the North Koreans may attack SK to escape out of this dilemma before their military forces run down.” (c) “They’d prefer to wait until Kim Il Sung dies before they use their full influence.” (d) “Maybe the Chinese are acting as they are because they figure we will take care of the problem and they can take a free ride.” Kissinger said he himself once believed the United States should unilaterally “knock out the nuclear capability of NK, if necessary even by aerial strikes.” He now thought it would be “too dangerous for us to do this alone given the general mentality that now exists in Washington and unwillingness to support it.” He said he now believed we should tell China “we are willing to go as far as you are willing to go in doing away with the nuclear capability . . . including a blockade and total economic isolation.” 12

Three months after that radio exchange, Kissinger wrote an op-ed expressing mild exasperation at the failure of multiparty negotiations on North Korea’s nuclear program. While he now conceded the oddity that China’s behavior seemed contrary to its own presumed interests, at least as he defined them, he still refused to single China out for criticism, instead painting with a broader brush that swept in two American allies:

Though China, Japan and South Korea may be thought to have even more to lose from a nuclear North Korea than the United States, they seem not to perceive their risks in practice. 13

Kissinger then offered yet another new explanation of China’s motivation, for the first time acknowledging not simply that Beijing was insufficiently concerned about Pyongyang’s nuclear project, but that it actually perceived some advantage in it. But, again, he placed Beijing in the company of Tokyo: “China and Japan prefer a divided Korea and might see in a modest North Korean nuclear capability a means to guarantee it. 14 Kissinger concluded his analysis by tempering the im-

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9 Ibid., 497.
11 The Diane Rehm Show, Interview with Henry Kissinger, WAMU-FM, April 7, 1994.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid. (emphasis added).
plied criticism of China he had made on the radio program, wrapping it in a blanket indictment of the three Asian governments:

These countries have been taking a free ride, hoping that America would assume the risks for solving their problems, while being prepared to blame us for an unsatisfactory outcome.  

Two days after Kissinger’s article appeared, and three months to the day after Kissinger’s remarkable radio interview, Kim Il-sung died. There has been no perceptible change in China’s policy toward North Korea in the years since.

Former President Richard Nixon, Kissinger’s senior partner in China realism, was less reticent than his former national security adviser and secretary of state in identifying Beijing as the decisive player in the nuclear drama, beyond being simply a negotiating partner. In his competing book published the same year as Kissinger’s, Nixon wrote: “China is the only country that possesses the necessary leverage to rein in North Korea’s ominous nuclear weapons program.” But he also cautioned that China’s support for North Korea had the potential to be intentionally adversarial to U.S. interests: “We should not underestimate China’s ability to disrupt our interests around the world if our relationship becomes belligerent rather than cooperative.”

2003

Almost a decade later, however, Kissinger was still contending that China shared other nations’ concerns about North Korea’s nuclear program because “it understands that a permanent Korean crisis would complicate its own domestic reform and political consolidation at a most sensitive time.” Kissinger wrote that China wanted to ensure the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the World Exposition in Shanghai in 2010:

Symbols of national consolidation and reform after decades of exertion and turmoil, these projects are threatened by protracted crisis and strategic uncertainty at China’s borders, which also risk straining China’s relationship with the United States. China’s conduct has left little doubt that it seeks a resolution, and urgently. It has declared a North Korean nuclear military program unacceptable and has been the driving force in assembling the new forum.

That new forum was the Six-Party talks, which Kissinger saw as “a signal achievement for American diplomacy.” Denied its goal of bipartisan talks with Washington, Kissinger argued, Pyongyang’s options to extract unconditional Western concessions would be limited. “Its most effective bargaining chip is the threat of its collapse -- a strategy that has its limits.” In fact, however, that chip has proved to have unlimited potency, having been played highly successfully, and repeatedly over the decade--by China itself. Kissinger implicitly concedes as much when he states in the same article:

But it can help produce such an outcome only within a political framework that ends Pyongyang’s nuclear program without a political collapse. At a minimum, China seeks some control over the political evolution in North Korea.

To enlist Chinese cooperation, Kissinger argues, America’s part of the deal is “to desist from active measures to destabilize or overthrow the North Korean regime.” The United States has upheld its end of the bargain.

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The following January, Kissinger reiterated that “eliminating North Korea’s nuclear program is overwhelmingly in the Chinese interest. They don’t want nuclear weapons on their borders.” Later that year, he wrote again to sound the alarm regarding “the so-called ‘private’ distribution of Pakistan’s nuclear technology to other countries” and to warn that “this may be the last moment to keep proliferation from spinning out of the three Asian governments:

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control." Specifically, he said "North Korea . . . might find the temptation to trade nuclear material for foreign exchange irresistible." But even without proliferation, he saw Pyongyang's purpose as ominous:

North Korea . . . seeks . . . a shield behind which it can conduct the revolutionary aspects of its foreign policy while reducing the risk of intervention by great powers.

Kissinger writes that the response to the growing threat has been tepid and divided, but he again refuses to identify China as the main offender:

The international community has been torn between premonition of nuclear catastrophe and the escapism of treating warnings about proliferation as an example of American bellicosity.

Without indicating whether he believes China shares that view, he asserts:

[The] special political and strategic objectives . . . China has . . . in the back of its mind are concern about nuclear weapons in all of Korea and the deployment of forces in North Korea in case of unification.

Put another way, even assuming China cares about a nuclear North Korea, it opposes, even more, a unified non-Communist Korea.

2005

The following year, Kissinger again addressed U.S.-China relations and started by objecting to some public criticism of Beijing's policies, "much of it in a tone implying China is on some sort of probation." He argued that "China, in its own interest, is seeking cooperation with the United States for many reasons."

Kissinger publicly recognized for the first time that "The issue of nuclear weapons in North Korea is an important test case." He also acknowledged criticism of China's role and attempted to confront it head-on.

[North Korea] is often presented as an example of China's failure to fulfill all its possibilities. But anyone familiar with Chinese conduct over the past decade knows that China has come a long way in defining a parallel interest with respect to doing away with the nuclear arsenal in North Korea.

It was a curious way of describing China's behavior vis a vis Pyongyang's nuclear adamancy over the previous ten years; its "parallel interest" consisted of non-judgmental lip service that continued to equate the North's nuclear program with American military support for South Korea. Kissinger neatly turned U.S. implied criticism of China back on Washington, suggesting it was somehow rash and unfair when compared to Beijing's more restrained approach: "[China's] patience in dealing with the problem is grating on some U.S. policymakers." Kissinger informed his American audience of China's geopolitical predicament:

[I]t partly reflects the reality that the North Korean problem is more complex for China than for the United States. America concentrates on nuclear weapons in North Korea; China is worried about the potential for chaos along its borders.

Kissinger saw a way to bridge the gap between U.S. and Chinese interests: "These concerns are not incompatible; they may require enlarging the framework of discussions from North Korea to Northeast Asia. But multilateralization of the issues was hardly a new idea, coming as it did more than two years into the Six-Party Talks. Nor does Kissinger explain what issues the broader framework would encompass. Uniquely to this opinion piece, Kissinger felt compelled to make a personal disclosure regarding his own financial and professional interests in China:

I must point out that the consulting company I chair advises clients with business interests around the world, includ-
ing China. Also, in early May I spent a week in China, much of it as a guest of the government.

2006

After the passage of yet another year of fruitless negotiations in the Six-Party Talks, Kissinger again addressed North Korea’s nuclear program: “The world is faced with the nightmarish prospect that nuclear weapons will become a standard part of national armament and wind up in terrorist hands.” Without naming names, let alone singling out China, Kissinger starkly warned of the worsening situation:

A failed diplomacy would leave us with a choice between the use of force or a world where restraint has been eroded by the inability or unwillingness of countries that have the most to lose to restrain defiant fanatics.

Kissinger decried “North Korea’s tactic of stringing out the period between each session, perhaps to gain time for strengthening its nuclear arsenal.” He saw an additional North Korean objective:

What Pyongyang is attempting to achieve . . . is a separate negotiation with Washington outside the six-party framework, which would prevent other parties in the Beijing process from undertaking joint responsibilities.

Kissinger described the potential adverse consequences if North Korea were to succeed in its negotiating strategy:

If bilateral talks replaced the six-party forum, some of America’s present partners might choose to place the onus for breaking every deadlock on Washington, in effect isolating the United States.

But in fact it was China which served as North Korea’s advocate for that bilateral approach. Kissinger then came as close as he seemed able in identifying Beijing as part of the problem rather than part of the solution:

The expectation that China is so reluctant to see nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula -- and therefore ultimately in Japan -- that it will sooner or later bring the needed pressure on North Korea has so far been disappointed.

But Kissinger then followed that up by issuing his now-ritualistic rationale for Chinese behavior:

This is because China has not only military concerns but also strategic objectives on the Korean Peninsula. It will try to avoid an outcome in Korea that leads to the sudden collapse of an ally, producing a flood of Korean refugees into China as well as turmoil on its borders.

Escalating his concern, Kissinger writes that North Korea’s “capacity for procrastination and obfuscation” presents a crisis “similar to what the world faced in 1938 and at the beginning of the Cold War” and argues (as he had in his 1994 radio interview) that the threat to use force should not be taken off the table:

The failure of that test in 1938 produced a catastrophic war; the ability to master it in the immediate aftermath of World War II led to victory without war.

As if to validate Kissinger’s dramatic warning, North Korea detonated its first nuclear device on October 9, 2006, prompting Kissinger to return to the op-ed pages. He first described the obstacle to progress in negotiating with Pyongyang:

[The] regime . . . has an extremely limited national interest - if any - in giving up a program it has pursued for two decades or longer while subjecting its population to extreme deprivation and at times starvation.

He then reiterated his explanation of China’s role in light of North Korea’s action:

Until the North Korean nuclear explosion, China was re-

37 Ibid.
39 Ibid. (Emphasis added.)
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid. (Emphasis added.)
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
luctant to press North Korea, not, as some allege, because it is indifferent to North Korean acquisition of nuclear weapons or sees some benefit in American discomfiture. 47

Kissinger’s explanation for China’s pre-explosion attitude was the familiar one:

Rather, it was because China has interests in Northeast Asia that go beyond the denuclearization of North Korea. The Korean Peninsula has been an invasion route to China for centuries. Chaos along its borders and floods of refugees on its territory have unique significance for China.

China has been, in effect, insisting on a recognition of these concerns. But Kissinger declines to explain which nation, exactly, might be planning to utilize the “invasion route” into China or why “chaos” and “floods of refugees” would ensue from Pyongyang’s entering into a lucrative deal to give up its nuclear program. He urges the parties:

[M]aintain the sanctions that helped bring a breakthrough and [do] not repeat the mistake of the Korean and Vietnamese wars of suspending pressures as an entrance price into negotiations. 48

Kissinger repeats his oft-stated warning that the multinational effort to stop North Korea’s nuclear program is “imperative for world peace” and that if it cannot prevail “in the face of the defiance of a country with few resources and a relatively small population, then appeals for diplomacy will become increasingly empty.” 49

Kissinger does not inform his readers of how China’s attitude toward North Korea after the nuclear detonation will differ from its pre-explosion tolerance. He had already asserted a year earlier that after the first decade of Chinese indulgence, Beijing was now acting “in parallel” with the United States, whose concern about the nuclear threat it supposedly shared. Each successive Chinese epiphany and putative turning-point eventually proved to be as illusory as its predecessor, but Kissinger’s assurances of Chinese sincerity and good intentions remained immutable.

2009

The endless negotiations on North Korea’s nuclear program continued through the 2008 election and Kissinger was moved to advise the new administration on the perils it faced:

In a world of multiplying nuclear weapons states, it would be unreasonable to expect that those arsenals will never be used or never fall into the hands of rogue organizations. 50

Kissinger made clear that time was quickly running out: “The next (literally) few years will be the last opportunity to achieve an enforceable restraint.” 51 At some point, Kissinger admonished, fruitless negotiations should not be allowed to continue: “North Korea has recently voided all concessions it made in six years of talks. It cannot be permitted to sell the same concessions over and over again.” 52 Kissinger seemed to describe a reverse David-and-Goliath situation with severe consequences for the world:

If the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia cannot achieve an enforceable restraint vis-à-vis a country with next to no impact on international trade and no resources needed by anyone, the phrase “world community” will become empty. 53

Kissinger does not carry this analysis to the point of examining which government was exhibiting the least concern regarding the viability of the “world community.” But in several of his other writings, including On China, he advances Beijing’s view that it has no vested interest in honoring, or being judged by, the norms of an international system that the People’s Republic had no part in creating. As shown earlier, China is also the leading proponent of the approach Kissinger condemns in this statement:

Since the Korean nuclear program threatens . . . all neighbors of North Korea more than it does the United States, calls to place the emphasis on bilateral Korean-U.S. talks amount

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Following his well-established pattern, Kissinger does not identify the source of those unhelpful “calls,” thereby continuing to insulate China from criticism for its protection of Pyongyang.

Just three months later, Kissinger penned yet another article expressing his deepening concern about North Korea’s nuclear program:

[T]he signal (and probably sole) achievement of their rule, for which they have obliged their population to accept a form of oppression and exploitation unprecedented even in this period of totalitarianism.  

Kissinger’s tone became increasingly desperate at the diminishing prospect of endless talks ever halting Pyongyang’s inexpressible movement toward achieving the status of a nuclear power:

[W]ith North Korea kicking over all previous agreements repeatedly, the time has come that process has overwhelmed substance. The negotiating process thereby ran the risk of legitimizing North Korea’s nuclear program by enabling Pyongyang to establish a fait accompli by means of diplomacy. That point is fast approaching if it has not already been reached.

Kissinger finally seemed prepared to distinguish China as more than just another member of the regional grouping of countries with equal concerns and equal responsibilities vis a vis a nuclear armed North Korea. He observed that ending the North Korean nuclear program “by a maximum deployment of pressures . . . requires the active participation of Korea’s neighbors, especially China.” But he quickly diluted the suggestion of a Sino-centric focus by pivoting to a broader regional scenario:

It is not enough to demand unstated pressures from other affected countries, especially China. A concept for the political evolution of Northeast Asia is urgently needed.

Kissinger never defined what this amorphous “political evolution” entails. And he returned, inevitably, to a full-throated defense of China’s hands-off approach to North Korea:

Too much of the commentary on the current crisis has concerned the deus ex machina of Chinese pressures on North Korea and complaints that Beijing has not implemented its full arsenal of possibilities. But for China, the issue is not so much a negotiating position as concern about its consequences.

China faces challenges perhaps even more complex than America’s. If present trends continue, and if North Korea manages to maintain its nuclear capability through the inability of the parties to bring matters to a head, the proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout Northeast Asia and the Middle East becomes probable. China will then face the prospect of nuclear weapons in all surrounding Asian states and an unmanageable nuclear-armed regime in Pyongyang.

But despite having described the putative dangers a nuclear North Korea presents for China, Kissinger nonetheless explained again why the rest of the world should understand and excuse Chinese inaction:

But if China exercises the full panoply of its pressures without an accord with America and an understanding with the other parties, it has reason to fear chaos along its borders at or close to the traditional invasion routes of China.

Kissinger’s reference to “an accord with America” raises again his earlier references to a “Northeast Asia” solution but he never quite explains what such an arrangement would involve beyond giving Pyongyang security guarantees and economic aid. He also fails again to enlighten his readers on precisely who would take advantage of those “traditional invasion routes”: North Korea? South Korea? Japan? The United States? Or perhaps that flood of refugees escaping from the new infusion of massive Western food, energy, and medical supplies extracted in exchange for abandonment of the nuclear program?

There is a more plausible explanation of Chinese motivation, and that is the impact of a nuclear-armed North Korea on America’s force posture and security

54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid. (Emphasis added.)
thinking. Kissinger describes it well, as a hypothetical situation rather than present reality, and seems not to grasp its import as a factor in Chinese motivation:

[A] North Korean nuclear program would require a reconsideration of current U.S strategic planning. More emphasis would need to be given to missile defense. It would be essential to redesign the American deterrent strategy in a world of multiple nuclear powers -- a challenge unprecedented in our experience. 61

It appears not to have occurred to America’s greatest self-proclaimed practitioner of Realpolitik 62 that China might see it in its own interest to complicate and obstruct

U.S. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Instead of confronting that likely reality, Kissinger’s prescription for a solution required a “sensitive, thoughtful dialogue with China, rather than peremptory demands.” 63

Six months later, Kissinger addressed the North Korea nuclear issue yet again and reviewed the negotiating process:

Pyongyang argues that its security concerns must be met first, that the principal threat to its security comes from the United States and that it therefore must gain special assurances from Washington before entering actual negotiations. But what bilateral assurances could possibly serve this purpose? 64

That North Korean argument is identical to the one Kissinger gave in On China to explain China’s posture of passivity for the “first decade of North Korea’s nuclear program.” Interestingly, Kissinger did not find the North Koreans’ rationale as objectionable when it came from the Chinese on their ally’s behalf. This time he manages to find a basis to distinguish the Chinese and North Korean negotiating postures but the bottom line is that the West should not press China to do more to restrain Pyongyang:

The position of China is more complex. It has strongly condemned Pyongyang’s nuclear testing. But it is more sensitive than its partners to the danger of destabilizing the political structure of North Korea. Great respect must be paid to Chinese views on a matter so close to its borders and directly affecting its interests. 65

Kissinger repeats his warning of the urgency of the situation, apparently clinging to the hope that it is still retrievable despite the number of previous occasions when he described it as in extremis:

The protracted process of opening negotiations runs the risk of becoming a palliative for substance. The test is substantive progress on the key issue: the elimination of a nuclear weapons capability. In view of the continuing technological progress in Pyongyang, which claims to have added a nuclear enrichment facility to its plutonium program, time is of the essence. 66

In this article, Kissinger does advance a fascinating perspective he had not offered previously: “In the end, the greatest risk to Pyongyang is not foreign aggression but internal collapse caused by its excessive ambitions.” 67 By “foreign aggression,” Kissinger presumably means any military conflict with an external power, which Pyongyang would call aggression no matter who fired the first shot and regardless of any U.S. or other legal justification based on preemptive self-defense. So, if Kissinger is indeed not being legalistic, he is effectively saying two important things in this statement. First, he believes Washington and its allies have almost certainly ruled out a military operation to eliminate North Korea’s nuclear weapons, contrary to his own recommendation that force should remain on the table.

The second point, however, is pregnant with meaning for his twenty-year defense of China’s position on Pyongyang’s nuclear project. The one constant

61 Ibid.
62 Discussing On China in a recent interview, Kissinger stated: “Let me say a word about ‘Realpolitik’ which is a term I never use. It’s a term my critics use when they want to say ‘watch out, he’s a German, it’s not an American concept.’” C-Span, Afterwords, Monica Crowley interview with Henry Kissinger, June 1, 2011.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid. (Presumably, the term “palliative” referred to the lack of “substance.”)
67 Ibid.
strand in the variegated arguments Kissinger has made to explain and excuse China’s hands-off approach was that it somehow feared internal regime collapse—and the much-conjured refugee flow—if North Korea gave up its nuclear weapons. That would come about, supposedly, if China used its economic leverage to pressure North Korea to come to terms with denuclearization and the North refused, thereby causing famine, panic, and pestilence. Since regime change would almost certainly follow in that scenario, it seems highly unlikely that Pyongyang would not yield to its ally and protector to avoid that result. The other, even more implausible, sequence of events, dismissed earlier in this paper, is that the population of North Korea would so object to losing its status as a nuclear power, despite the massive in-flow of economic aid, that it would rise up against its faithless government for making such a deal or flee into China.

But now Kissinger seems to be making quite the opposite argument—i.e. that the regime would collapse not by eliminating its nuclear program but by continuing it. That can be the only meaning of “internal collapse caused by its excessive ambitions” once war with foreign powers is ruled out. In other words, Kissinger now seems to be asserting, the government is totally bankrupting itself and/or the Korean population is nearing the point of desperation. Under this scenario, Pyongyang’s grossly wasteful diversion of the nation’s resources from even minimal survival consumption levels to fund the reckless nuclear and missile program will bring its demise. If that is indeed Kissinger’s new argument, it directly undermines two decades of excuses China has been making for doing nothing to stop Pyongyang—and, of course, Kissinger’s own willingness over that long period to represent China’s position as legitimate and valid.

Kissinger expresses exasperation with Pyongyang’s ongoing, and successful, strategy of delay, and the international community’s seeming willingness to tolerate it indefinitely:

It is time to face realities. This is the 15th year during which the United States has sought to end North Korea’s nuclear program through negotiations. These have been conducted in two-party and six-party forums. The result was the same, whatever the framework. In their course, Pyongyang has mothballed its nuclear facilities twice. Each time it ended the moratorium unilaterally. Twice it has tested nuclear explosions and long-range missiles during recesses of negotiations. If this pattern persists, diplomacy will turn into a means of legitimizing proliferation rather than arresting it. 68

Kissinger closes his article with this call for immediate, but undefined, action against North Korea:

No additional reconnaissance is needed about Pyongyang’s intentions: The six-party forum provides adequate opportunity for dealing with the issues. The famous dictum of Napoleon is apposite: “If you want to take Vienna, take Vienna.” 69

Yet, over the nearly twenty years that North Korea has been developing and testing these weapons and related missile systems, Kissinger has not explicitly called on China to do anything differently from what it has been doing all along—virtually nothing—to curtail Pyongyang’s nuclear ambitions. He merely advocates more “Sino-American dialogue and . . . Six Party Talks.” 70 Kissinger’s analysis of the Chinese position seems oblivious to the reality that if Beijing actually opposed North Korea’s nuclear program, American prodding and cajoling would be unnecessary since China has never been reticent about acting decisively on security concerns near its borders.

It is long past time to apply Kissinger’s clear-headed admonition about North Korea to China’s own behavior: “No additional reconnaissance is needed about [Beijing’s] intentions.” An honest diplomatic history of this period will show that (a) China knowingly, and for its own purposes, enabled North Korea’s emergence as a nuclear power and WMD proliferator, and (b) the indulgence of Kissinger and others in America’s bipartisan foreign policy establishment enabled China to succeed in that supportive role. In a recent address, Kissinger repeated his mantra that “China cannot possibly want a nuclear Korea, or Vietnam for that matter, at its borders.” 71 But the evidence indicates, regarding Ko-
rea, that is exactly what China wanted and expected all along. The twenty-year nuclear saga has advanced China’s foreign policy and national security objectives in several important ways:

First, it coerced massive Western aid that helped keep in power a close Communist ally and prevented a unified, democratic Korea.

Second, it won China enormous prestige as “a responsible international stakeholder” working within the Six-Party Talks, ostensibly to contain North Korea’s nuclear activities.

Third, it greatly enhanced Beijing’s negotiating leverage with Washington on trade imbalances, currency manipulation, human rights violations, and Taiwan.

Fourth, it distracted Washington’s diplomacy and disrupted its defense planning; diverted attention and resources from Iraq, Afghanistan, and counter-terrorism; and strained the American public’s support for overseas commitments.

Fifth, it hindered U.S. counter-proliferation efforts with Iran and spread dangerous technology to other anti-Western regimes and potentially to terrorists.

For decades, Pyongyang and Washington have each relied on Beijing as an indispensable partner in their competing national security objectives—the results are in and they vindicate North Korea’s strategy, not the West’s. Of course, Kissinger is not alone in averting his gaze from China’s subversive efforts on behalf of North Korea’s nuclear program. During Jiang Zemin’s 1999 visit, President Clinton thanked China for controlling North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. In 2003, President Bush was “heartened” by Jiang’s commitment to a nuclear-free peninsula. In 2008, he commended China’s “critical leadership role.” The Obama administration similarly has bestowed appreciation or China’s “constructive” efforts on this issue. So far, no administration has yet demanded that Beijing actually earn that praise by compelling North Korea to eliminate its nuclear program, nor drawn the necessary conclusions about China’s regional and global intentions from its refusal to do so.

But it is Kissinger who has chosen repeatedly over the past two decades to defend China’s willing complicity as North Korea’s missile and nuclear program deepened and expanded, and even as he repeatedly called on “the international community” to take meaningful steps to halt it. In a remarkable demonstration of cognitive dissonance from a figure known for his intellectual discernment of the most subtle nuances in historical and modern diplomacy, Kissinger adopted a predictable pattern of analysis and advice: (a) He recognized early and addressed often the growing danger of North Korea’s nuclear program; (b) he perceived the eventual threat to China as being at least as great as that to other countries; (c) he understood China’s unique ability to stop Pyongyang’s program, yet (d) he always found explanations—including contradictory ones—for China’s protective passivity toward North Korea, and (e) he even mustered, on Beijing’s behalf, a degree of indignation when others expressed impatience and mystification by Chinese inaction, criticizing the West for being too “judgmental” and lacking “sensitivity” to China’s supposed predicament.

In recent testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta confirmed that China has “clearly assisted” North Korea in its ballistic missile program. 72 At an East Asia security conference in Washington, Sheila Smith of the Council on Foreign Relations, stated that in light of the Panetta disclosure, “those of us who have long supported policies of engagement with China will have to seriously reconsider our position.” 73 Kissinger, the foremost exponent of those policies, has given no indication that any such reconsideration is necessary. Nor, despite his long intellectual and rhetorical odyssey simultaneously raising alarms about North Korea’s nuclear program while defending China’s indulgence of it, does he harbor any doubts regarding China’s benign intentions. In what can only be described as massive cognitive dissonance, Kissinger believes China finds Pyongyang’s nuclear project “unacceptable”; yet, year after year, decade after decade, Beijing not only accepts, but enables it. It is time for America’s leading practitioner of the theology of “realism” in international affairs, to do as he himself advised the world’s governments and face reality.

72 Testimony of Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, House Armed Services Committee, April 19, 2012.
73 Statement of Sheila Smith at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 26, 2012.
A Different Place: North Korean State Formation, 1945-1949

North Korea is a mysterious place in the globalising modern world and, consequently, understandings of the state are left to conjecture as often as they are left to fact. North Korea has proved a tricky subject for the historian due to unyielding restrictions over access to the country, let alone access to any domestic archival material. Yet, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) continues to fascinate us as we seek to explain why North Korea has managed to persevere as a state for as long as it has. Especially while other Eastern Bloc nations have gone the way of the West and China has turned into a market economy. The root my explanation asks to go back to the period of the state’s initial formation. This paper focuses on North Korea in the years 1945-1949 and examines how a history of the state in these years might contribute to conventional understandings of the DPRK. Furthermore, it asks the question to what extent these years can be seen as a period of positive success amidst the principally negative modern history of the North Korean state.

The largely reclusive North Korean state is often dragged into the public eye in the West. Most recently international attention has been focused on the saturation coverage of the Sony hacking crisis triggered by a satirical film, The Interview. The film highlighted North Korea as a source of comedy and ridicule in the west and reinforced the prevailing narrative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) as being a somewhat joke nation under the “grip of cartoon communism” and “crazed dictators.” Such perceptions, which view North Korea as a principally failed nation-state, play back a historical inability and unwillingness to understand the reality of North Korea and its history. It is relevant to go back to the origins of the state, not necessarily the Korean War, in order to make way for clearer understandings about North Korea and its leadership. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has long been a breeding ground for altered and polarised histories, often stipulated by Cold War binaries. The liberation or haebang period, and the subsequent years from 1945-1949, have become victim to this convention. A historian has claimed that “[h]istory in Korea has always been a sacrosanct subject,” a fitting assertion, as North Korean collective memory of this era is controlled largely by an inertly positive and immutable narrative of the liberation and formation of North Korea by Kim Il Sung. In contrast, orthodox western documenters have adversely portrayed North Korea in these years as being simply overrun by Soviet depredations and Stalinist abuses of socialism. The historiography around this period grapples with the early nation building program, and drawing on the North Korean captured documents from Record Group 242 of the United States National Archives, revisionists have offered the “possibility of moving above, behind and below conventional historical narratives.” Counter to the simple orthodox view, Bruce Cumings, Suzy Kim and others, have interpreted these years as a period of prosperity, fostering unique freedoms, modernity, hope and possibility unmatched in North Korea today. Their findings lead to questions about the nature of the North Korean “tragedy,” and they imply that “North Korea was a different place before the Kore-
an War.” Nevertheless, evidence of combustible and reprehensible elements complicate these findings. This paper breaks past the legacy of conflicting interpretations and decipherers to what extent North Korea can be deemed a success in this extremely complex period in North Korean history.

To draw a proper judgement on the years 1945-1949 one must take into account the context and importance of the Japanese surrender and the period of Soviet occupation. Adam Cathcart and Charles Kraus have stated that post-colonial Korea was made up of a “combustible mixture of factors,” an apt description for a country going through a chaotic transition from Japanese colonial rule to liberation under Soviet administration in 1945. The Japanese policy of no-cooperation with the Soviet occupation forces resulted in the flooding of sixty-four mines with a further 180 made ineffective as well as the damaging of rolling stock, repair shops and the destruction of eighty railway locomotives. Furthermore the Japanese destroyed official records and banks leaving 1,015 out of 1,034 small and medium size businesses crippled in their wake. In her memoir, Sunny Che avows that “the first week of Korean liberation from the Japanese colonial rule was sheer pandemonium, throwing the whole country into anarchy.” An insuperable lack of skilled workers and factories which produced only half finished products further complicated the situation. In a study of Inje County, Suzy Kim notes that for a population of 30,000 in 1946, the county had 175 military skilled workers, one telephone repair man, two mechanics and one doctor. The demise of over three decades of colonial rule left North Korea facing innumerable difficulties.

Additionally, this hypothetically liberated nation also faced violent appropriation by the Soviet Union. Bruce Cumings claims that a highly disorganised Soviet occupation force lived off the land taking what they needed without payment. The mayor of Pyongyang acknowledged that in the first weeks the Soviets seized two thirds of the food set aside by the People’s Committees. Aside from taking North Korean foodstuffs, there was widespread looting and mass raping of Korean women by the Soviet Army which further damaged the Northern state. Cathcart and Kraus’s research on the border town of Sinŭiju sheds valuable light on the combustible situation. They cite a report from 13th November 1945 which claimed Russian troops were violating military law through public drunkenness and robbery whilst noting the widespread venereal disease amongst the Red Army ranks. Owen Miller highlights that the Soviets exploited North Korea further through unequal trade agreements. He also claims the Soviets removed large quantities of industrial plant from factories and directed aid to parts of the economy which were responsible for producing exports for the Soviet Union. The Soviet occupation forces were met by popular remonstration, with students taking part in organised revolts on the 23rd November 1945 in the border town of Sinŭiju provoking brutal violence from the Red Army. The students attacked the People’s committee in Sinŭiju, the Pyongyang Communist Party Headquarters and the Peace Preservation Bureau where they were met with gunfire and beatings. A Soviet military report documented that 100 people had died during the Sinŭiju incident with up to 1,000 arrests. Resistance spread during March 1946 to the city of Hamhung, where Students were again at the centre of the revolt. Miller notes the “explicitly anti-Soviet complexion” of the resistance in Hamhung, with students protesting that the Soviet forces should “go home and stop taking local rice while the Koreans were starving.” In Hamhung resistance was met with similar brutality by the Red Army as had been seen in Sinŭju a few months earlier. Further violence marred this period as political resistance from Christians resulted in arson attacks against three churches in Sinŭiju in the spring of 1946. This violence and unrest, accompanying the Soviet arrival, reinforces the

8 Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, p.386
12 Kim, Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, p.73.
13 Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, p.388.
14 Ibid., p.389.
15 Cathcart and Kraus, “Peripheral Influence,” p.5
18 Ibid.
19 Miller, “North Korea’s Hidden History.”
20 Cathcart and Kraus, “Peripheral Influence,” p.5 & p.15.
conventional western narrative and its emphasis on the violent exploitation of North Korea in this formative period. The presence of the Soviet forces has allowed historians to liken North Korea to other countries under post-war Soviet arrogation. Erik van Ree has asserted that “Soviet policy in the early post-war period was, indeed, more dictatorial in North Korea than it generally was in Eastern Europe.”

It is useful to draw a comparison here between two seemingly analogous situations. Norman Naimark documents the horrifying reality faced by Eastern German in 1945 remarking that on seizing Berlin “up to half a million people were killed.” The Soviets further drafted German forced labour forces for the mines of Erzgebirge to extract uranium and transported German technical specialists back to Russia.

In Wladyslaw Gomulka’s memorandum of a conversation with Stalin in 1945, he recalls Stalin’s assertion that after the war “plundering instincts were awakened among the Red Army soldiers,” he claimed that in Berlin they took two hundred thousand watches as the Soviet command openly allowed soldiers to take spoils from people homes. A lack of discipline over the Soviet forces is further highlighted by eyewitness K. Gofman’s report to Georgi Dimitrov in August 1945 in which he stated that the so called “responsible organs,” were doing very little to restrain the Soviet marauders. In addition to, and perhaps explaining this lack of control, Naimark notes that the local commanders were often sympathetic towards the unceasing “rape and rampage” which continued long into the occupation of Eastern Germany. Naimark asserts that it was “not untypical for Soviet troops [in Eastern Germany] to rape every female over the age of twelve or thirteen in a village, killing many in the process; to pillage the homes for food, alcohol, and loot; and to leave the villages in flames.” These accounts reveal some overlap in the immoral behaviour of the Soviet occupational forces in North Korea, but the extreme nature of actions in Germany set these proceedings apart.

It has been recognised that by January 1946 strict military control, which was lacking in Eastern Europe, was firmly in place in North Korea and Manchuria. Cumings has asserted that by early 1946 there was a relative absence of Soviet abuses as the military police were instructed to shoot any Russian who was caught raping a Korean. An observation from a British onlooker illustrates compliance; he claims that between 15th March and 23rd April 1946, “One hundred and twenty Russian soldiers were shot by order of the Russian Command in Harbin during this period for various offences against public order.” Although unable to escape Soviet exploitations, North Korea was affected for an arguably limited period and less brutally than Eastern Europe.

While such images of violent appropriation dovetail with conventional western Cold War narratives, this is not to say that the Soviet occupation policy was a solely kleptocratic affair. In fact, it is essential to look beyond this context and accommodate the arguments that these years fostered considerable improvements in North Korea. The Soviets arguably worked successfully with the North Koreans to solve, not to exacerbate, many of the aforementioned problems following liberation. In the words of one revisionist, the north “moved out of backwardness” becoming “a repository, therefore of what was young, dynamic, and progressive.”

Widespread land reform was carried out beginning on 5th March 1946 and was far less violently than similar reforms in China or Vietnam. Even the United States intelligence reports note the lack of bloodshed. An eyewitness report by American journalist Anna Louise Strong in 1949 claimed that the seizure of land from colonial landlords allowed the average holding for a poor farmer to rise from half an acre to five acres, meaning every family could feed itself. Grain production improved while reclamation projects increased the amount of land under cultivation. In South Hamgyŏng the number of grain sacks produced rose from 1,260,790 in 1945 to 1,885,200 in 1946. Further-

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25 K.Gofman to Dimitrov, August 15th 1945, RTSKHDNI, E17, op. 128, d. 791, 11. 210-211, cited in Norman Naimark, The Russians in Germany, p.79.
26 Naimark, The Russians in Germany, p.79.
27 Naimark, The Russians in Germany, p.72.
31 Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, p.416.
33 Kim, Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, p. 83.
more, the Labour Law, passed on 24th June 1946, nationalized major industries and eliminated the various abuses of the colonial factories. An eight hour working day was introduced, along with social security insurance, additional pay for hazardous work, equal pay for men and women and better working conditions. In an article from the Manchester Guardian from 6th October 1949, Andrew Roth wrote that “North Korea is one of the most successful States in Asia in rebuilding its production,” asserting that industrial production was up to 80% of 1944 levels while Manchuria was only at 10-15% of its 1944 output. Economic recovery figures are also impressive: by 1949, per capita national income had more than doubled since 1945. The July 1946 law on gender equality, outlawed prostitution and female infanticide, while the “Law to Eradicate Remnants of Feudal Practices” in January 1947, prohibited forced marriage, dowry exchange, and marriage under the age of 17 for women and 18 for men. With the expulsion of colonial practices and the launch of modern reform, by 1949, the economic, industrial and agrarian arenas in North Korea saw much success, even in the eyes of figures of the western press.

Cultural progress contributed further to the advances of the state in these years. In her detailed subaltern history, Suzy Kim observes that in Kangwŏn Provence, “households with radios almost tripled, from 854 before liberation to 2,570 two years after liberation,” while households with electricity increased from 16,513 to 29,850. It is worth noting that there were 130,000 houses in the province, so although they did not affect all residents, Kim asserts that these improvements “were the first steps towards a more hopeful future and the promise of a modern life.” Intellectual life also saw much progress with schooling made compulsory. In 1944, almost 20 million out of 25 million had no formal schooling, yet by the end of this period the number of peasant children in education had increased by 204%. Andrei Lankov highlights the construction of Kim Il Sung University as early as summer 1946, while in contrast to the deportation of German specialists in Germany, he notes how Soviet intellectuals were drafted in to support the re-building and education programme. By 1949 there were also 600 North Koreans studying in the Soviet Union compared to the 100 South Koreans in the United States. Kim Il Sung additionally emphasized in September 1946 that in addition to the university, a teacher training and medical college, and thirty new technical schools were under construction in close proximity to factories. The state was tackling the backwardness persisting from its colonial past and additional problems created by the Japanese retreat such as the pressing lack of skilled workers.

Such achievements are impressive, but arguably more remarkably, this era has allowed historians to contend the unfamiliar idea of a somewhat democratic, “liberated space” in North Korea. Suzy Kim’s research, alongside others, illustrates an age that, free from war and “prior to the exponential growth of the suffocating personality cult” around Kim Il Sung, fostered progressive, open-minded tendencies lacking in the DPRK today. Due to the lack of direction from Moscow, and the disorganised nature of the Soviet forces, it has been argued that they largely followed a populist approach. This translated into attempts to remove Japanese authorities, leaving local administration in the control of the People’s Committees. Cumings highlights that in Hamhung, having said they would take administrative control, the Soviets “kicked the Japanese out and turned over administration to the committee.” He argues that the “Soviet occupation provided a womb in which this [local participatory] politics could be nurtured.” One North Korean reportedly told Anna Louise Strong that “[t]he Russians liberated us from the Japanese ... but we Koreans did all the rest.” She claims the northern population spoke of a “people’s rule” and there was an insistence that they were “free” amongst all the North Koreans that she met. Additionally, what Suzy Kim calls the “first democratic election in Korean history” took place on 22nd July 1946 in which everyone could vote and

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34. Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, p.418.
41. Ibid., p.98 & p.103.
42. Lankov, From Stalin to Kim Il Sung, p.39.
43. Ibid., p.38.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p.391.
52. Ibid.
individuals were given the opportunity to nomia members of their community into leadership positions. Even a peasant woman in Hwanghae Province claimed that the 

“elections are used to bring out good people,” she explained that “we must nominate Mr. Kong, who lives in the village yonder. He’ll be able to sympathize with other people’s situation because he’s been through a lot himself.” Although the amount of positions reflected the number of candidates the population had the power to elect or reject. Impressively, 99.6% of all eligible voters took part with 97% expressing candidate approval. Such tendencies demonstrated a stark contrast to politics and elections under colonial rule during which the Japanese appointed the “village chief.”

Further empowerment for the people was affirmed as 800,000 peasants both oversaw and benefited from agrarian reform. Confiscation of land from colonial landlords was carried out under the leadership of rural committees after which the peasants were entrusted with controlling the consumption and management of 75% of the harvest. Kim Il Sung hailed that the peasants were the “protagonists of the countryside, becoming masters of rural administration.” Suzy Kim claims that by avoiding collectivization, the regime fostered the “individual creativity” of the masses. The state also encouraged cultural creativity resulting in an influx of artistic figures moving north in these years. The story of the modern dancer Ch’oe Sùng-hū illustrates this. After receiving no response to a request to start a Korean dance school in the south, she moved north and after a time performing in Moscow was set up with a school in the north. Additionally, newspapers had considerable freedom and were led by Korean journalists with Soviet articles being restricted to the latter pages, in contrast to South Korea where journals were filled with translations of American texts. Cathcart and Kraus highlight that “alternative newspapers” were published in places like Sinuiju and that magazines and radio supplied foreign news allowing the population to accommodate international ideas. A population emerged who consequently had a freer and more nuanced view of the world than is found in North Korea today. Women too felt the benefits associated with liberation; an article from Chosŏn Yŏsŏng, claimed that “[t]oday in the streets men, women, the old, the young, everyone stops to listen to the women,” unlike “the women of the past who sold their bodies.” The relative freedoms of these years and the successes achieved alongside them give evidence of a state which was exceedingly unlike the reclusive, repressive, economically stagnant and male-dominated DPRK we recognize today.

The level of legitimacy earned by the regime in the north is also worth consideration. Chong-Sik Lee elucidates the “sound political tactic” of the state leadership in merging the Korean-Chinese New People’s Party, which was heavy with intellectual members, with the Communist Party, a party of workers and peasants, in July 1946 to produce “a strong unity of classes” in The North Korean Workers Party (NKWP). The regime’s popularity rose as people believed that the leaders in Pyongyang was striving to better the lives of the majority. NKWP membership soared from 105,000 in July 1946 to an impressive 750,000 members by March 1948. Lankov has claimed that despite some degree of discontent, as seen with the students in Sinuju and Hanhŭng, this was moderate in comparison to the south where by the end of 1946 left wing opposition were “waging a civil war.” James Matray highlights the wholesale lack of legitimacy obtained by the United States in the south claiming they “rarely assigned much importance to satisfying the hopes and dreams of the Korean people or the future of their country.” Southern newspapers were attuned to the changes happening in the north, with the leftist and moderate press

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58 Kim, Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, p.79.
59 Ibid, p.79 & p.84.
60 Kim, Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, p.83.
63 Cathcart and Kraus, “Internationalist Culture in North Korea,” p.127.
66 Lankov, From Stalin to Kim Il Sung, p.27.
extolling the various reforms. This is especially notable after the March 1945 land reform, as newspapers in the south called for similar measures. Cumings claims that a “perusal of the southern press during this period reveals the degree to which southerners thought that Korean dynamism was emanating from the north.” Looking beyond the 38th parallel is useful and brings to the foreground the disorder which characterized South Korea in this period. axe hacking and burial alive following liberation. Furthermore the Cheju-do rebellion in April 1948 illustrates a clear “crisis of legitimacy” for the Southern regime as various communist cells within the 9th Regiment of the South Korean constabulary combined with guerrilla forces to take part in insurgent attacks on the local police station. Problems with coherence persisted and the “heritage of rebellion” within the army was clear again in May 1949 when two battalions of the 8th Regiment of the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) left to join the Korean People’s Army (KPA) of the north. The struggles in the South in these years serve as a valuable counterpoint to the largely popular regime and prosperous improvements in North Korea. A report by Kim Il Sung from April 1946 highlights the populace’s huge gratification with the North Korean Land Reform. Kim wrote of the “tens of thousands of letters, some written in blood, addressed by the peasants to the Party Central Committee and the Provincial People’s Committee of North Korea, describing how greatly they were moved and how happy they were, to receive land.” Suzy Kim confirms that the Provisional People’s Committee received 30,000 letters of thanks alone in the first month. In what Lee describes as the “final triumph” for Kim Il Sung, the NKWP absorbed the South Korean Workers Party (SKWP) in June 1949, demonstrating the victory of Kim Il Sung over Pak Hon-yong, a SKWP leader and “one of the first to raise the red flag in Korea.” By the later years of the period the prevailing rhetoric in North Korea shows a leadership, following successful revolutionary improvement and consolidation, which saw itself as “courageously blazing the path for the whole of Korea to follow.” It would be difficult and somewhat laborious to refute all the evidence demonstrating the progress achieved by the North Korean state in this period, yet the difficulties accompanying such developments must be noted. A comprehensive perusal of various reports by Kim Il Sung does reveal some weaknesses of the regime. What can be perceived is a disorderly attempt by this nation to rapidly modernise, replace feudal practices and the legacy of state still “infested with pro-Japanese elements.” In a report from December 1945, Kim Il Sung recognised that the head of the Yangdok County People’s Committee had served as the head of a pro-Japanese organisation, the Iljin-hoe, before liberation. The state had additionally failed to eliminate colonial forces from the judicial system. Charles Armstrong notes that Ch’oe Yongdal, head of the Justice Bureau, admitted that he had “inadvertently allowed many ‘pro-Japanese elements’ to sneak in to the judiciary,” while a testimony from early 1946 claimed that at county level Japanese court houses and colonial laws were still being utilised. A second report by Kim Il Sung on 10th April 1946, illustrated further shortfalls, highlighting how the “party functionaries themselves lacked a correct understanding of the party’s policy for the agrarian reform.” He asserted that the state “still lack(ed) vigilance” and that “since the agrarian reform the class struggle has become more acute.” Various ultra-rightist groups did show discontent with the land reform leading to armed rebellions, while vengeful acts took place by peasants against landlords. Within the chaos of all this change, there were also peasants

70 Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, p.424.
72 Ibid.
75 Ibid, p.529.
77 Kim, Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, p.82.
81 Ibid, p.11.
83 Kim Il Sung, “The Results of the Agrarian Reform,” p.46.
84 Ibid, p.46.
still paying rent to their previous landlords. Furthermore the widespread problem of party discipline becomes apparent with claims that party leaders were failing in their duties and taking advantage of their positions to “feather their own nests.” Kim labels the security chief of North Pyongan Province a “fast liver who had several mistresses, he occupied a number of houses and misappropriated a stupendous amount of confiscated Japanese property.” Within this “liberated space” a somewhat chaotic process of revolutionary change, which still fostered many colonial practices, is visible.

Although evidence of popular support is impressive, the legitimacy of the regime must be not be over emphasised. Notwithstanding the early disquiet concerning the arrival of the Soviet forces, local party officials were unpopular as they mobilised villagers to pay tax while figures called “United Front workers” were criticised for choosing candidates who lacked popular support in the elections. Furthermore, Kim II Sung himself was a figure surrounded by much controversy. On 14th October 1945, Kim was introduced to the North Korean people at a mass rally by the Soviets as a “national hero” and exceptional guerrilla leader. Yet, Dae-Sook Suh asserts that because of his youth few people believed the propaganda surrounding his past. Lankov too has highlighted rumours of “false Kim” and notes that few people had ever heard of him. Suh goes as far as to claim that “the strenuous effort by the Russians to build up the image of Kim II Sung to national prominence” and “the alleged falsification of his past […] was resulting in a mass migration of North Koreans to the South.” The porous nature of the 38th parallel in these years is a topic of some controversy and Cummings claims that although refugees leaving the north were often labelled refugees from the communist regime, the largest number of people to go south were returning from North Korea and Manchuria to their homes. Additionally, the northern regime encouraged the movement of the “aggrieved and dispossessed” upper-class landlords to the south to avoid having to deal with them in the north, while the disrupting effect they had by straining food supplies in the south was desirable. Nevertheless it must be noted that great numbers of landlords, well-educated lawyers, engineers and teachers who were leaving the north in these formative years further exacerbated the severe skilled based problem in North Korea.

The final achievement of Kim II Sung in consolidating the state leadership came at great expense, and to emphasise the idea of a “liberated space” too emphatically is to overlook the violent, reprehensible and fundamentally backward elements which sour the achievements of these years. The nature of North Korean party-politics must here be addressed. Suh has claimed that “political development was an ugly story” in North Korea with assassinations eliminating some of the most progressive young leaders. This is a very different depiction of North Korean politics than the one given by Cumings or Suzy Kim at the level of the subaltern. Suh highlights the assassination of Hyón Chun-Hyok, a local communist leader in broad daylight in Pyongyang on the 28th September 1945 and the later purge of Chang Shi-u of the Domestic Faction by Kim II Sung. Amongst others purged by Kim were a number of his comrades from Manchuria as he eliminated all opposition in a bid to strengthen his power. These ruthless methods complicate arguments which highlight a hopeful and promising start to North Korea. The party was consolidated further by propaganda which uprooted subversive ideas while political cohesion was sought through displays of physical conformity. The party emphasized perfecting the physical condition of its people through mass games and group sporting events. “The nation was supposed to walk in step, both literally and figuratively,” claims Armstrong. Significantly, in November 1948, article 50, paragraph 6 of the North Korean constitution gave the central party power to overrule the People’s Committees. The state was tightening itself around a single political channel as a fundamentally rigid “party-state-military triumvirate” emerged.

To return to the assertion that North Korea was an open-minded, internationally attuned nation, one can ques-

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85 Suzy Kim, Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, p.82.
87 Ibid, p.18.
89 Lankov, From Stalin to Kim II Sung, p.19.
91 Lankov, From Stalin to Kim II Sung, p.19.
95 Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, p.425.
97 Ibid, p. 316.
98 Ibid, p.323.
100 Armstrong, The North Korean revolution, p.213.
tion these tendencies. Internationalism was limited to the awareness of the communist world and the convenient adversary of Japan. Cathcart and Kraus highlight the “Shen Chong incident,” the rape of a Beijing university student by an American marine, which helped to reinforce an anti-American stance and North Korean propaganda about “lascivious American troops.” Furthermore anti-Japanese sentiment was used to affirm the validity of the regime making Japanese war crimes an important and popular topic. This limited international awareness was exploited to serve the state’s monolithic directives, reinforcing the negative view of Japan and the US, while awareness of the Chinese Civil War and a pro-Chinese Communist Party line helped to consolidate the new regime. Kim Il Sung also used more violent methods to secure his regime. In March 1948, he placed emphasis on the “iron discipline” of the party, asserting in a private conference that the regime should “bind the factionists hand and foot so as to prevent them from making mischief freely.” What has been perceived as a prosperously free space lacking vigilance arguably also had evidence of being highly militarised and obsessively controlling.

Tenacious disciplinary elements are visible as early as 1946. Following the unrest in Sinŭiju, Cathcart and Kraus describe the strict disciplining of the protesters as student activists were absorbed into disciplinary party organisations such as the army. Measures hardened from 1946-47 as Sinŭiju became a “highly policed and militarized zone”; in which those traveling in and out underwent rigorous inspections. By late 1947, the state was becoming a military force, moving towards a “mono-organisational,” “total system” to borrow Armstrong’s terms. An uncomfortable system of “mutual suspicion and surveillance” emerged in which it has been estimated that the state had 12,000 regular police, 5,000 secret police, and a large number of “political thought-police,” border patrol constabulary and other security forces — a number equal or greater than that of the colonial period. Such a strong police presence did have some positive benefits; self defense units (Chawidae) were responsible for protecting certain state assets such as factories and government offices as well as for directing villagers to safety in the result of a southern attack. Nevertheless, these were sourced by their right to inspect people’s identification cards and impound anyone they deemed suspicious.

The border clashes of 1949 along the 38th parallel further complicate perceptions of North Korea in this period. As a result of border fighting in Inje County, forty people were killed, with a further eighteen kidnapped and twenty-two injured. Ninety-two farm animals were lost, and 136 houses burnt down with 156 people fleeing south. With Soviet weaponry being transferred from the end of 1946 to mid-1948, the northern half of the peninsula was on a war footing. Reporting in September 1949 on border friction, Andrew Roth wrote “Korea’s thirty-eighth parallel is probably the most dangerous frontier in the ‘cold war’” claiming that ‘the term the ‘hermit nation,’ which was applied a century ago to all Korea, now applies to North Korea, whose ‘iron curtain’ is almost impenetrable.” This unsettling portrayal of the state is comparable to perceptions of North Korea today. We can see glimpses of the DPRK today in this period, and despite some claims the strong personality cult around Kim Il Sung was certainly under construction. As early as 1946, “The Song of General Kim Il Sung” had emerged and by 1948 films and poems, along with the aforementioned Kim Il Sung University, were helping to foster what Armstrong has claimed was a ‘nearly ubiquitous cult’ dedicated to the Suryŏng. Furthermore the unsettling consolidation of a unified front, through the national practice of “thought struggle” and “thought unification at the collective level” and the ilsim tangyŏl philosophy of “one heart united,” mar perceptions of North Korea as a realm of creative individuality. By June 1950 North Korea had impressively built an enlisted army of 150,000 men, many battle-hardened from the Chinese Civil War. At the close of this period, Kim and his allies had firmly established a highly centralised

103 Cathcart and Kraus, “Internationalist Culture in North Korea,” p.136.
104 Ibid, p.130.
108 Ibid, p.16.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
117 Ibid, p.234 & p.239.
and efficient state in a belligerent stance with much of the liberalized creativity having been sacrificed to achieve this. The state of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea may be commonly alleged a failure, but it should be of concern to us that the achievements of the DPRK in this period are not overshadowed or forgotten because of shallow current perceptions of North Korea in the West and our desire to maintain the persona of North Korea as a pantomime villain. Notwithstanding the context of Japanese withdrawal and the initial months of Soviet occupation in 1945, the achievements of the state’s program in the years 1945-49 manifest themselves impressively. The economic, agrarian, industrial and cultural arenas thrived, and glimpses of a liberal and progressive nation punctuate this period with a presence unmatched in the DPRK ever since. To conclude, the North Korean state during this period saw manifold successes, concluding with victory for Kim Il Sung and his comrades in consolidating the foundations of a monolithic state leadership, which has survived over half a century. Yet, the costs of such an attainment must not be overlooked and what was a success for Kim II Sung can be seen as a tragedy for his nation. Compared to 1945, North Korea was a largely transformed place by 1949. Many of the economic and cultural successes of this period had been achieved through independent creativity and diverse and progressive methods. Yet ultimately, this diversity and creativity was sacrificed by Kim Il Sung for political control, as North Korea became a hierarchal and fundamentally despotic regime. Such a realisation sours the overall success of North Korea in the years 1945-1949.

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Petrov, Leonid, “Historiography, media and cross-border dialogue in East Asia: Korea’s uncertain path to reconciliation,” Beyond the history wars: confronting the ghosts of violence by Tess Morris-Suzuki (Oxon: Routledge, 2013)


Abstract: It is a widely accepted notion that the colonization and annexation of the Korean Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897) under Japanese imperial rule was the natural catalyst that led to the consolidation of Korean national identity and its fight for independence in the 20th century. But the often forgotten point is that there was never actually a single consensus on the direction of Korean national identity to begin with, even after Korea had officially become a Japanese Protectorate under the 1905 Eulsa Treaty. It was precisely within this embryonic period of Korean national identity discourse that Protestant Christianity entered the Korean peninsula and became the unlikely source of inspiration for Korean national identity formation. This paper will examine the complicated position of a self-proclaimed apolitical Protestant Mission in Korea and trace Protestant Christianity from its entry to growth in Korea, as well as its far reaching political implications in Korean court politics. The intersection of Protestant Christianity with Korean identity formation will especially be examined on the basis of the Christian role in the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919, the first major organized protest for Korean independence and autonomy against Japan.

Japanese police arrested Paik Yong Sok, a Korean milk-seller, on June 28, 1912 for being a Presbyterian Christian. He was blindfolded, hung up, and beaten for two days until he was forced to confess to conspiracy against Japanese imperial rule. 1 On the same day, Chi Sang-chu, a Korean clerk and Presbyterian, testified that a Japanese policeman had covered his mouth, poured water into his nose, and pressed lit cigarettes against his flesh until he confessed to plotting to assassinate Count Terauchi, the Japanese Governor-General of Korea. 2 Likewise, Im Do-Myong, a Korean barber, was beaten with an iron rod at the Japanese police headquarters in Seoul until he confessed to similar involvement in anti-Japanese activities. 3 He, too, was a Presbyterian, and only one of thousands more who suffered the same. Across the Korean peninsula, Christians were crucified on wooden crosses, missionary schools closed and their students arrested, churches torched along with their Bibles and hymnals, and entire congregations flogged for alleged conspiracy. 4 Despite demographically representing less than two percent of the Korean population, some 300,000 Korean Christians came to be perceived by Japanese authorities as the prime movers of the Korean nationalist independence movement, which culminated on March 1st, 1919 when an estimated two million Koreans spilled into the streets in a synchronized public protest against Japanese imperial rule.

How had Protestant Christianity, an alien Western faith introduced merely a few decades earlier in 1884, become implicated in an indigenous Korean nationalist movement against Imperial Japan? After all, Christianity had long been negatively associated with Western Imperialism, often the victim of domestic nationalistic efforts to drive out foreign, Western influence. Strange wonder, then, that Koreans living in the traditionally isolationist, Confucian Chosun Dynasty nonetheless discovered an unlikely ally in Protestant Christianity and went so far as to assimilate this Western religion to challenge Japanese authority in their own domestic fight for independence. Here was a rare marriage between the universalistic, civic ideals of Western Christianity and the particularistic, nationalistic values of Korean patriots, where a Western faith usually the target of domestic nationalism nonetheless discovered an unlikely ally in Protestant Christianity and went so far as to assimilate this Western religion to challenge Japanese authority in their own domestic fight for independence. Here was a rare marriage between the universalistic, civic ideals of Western Christianity and the particularistic, nationalistic values of Korean patriots, where a Western faith usually the target of domestic nationalism emerged as its greatest partner. It was, indeed, thanks to the often-overlooked divergence between the Korean Protes-
tants and the Protestant missionaries as well as the relative independence of the Korean Protestants under the Protestant Mission’s “Nevin Method,” that Christian ideals became repurposed with a particularistic, nationalistic twist opposed by the missionaries themselves. Regardless of an internal schism, it was at the same time the inescapable affiliation of the nationalist Korean Church—however independent—with the extraterritorial authority of the Protestant Mission in Korea that ultimately triggered the success of the March 1st Independence Movement in eliciting international backlash against Japan.

It is a widely accepted notion that the colonization and annexation of the Korean Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897) under Japanese imperial rule was the natural catalyst that led to the consolidation of Korean national identity and its fight for independence. But the often forgotten point is that there was never actually a single consensus on the direction of Korean national identity to begin with, even after Korea had officially became a Japanese Protectorate under the 1905 Eulsa Treaty. In other words, the intersection of Protestant Christianity and Korean nationalism is especially difficult to articulate, since the latter was in a constant state of flux. As disparate nationalist schools of thought and movements disappeared as quickly as they came, Korean nationalism reflected and adjusted to structural disruptions in the regional political order. In order to determine how the Protestant Church, then, eventually entered into a mutually reinforcing relationship with the widespread, domestic nationalist campaign that climaxed on March 1, 1919, it is important to examine the changing landscape of Korean national identity and its relationship with Protestant Christianity, as it developed through a series of nationalist movements starting in the late 1800s. The first of such movements occurred in 1884, coincidentally the same year Dr. Horace Allen, the first Protestant physician and missionary, first set foot in Korea.

The Kapsin Coup of 1884 was a nationalist movement instigated by a select group of educated yangban elites including Kim Ok-Kyun, Yun Chi-Ho, and So Jae-Pil, who came to despise the traditional superiority wielded by Qing China in the Neo-Confucian worldview of the Korean Chosun court. On the heels of the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 in which Japan sought to subvert Chinese primacy in Choson Korea, these progressive yangban intellectuals were among the first to become cognizant of the changing realities of their surroundings, namely the decline of China and the rise of Japan.

6 They established kaewhadang, or Enlightenment Party, and made no secret of their contempt for the subservient position that conservative Queen Min imposed on Chosun in its orientation relative to China. Pak Kyu-Su, a kaewhadang elite aspired to shatter this Confucian, Sino-centric worldview of Korea as a Chinese vassal state: “Let’s look at the location of the Middle Kingdom. Turn this way, and America becomes the Middle Kingdom. Turn that way and Korea becomes the Middle Kingdom.” 7 Kim Ok-Kyun, a progressive Korean yangban educated in Japan, too, was no less critical of China in his Journal of 1883 (Kapsin Illok): “It is shameful that China has traditionally treated Korea as its vassal state and it is…due to this tributary relationship that Korea’s prospect to emerge as an independent nation is rather bleak.” 8

Kim’s attack was not only in word, but also in deed. It was, in fact, under Kim Ok-Kyun’s own leadership that the Enlightenment Party contrived the Kapsin Coup in December 1884, its sole objective succinctly recorded in the Kapsin Illok: “[To] put an end to the empty formalities of tributary relation with China.” 9 Serious for success, Kim organized a thousand Korean soldiers and invited 150 Japanese troops into the Korean capital of Seoul to help murder the country’s leading conservatives and expel the pro-Chinese Queen from Chosun politics once and for all. 10 Not to be outdone, however, the frightened Queen Min enlisted the help of Qing China, who immediately intervened with a dispatch of 1,500 soldiers into the Korean royal palace to quash the political coup and the pro-Japanese followers of the Enlightenment Party. 11 Despite a bloody end to their insurrection, the progressive yangbans of the Kapsin 1884 Coup nonetheless heralded a tectonic shift in Korean national identity discourse. To them, Japanese-style Westernization, not a centuries-old Neo-Confucian worldview, seemed the key to future Korean survival vis-à-vis a shifting world order in which China no

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8 Ibid, 48.

9 Ibid, 45.


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Alternate spelling: Joseon, Chosen
longer held sway.  

Protestant Christianity, from the very moment of its entry, stumbled into this political whirlpool and became inadvertently implicated in the domestic coup d’etat. Unlike Roman Catholic missionaries from Europe who had often been massacred by the anti-West Chosun authorities for proselytizing and encroaching on Korean territory, Protestant missionaries from America did not dare venture into Korea until their safety as American citizens had first been guaranteed under the 1882 Treaty of Peace, Amity and Commerce, signed into action in 1884 between the United States and Korea. Although the Treaty, strictly commercial in nature, did not grant Americans the legal right to openly preach Christ in Korea, it sufficed to embolden the Foreign Mission Board of the US Presbyterian and Methodist Churches to immediately begin deploying missionaries to Korea, starting with Horace Allen in 1884 and Horace Underwood, Henry Appenzeller, William Scranton, and John Heron in 1885. Camouflaging their religious commission to evade Korea’s anti-Christian laws, these missionaries worked strategically, pursuing “indirect evangelism,” in which they strove to establish schools and hospitals rather than church buildings to propagate Christian teachings under the guise of Western education and medicine. In this context, a political breakthrough was achieved in 1884 when Robert Maclay, an American missionary in Japan, secured a royal permit through none other than Kim Ok-Kyun—the same man who would lead the pro-Chinese progressive Kapsin Coup only a few months later—to establish a hospital and school in Korea for the purpose of “Western” scholarship. In other words, Protestant Christianity had become poised to enter the Korean peninsula, intimately tied to the political sponsorship of the pro-Japanese, progressive Enlightenment Party of the 1884 Kapsin Coup.

One can only imagine the horror of the Protestant Mission, then, when the Kapsin Coup failed and the conservative Min faction resurged even stronger as a result. This domestic development rendered precarious the political position of Protestant missionaries, now dangerously allied to a treasonous faction that had rebelled and failed against the Queen. Only a fortunate stroke of serendipity delivered the Christian Mission from the dismal fate of its progressive Korean sponsors. In fact, purely by chance and sheer coincidence, Paul von Molldendorf, the foreign court advisor present in the Korean royal palace on the night of the Kapsin Coup, thought it best to summon American physician-missionary Dr. Horace Allen to treat Prince Min Yong-ik, the powerful cousin of Queen Min who had been wounded in an assassination attempt during the insurrection. Allen’s own record of the incident demonstrates the utter spontaneity of this fateful interaction between the Korean royal family and the American Protestant:

“After being rushed across the city under an escort of native troops, I found the foreign representatives spattered with blood…. Prince Min was lying at the point of death with arteries severed and seven sword cuts on his head and body.”

Allen resuscitated the dying Prince Min, staying by the leader’s side for three months until he fully recuperated. And, thus, the fate of Protestant Christianity in Korea was overturned. For saving the life of the Prince, Allen earned the trust of the Korean royal court and the conservative Mins, who expressed full gratitude by inviting Allen into the palace and granting him the official rank of court physician. One day the partner of a pro-Japanese faction and next day the savior of its pro-Chinese enemy, Protestant Christianity had teetered its way into the very heart of Korean politics itself.

Thereafter, Allen exercised his political leverage as a court physician to facilitate the work of the Protestant Mission on the Korean peninsula. He immediately capitalized on his newly acquired access to the Korean royal family and successfully received authorization from King Kojong to construct a Royal Hospital for the practice and teaching of Western medicine. With no small amount of flattery and cajolery, Allen assured the King that this court-sponsored hospital would certainly “endear the people to their mon-arch,” then proceeded to recruit fellow undercover American

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13 Cho, Eunsik. The Great Revival of 1907 in Korea: Its Cause and Effect, from (Missiology: An International Review, 1998), 290.; Matsutami, 59; The treaty was negotiated in 1882, but it was not signed into action until May 1884.
14 Matsutami, 60.
15 Ibid, 149.
16 “Western” in quotes because the Christian missionaries sought to disseminate Christian teachings and values by establishing schools and hospitals mainly as a cover for missionary work.
17 Matsutami, 60.
missionaries as workers for the newly chartered royal medical institution. His political strategy of indirect evangelism was, after all, to gain access to the Korean natives through innocuous means of education and medicine as a first step toward conversion. Riding on the momentum, missionary Henry Appenzeller also exploited Allen’s royal connection and requested a permit for a new Western school, which the King delightedly endorsed in 1885, sponsoring the first modern Korean school with the court’s own funds and personally naming it “Paegae Haktang” or “Hall for Rearing Useful Men.” Queen Min also showered her support for the man who had saved her cousin, demonstrating her personal favor by bestowing the name “Ewha Haktang” to a girls’ school begun by the Methodist mission in 1886. The breakthrough of early Protestant Mission into Korea, therefore, benefited from its political connection to the Korean court and the strategically a-religious presentation of the Mission as a benign force to the Korean people.

But the Foreign Mission Board of U.S. Presbyterian and Methodist churches was less than pleased with the Protestant Mission in Korea. A Foreign Missionary article in September 1885 reprimanded the missionaries in Korea to exercise special caution, admonishing that “nothing could be more uncalled for, or more injurious to our real missionary work, than for us to seem to take any part in the political factions of Korea.” The United States Minister to Korea issued a death sentence to the Protestant mission in Korea, specifically ordering Americans “to refrain from teaching the Christian religion and administering its rites and ordinances to the Korean people.” The reason cited for such a restriction order was, again, that the 1882 Treaty of Amity between the United States and Korea had never legalized Christian activity of Americans in Korea, making missionary work technically illegal. After all, Christianity was decidedly a sensitive matter with inevitable political opposition from Korea, since faith in this Western religion, which banned idols and preached equality before God, could easily threaten the foundational values of a hierarchical Confucian Korean society that instead worshipped ancestors and depended on a social caste system. Even the royal patronage of the Min faction for American missionaries was solely on the grounds of medical practice and education, and certainly not an indication of official toleration for Protestant Christians. Moreover, as the defeat of the progressives in the 1884 Kapsin Coup had previously shown, constructing Christian goals upon the political goodwill of any one faction in the volatile Korean court was a dangerous gamble that could easily go awry.

Such was the essence of the ensuing tug of war between Caesar and Christ: facing pressure from their home countries, American missionaries in Korea were forced to choose between due obedience to the anti-Christian laws of the Korean Kingdom or unflinching devotion to the expansion of God’s Kingdom no matter the political circumstances or the means it might take for success. To the extent that utter deference to the anti-Christian laws of the Korean King would have stifled the prospect of missionary activity in Korea altogether, the choice between Caesar and Christ was simple and, perhaps, even predictable for missionaries like Horace Underwood, who chose God over King: “We’re under higher orders than that of the Korean King…[and] our duty [is] to preach and take the consequences, resting for authority on the word of God.” As his wife Lilias Underwood, also a missionary, would record later, the two went on to evangelize in rural villages, baptizing converts in secret, “teach[ing] and preach[ing] in public and private” and even managing to establish the Chongdong Church, the first Protestant Church in Seoul, with 14 members in 1887. Such religious activities must have raised eyebrows in the Korean court, which did voice its complaint to the US legation in Seoul that work “not authorized by the 1882 Treaty [between US-Korea]…shall cease.” Surprisingly enough, however, no actual persecution followed from the Korean government. For the time being, indeed, it seemed that Christ had won.

Also of special utility in the light of Chosun’s anti-Christian laws was the endorsement of the “Nevius Method” by


\[25\] Kim, 61. To this day, Ewha Haktang, which evolved into the Ewha Womens University is a premier womens’ college in South Korea.

\[26\] Kang, 17.

\[27\] Matsutami, 68.

\[28\] Ibid.

\[29\] Wells, 27.

\[30\] Matsutami, 68.

\[31\] In reference to the New Testament, where Jesus, confronted about whether or not to pay taxes, tells his followers to render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.

\[32\] Matsutami, 68.

\[33\] Kim, Insoo, 48; Matsutami, 68.

\[34\] Ibid, 68.
the American missionaries in Korea. In fact, hoping for the least disruptive way to penetrate an anti-Christian Korean society that was xenophobic towards all things foreign, the Protestant Mission adopted the “Nevius Method,” an evangelization strategy advocated in 1885 by John L. Nevius who was a missionary of the American Presbyterian Church in China.  

The Nevius Method was a way to ensure that the native converts would come to own and take charge of most operations of their church from the financing of their congregation to even the construction of their own churches. The desired effect was the diminishing of the impression of Protestant Christianity as a foreign religion, and the promotion of it, rather, as a domesticated, independent religion close to the people. As a three-pronged strategy, the Nevius Method promoted “self governing, self supporting, and self propagation” of churches among the converts, thus, promising independence and autonomy to a native population that traditionally suspected the overbearing influence of foreigners.

Horace Underwood, certainly one of the most passionate missionaries in Korea, fully endorsed the Nevius Method in 1890 as a way to guarantee the autonomous self-multiplication of the Church:

After careful and prayerful consideration, we were led to adopt [the Nevius Method], and it has been the policy of the Mission. Let each [man]…be an individual worker for Christ, and to live Christ in his own neighborhood…to do evangelistic work among their neighbors, to…provide their own buildings.

In practice, the Nevius Method fostered a spirit of independence among the churches and encouraged them to become autonomous in their functions. In the spring of 1890, for example, when a group of new Korean converts from Sorai village asked for assistance in the construction of their church, Underwood replied that they “already have plenty of trees, stones, straw as materials” to build the church on their own. In this way, the Nevius Method absolved the Protestant missionaries of the dangerous risk of having to manage the daily operation of every single church, while at the same time ensuring that the churches were independent and operative on their own.

Before proceeding, it is especially illuminating to investigate further the bold persistence of Protestant missionaries like Horace Underwood during this period, and more interestingly, the equally unusual tolerance of Protestant activities by the normally ruthless, anti-Christian Korean government. No doubt, the Protestant missionaries were primarily driven by their spiritual conviction in daring to proselytize in a country that had previously slaughtered Catholic missionaries; however, while not discrediting the intensity of the missionaries’ religious fervor, it was, rather, the extraterritorial authority of the Protestant Mission—decidedly an indirect American establishment in Korea—that emboldened the missionaries even further in their religious undertakings. By the same token, it was in recognition of this extraterritorial status of the Protestant Mission, given its predominantly American constituents, that the Korean royal court felt politically reluctant to fully execute its anti-Christian policies against proselytizers.

The Choson court, in fact, held a political agenda that prioritized friendship with the Americans over punishment of their religiosity. After all, the 1882 Treaty of Amity between the United States and Korea had been endorsed specifically to recruit the political support of Washington in counterbalancing competing foreign powers on the Korean peninsula, namely Japan. Commodore Robert Shufeldt who had negotiated the US-Korea Treaty noted, in 1882, the political utility of American presence in Korea as recognized by the Koreans themselves:

“Both Corea and China are anxiously looking for protection against the growing aggression of Japan on the peninsula. In this connection, the Viceroy informed me in the strictest confidence that the King of Corea would now be glad to see an American man of war in the Seoul River.”

Therefore, the desired companionship with the American government, though it arrived on the Korean coast in the form of the Protestant mission, held large political implications for the Korean royals, who naively prayed that they had, in signing the Treaty, discovered a potential friend in the United States to counteract the rising threat of Japan.

Then, for the Korean royal court, looming behind the Protestant Mission in Korea was the specter of the American flag, a reality constantly heeded to by both the missionaries.

35 Kim, Insoo, 49.
37 Kim Insoo, 49.
38 Ibid, 50.
39 Matsutami, 74; Pak, 119.
and the Korean government authorities themselves. In fact, Horace Allen, in his interactions with King Kojong, frequently conflated Protestant Christianity with the political power of the United States, arguing that unlike Catholicism, which would at once render Korea inferior to the authority of a European Pope, Protestant Christianity could groom Korea to enter the progressive world of liberty, equality, and independent spirit exemplified by the powerful Protestant America.

More importantly, the Koreans themselves acquiesced to the extraterritorial power of the Protestant Mission in Korea, each time punishing and incarcerating only the native Korean Christian converts but absolving the American missionaries of the same consequences. In what became known as the “Pyongyang Incident of 1894,” when a few missionaries, concerned for the plight of their converts who had been imprisoned for their faith, flexed their political muscle and proceeded to contact the US and British legations in Seoul for assistance, the Korean government hurriedly released the Korean converts from jail, fearing for potential damage in their relations with the missionaries’ home countries. Referring to the Mission’s extraterritorial status in this specific incident, the wife of missionary Horace Underwood even reflected that, “This victory [in the Pyongyang incident] made the people generally realize…that behind the missionaries was a power which could override even magistrates and Governors.” The occasional expression of disapproval from the technically anti-Christian Korean government, therefore, proved perfunctory and rarely posed a real threat, as confirmed by Allen: “By 1890, the anti-foreign law had by common consent become a dead letter and was superseded by a general goodwill.” Such extraterritorial firepower of the Protestant mission would return again to assist the Protestant nationalists in the Independence Movement of March 1st, 1919.

The extraterritorial authority of the American Protestants had shielded the Christians from the wrath of the royal court, but it failed to offer protection from the arbitrary violence of Korean mobs who desired to expel Japanese and Western influence. In fact, despite the benign neglect of Protestant activity under the Korean government, an unexpected popular shift in Korean national identity discourse threatened the very existence of the Protestant Korean Mission from the root. The Donghak Peasant Revolution of 1894, indeed, was a massive anti-feudal, anti-imperialist insurrection that spread across the nation from the southern provinces of Korea and persevered for a year in its protest against the feudalistic yangban elites of Confucian Korean society. Most importantly, the revolution was anti-Western, anti-Japanese, and specifically anti-Christian, orchestrated by followers of the Donghak faith (literally, Eastern Learning, 東學) who deliberately named their religion this way to combat Sohak (literally, Western Learning, 西學), the Korean term for Christianity.

Proclaiming themselves the “People’s Party” and their meetings the “People’s Gathering,” 4,000 armed Donghak peasants convened on February 17th, 1894 with the slogan “Expel the Japanese and Western Bandits.” Calling China and Korea “lips and teeth” and vowing to deliver their King from the corruption of the rapacious yangban elites, the Donghak peasants declared in their manifesto that they were “sworn to death… in [their] common goal to drive out the Japanese and foreigners, to bring them to ruin and to cleanse the country of perfidious people.” The Donghak peasants truly believed that the future of Chosun lay in reforming its inefficient social hierarchy, and, most importantly, in consolidating the powers of the East (Dong)—namely Korea and China—against the hostile influence of Japan and the West.

The greatest, albeit unprecedented, consequence of the Donghak Revolution was that it brought the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) upon Korean home soil, triggering the de-facto rule of Imperial Japan over Korea. In fact, in a political déjà vu eerily reminiscent of the Kapsin Coup from just ten years earlier, the pro-Chinese Queen Min once again employed the assistance of Qing China in her attempt to subdue the domestic Donghak insurrection. The Qing mobilized more than 2,000 troops to assist the Korean court, but not without first provoking the Japanese, who preemptively sent some 6,000 of their own soldiers to challenge Chinese intervention in Korea. With an imperial agenda in mind, the Japanese soldiers marched into the heart of the Korean capital in 1894, murdered Queen Min inside her own palace, shocked the Qing Chinese by annihilating them in the Sino-Japanese war that ensued, and slaughtered an estimated 100,000 Korean peasants who mobilized themselves in a reinvigorated, Second Donghak Revolution against Japan.

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41 Matsutami, 65.
42 Matsutami, 74, 75.
43 Ibid, 75.
44 Ibid, 76.
45 Wells, 28.
46 Matsutami, 209

47 Shin, 73.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid, 83.
50 Ibid, 82, 104.
51 Ibid, 104.
Contemporary Korean historian Pak Un-Sik (1859-1926) recorded that from 1894 until the end of the Sino-Japanese war in 1896, at least 300,000 peasants lost their lives and that the Japanese had almost entirely obliterated the Donghak movement. Above all, King Kojong fled from his own palace to the Russian legation in Seoul in 1897, practically leaving his decrepit kingdom in the hands of enemy Japan and, thus, marking an impolite ending to the 600-year-old Chosun Dynasty.

The Donghak Revolution, responsible for this chaotic series of political upheavals, immensely complicated the position of Protestant Christianity in Korea. For one, the anti-Western Donghak Peasant Revolution had wreaked havoc upon Korean Christian communities, and Protestants and Catholics, natives and missionaries alike suffered as a result. Especially, Protestant missionaries in the countryside even had to evacuate from their respective villages, taking shelter in Seoul merely to save their lives from the onslaught of the Donghak peasant mobs. Meanwhile, mission buildings fell victim to armed Donghak soldiers, who indiscriminately burned church buildings to the ground.

The more significant repercussion of the Donghak Revolution for the Christian mission, however, lay elsewhere. In fact, the violence of the Donghak peasants meant that Protestant missionaries naturally came to appreciate the intervention of Japanese soldiers when they arrived in 1894 to slaughter the anti-Christian Donghak peasants. From the perspective of the Protestant missionaries, the Protestant Mission had crossed into an interesting relationship with Japan in which it felt indebted to the Japanese military for indirectly delivering the Protestant mission from further suffering under the Donghak Revolution.

From here, experiences of the Protestant missionaries and the Korean natives began to diverge. The indigenous Korean Christians, in fact, had a different story to tell about Japan. Under uninvited Japanese militarism, their Queen had been murdered, their King exiled, and six centuries of their King’s history forcefully curtailed. Japan had made no secret of its imperialistic ambitions in the Korean peninsula, and with the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War, it was on the fast track to rule over the Korean peninsula under the Eulsa Protectorate Treaty of 1905. The Protestant Mission was therefore thrust into the uncomfortable political position of having benefited from Japanese military intervention in Korea, while the very people it served had suffered and bled by the same Japanese hand. This tension only multiplied for the Protestant Mission, placing the missionaries in an uneasy position when a large number of Korean Protestant converts became involved in the establishment and activities of the Independence Club, a progressive, anti-Japanese organization with an obvious nationalistic bent.

The formation of the Independence Club, which occurred in July 1896 shortly after King Kojong’s flight to Russia, was a development in the Korean national identity discourse that seriously complicated the position of the Protestant missionaries vis-à-vis the Protestant Koreans. Founded almost as a quasi-substitute government in the absence of the Korean monarch, the Independence Club had been inaugurated as a “self-strengthening movement” under the leadership of none other than So Jae-Pil and Yun Chi-Ho, both yangban turned Protestants who had participated in the progressive 1884 Kapsin Coup against the conservative Min faction. The Independence Club enjoyed enthusiastic participation from Protestant Korean teachers of prominent mission schools such as the Paejae Haktang and Kyongsin Hakkyo, and counted among its members mission school graduates such as future Korean President Yi Sungman (Syngman Rhee). Moreover, participation in the Independence Club, which had eight local chapters across the peninsula, proved higher where Protestant Christians were many, and in the Pyongyang branch of the Independence Club alone, all 17 leaders were Protestant. Hosting twice a “People’s Assembly,” which was attended by more than 10,000 Korean patriots in the capital Seoul for a public discussion about Korea’s future, the Independence Club advocated constitutional, representative monarchy for Korea, and even erected an Independence Gate modeled after its French counterpart to vouch for similar Korean autonomy from Japan and China. Reaching a membership of 4,173 by 1898 and over ten thousand by 1904, the Independence Club, with a strong Protestant following, quickly became recognized as the big-

53 Shin, 104.
54 Ibid, 108.
55 Matsutami, 73.
56 Ibid. As already mentioned, Protestant Christianity was persistently presented as a force wholly different from Catholicism, which was relatively more identified with Western imperialism and, thus, less welcomed by Koreans due to the implications of being “subjected” to Papal authority. Meanwhile, Protestant Christianity had political association with “Protestant America,” although, to the Donghak peasant rebels, the distinction didn’t matter much.
57 Ibid, 209.
58 Shin, 15. During the Coup, the two men had been pro-Japanese. But after Japanese imperialistic ambitions became clear in the late 1890s, these two men turned anti-Japanese but were equally reform-minded as before.
59 Pak, 126.
60 Pak, 127.
61 Shin 137.
gest umbrella organization for nationalistic, patriotic action under Japanese rule.  
Ironically enough, the missionaries had only themselves and their teachings to blame for the gravitation of their Protestant converts to the politically charged activities of the Independence Club. After all, it was the missionaries themselves who had entered the Korean peninsula in the first place as conveyors of Western education and modern scholarship. It was in fact, through missionaries and the teachings in their mission schools that Korean citizens of all social classes had first come into contact with the democratic consciousness of the West and the decidedly Protestant ideals of “equality before God.”  
It was here that the elite yangbans had come to denounce the very social hierarchy in which they flourished, confessing as one man did in his newfound Protestant faith that “God did not make one man a yangban and another sangnom (low fellow.)” After all, as author Martha Huntley put it, it was “inadvertently, the mission schools [that had] aided Korean opposition to Japanese colonialism… [and]…political enlightenment was a byproduct of mission education.” Indeed, politically forward-minded Koreans were simply more likely to support the progressive agenda of the Independence Club. After all, as author Martha Huntley put it, it was “inadvertently, the mission schools [that had] aided Korean opposition to Japanese colonialism… [and]…political enlightenment was a byproduct of mission education.”

Immediately drawing a line between themselves and the activities of the Independence Club, however, the missionaries in Korea invoked the Protestant belief in separation of state and religion. “The missionaries strongly believe, with the Boards at home, that… it is better for Disciples of Christ to patiently endure some injustice than to carry Christianity in antagonism to the government under which they labor,” wrote Arthur Judson Brown in 1902, the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Missionary Charles Allen Clark, too, insisted on the apolitical neutrality of the Church, condemning the Korean Protestants for harboring anti-Japanese, nationalistic sentiment: “Our position has been that the church is a spiritual organization and as such is not concerned with politics either for or against the present or any other government.” Missionary Samuel F. Moore stationed in Seoul even mentioned specifically that being, “engrossed with the Independence Club had little thought or purpose in the work of the Church.”

However, such proclamations of neutrality, especially if based on a spiritual argument of separation of church and state, must be questioned further for authenticity unless one is to believe that the Protestant Mission was purely a spiritual organization devoid of any political biases. Indeed, as examined once before, the predominantly American community of Protestant missionaries enjoyed full extraterritorial authority as, practically, an American constituency in Korea, and, thus, no matter how spiritually convicted or genuine, the missionaries always stood within the jurisdiction of the American flag and the laws of their home country. As suspected, the political reality of the American missionaries was that their home government in Washington had betrayed its 1882 Treaty of Amity with Korea, formally acknowledging, instead, the Japanese occupation of Korea under the secret 1905 Taft-Katsura Agreement. In reciprocation, Japan had promised to acknowledge the U.S. occupation of the Philip-

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62 Pak, 126.
64 Park, 514.
65 Kang Ji Wo, 31.
66 Wells, 9
67 Kim Insoo, 66.
68 Pak, 126.
69 Mckenzie, 213

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70 Yu, K. Kale, American Missionaries and the Korean Independence Movement in the Early 20th Century, 175
71 Yu, 175.
72 Ibid, 176.
73 Matsutani, 190.
74 Cho, 290.
The arrogance and thoughtfulness of missionaries are alienating the Koreans in schools and churches…There will be a great revolt some day in the near future on the part of the Koreans unless the missionaries change their attitude.

What a pity!  

Kim San, a young Christian youth, who later became an active leader in the March 1st movement also added to the sentiment:

One thing in particular made me angry…was hearing an American missionary tell the people, “God is punishing Korea for the mistakes she has made. Now Korea is suffering to pay for these. Later God will let her recover after penance is done…In Europe, the Christian nations did not turn the other cheek. To fight was to gain victory…All over Korea, young men felt the same.

Equally important, the possibility of this divergence between political Protestant Koreans and the “apolitical” missionary authorities in their activities lay in the Protestant Mission’s very own Nevius Method, the policy of fostering independence and autonomy among the indigenous churches and their leadership. As mentioned before, the Nevius Method, which was designed for the domestication of the Western church in xenophobic countries like China and Korea, had decentralized the role of the mission authorities while encouraging self-governance of the indigenous church network. In action, the Protestant Mission in Korea, even as it discouraged anti-Japanese activities among the Korean Protestants, included in the 1901 Resolution of the Mission Council a blanket statement that enshrined the principle of the Nevius method: “Our Church neither forces nor prohibits its members to take part in state affairs or join any political party [emphasis added].” In 1907, thirty-six Korean church elders joined to form the Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, formally excluding missionaries from church administration. In other words, although Protestant Christianity’s teachings and values were not explicitly designed for any form of anti-Japanese, nationalistic activism, the decentralized and relatively autonomous Korean churches were free to repurpose Protestant ideals for nationalistic purposes within their own individual congregations.

Such was the case in the explosive growth experienced by the Korean Protestant Church starting from the time of the 1905 Protectorate Treaty leading up to the Japanese annexation in 1910. In fact, the Korean-run Protestant Churches, of which there were 321 in 1905, began catering to the pent-up nationalist sentiment of the Korean populace. In a flagrant example of what the missionaries told them not to do, indigenous Protestant Churches and mission schools conflated Christianity with nationalism, presenting Biblical struggles of the Israeli people as analogies for the sure victory of the Korean minjok, or race. “When one looks at the language and deeds of Christians, they profess that the people of Israel...
under the oppression of Egypt succeeded in their exodus for national independence and liberation under God’s help and under the leadership of Moses,” recalled Paek Nak Chun, who lived through the colonial era, “They teach the Biblical story that during the war with another nation, the people of Israel were vindicated by David, the Apostle of Justice who destroyed the giant Goliath.” Even in mission schools like Sungin High School, students came up and used sermons from the Bible to share their active resistance against the Japanese, and as Protestant nationalist Cho Mansik recalled, “We did not mistake the message.” Hymns such as “Believers are like Soldiers of the Army!” “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” and “Soldiers of Christ Rise” were favorite selections of these Protestant congregations for obvious reasons. Such was the powerful moment where particularistic patriotism and anti-Japanese nationalism were able to coalesce with the universalistic values of Christianity under the auspices of the autonomous indigenous Protestant Churches in Korea.

The nationalistic Protestant Christianity of indigenous Koreans, in this way, catered to the psychological and political vacuum of the Korean people who, under strict Japanese rule, had become deprived of a public forum for political exchange and collective action. Such Koreans flocked to the Church en masse for this specific reason, as confirmed by the Korea Daily News in 1907, a newspaper run by a British man and therefore exempt from much Japanese censorship:

Over the years the people of Korea have felt bewildered and helpless under government oppression and Japanese maltreatment. As a result more and more have been converted to the faith of the West. Lately their numbers keep growing even more, and it now seems that Korea as a whole rebounding from oppression and maltreatment may well turn into a Christian nation.

Not surprisingly, by 1907, the number of churches in Korea had doubled in just two years to 642 churches and in the meantime Protestants had experienced “The Great Pyongyang Revival” and “A Million Souls for Christ Movement,” which swept across the nation, gaining tens of thousands of new believers. After a meager following of a couple hundred believers in 1890, the Protestant Church gained 50,000 believers by 1905, leaping yet again to more than 200,000 by 1909. Powerful Koreans such as Yi Won Gung, the most famous Confucian scholar in Korea, Kim Chong Si, former chief of police of Seoul, and Yi Sang Jae former secretary cabinet and later executive leader of the Seoul YMCA joined the indigenous Protestant Church during this period. Native Korean churches had also taken the initiative of establishing churches in their local communities and according to the Chosun Christian News, by 1908, Korean churches had established “an average of two schools for every one of the 345 counties in all the land.” According to the Report of the World Missionary Conference in 1910, two thirds of all the boys and girls in school were attending Christian schools. By 1910, the presence of Korean Protestants had increased to the extent that Korea was being dubbed the “Jerusalem of the East.” The Korean Protestant Church had evolved into a formidable tinderbox of anti-Japanese, nationalist sentiment.

To be certain, the powerful and authentic religious experience of Christianity is not to be ignored as one sure cause of the Protestant Boom during this period. In fact, the experience of revival among Christians was reportedly supernatural, with people “clenching their fists and striking their heads against the ground in a struggle to resist the power that would force them to confess their misdeeds.” The Missionary Review of the World reported similarly in 1907 that the “whole congregation of Changdaehyon Presbyterian Church united in audible prayer which rose and diminished in fervor like the waves of the sea.” Still, however, religious experience alone as a cause of the Protestant Boom does not explain why the Japanese authorities grew so overly defensive, going so far as to send spies into congregations to search the mission premises, and even reading school essays written by students. In fact, the Japanese, also, suspected that it was certainly not religious experience alone, but rather the potential of the indigenous Protestant Church as an agora for political exchange that inspired hundreds of thousands of Koreans to flock to the church.

So aggressively paranoid of the Korean Protestant Church were the Japanese authorities that, in what became known as the infamous Conspiracy Case Trial of 1911, the Japanese police arrested hundreds of Koreans for no apparent reason, charging them groundlessly for conspiring to assassinate the

86 Yu, 182.
87 Ibid.
88 Matsutami, 219.
89 Pak, 119.
90 Pak, 34.
91 Pak, 29.
92 Cho, 298.
93 Matsutami, 200.
94 Kim Insoo, 61.
95 Park, Sandra. “Rebuilding the Jerusalem of the East: North Korea’s Christian Past, Present, and Future.”
96 Cho, 29
97 Park, Sandra, 29.
98 Matsutami, 219.
Japanese Governor-General Terauchi Masatake. It was by no coincidence that of the 123 prosecuted, 94 were Protestant Christians, including nationalist Christian leaders like Yun Chi-Ho. 99 What exactly ensued in the torture room until these innocent Christians were made to confess to crimes they had never before heard is not of concern, and its details are already disclosed in the opening of this paper. What does emerge, however, as a point of interest is that 1911 was only the beginning of intense Christian persecution in colonial Korea. Even more importantly, it was the increasingly harsher persecution of Protestant Christians as the Japanese, more ruthless each time, forced closing of mission schools, banned mission textbooks and burned Bibles that tested the patience of the Protestant Missionaries who had until then sided—or remained “neutral”—with Japan. Though in disagreement with their converts regarding the role of Japan or the independence of Korea, the Protestant missionaries were increasingly agitated by the havoc wreaked upon fellow Christians by the Japanese. Here was the once pro-Japanese, but now increasingly frustrated missionary, Arthur Judson Brown, following the Conspiracy Trial of 1911: “It is about as difficult for those who know them (the prosecuted) to believe that any such number of Christian minister, elders, and teachers, had committed crime as it would be for the people of NJ to believe that the faculty, students, and local clergy of Princeton were conspirators and assassins.” 100 The pendulum between Caesar and Christ was swinging once more.

On March 1st, 1919, the fateful day of the March 1st Independence Movement, nothing could challenge the Protestant Church as the largest, most effective, most networked group of Koreans on the Peninsula, what with its thousands of pastors, church workers some 300,000 believers, 2,000 churches, 10,000 schools, hospitals, church newspapers, the YMCA, the YWCA, and more. 101 Not all nationalists were members of the Protestant Church, of course, but no other organization enjoyed in its representation such participation from all social classes and such widespread distribution throughout all provinces on the peninsula as the Protestant Church, including 11 churches in Seoul, 260 in Pyongyang, 76 in the Southeastern Cholla province, 126 in the Kyongsang Province. 102

It was no surprise that despite representing only two percent of a population of 20 million, when nationalist sentiment peaked after President Woodrow Wilson’s support for “self-determination” in 1918, Christians came to spearhead the independence movement of Korea. Sixteen of the thirty-three signatories to the March First Declaration of Independence were Protestants, as well as 10 out of the 11 organizers of Tokyo Korean Declaration of Independence. 103 It was also no surprise that the Movement began from the churches and mission schools which had grown to become centers of Korean anti-Japanese sentiment. Missionary Frank Smith reported that after the Declaration of Independence was read in churches, mobs—both Christian and non-Christian—“each time collected from the church and started from there,” marching into the streets in protest against Japanese rule. 104 It was also not surprising, that, when the Japanese began its crackdown, they targeted Christians as the conspirators behind the Independence Movement, crucifying them and tying them to telephone poles to flog them. After all, Missionary Frank believed it was “but natural for the police to take the whole thing for a Christian movement.” 105 But this time, the Japanese, by destroying the Korean Church and testing the patience of the Protestant Mission, had at last squandered the political goodwill of the Protestant missionaries, who gathered finally under the moral banner of “No neutrality for brutality,” using their extraterritorial authority to bring the censure of their home countries upon Japan.

In fact, it was the extraterritorial authority behind the missionaries, who were inevitably affiliated with the Protestant Korean Church though not supportive of its independence activities, that triggered a boomerang effect from their home countries now stimulated by the brutalities of the Japanese government. Missionaries like Dr. Frank Schofield took pictures of the Japanese brutalities and published 5,000 copies of them in a booklet, Unquenchable Fire, distributing them to their home countries. 106 The Methodist Episcopal Church in the U.S. became concerned for the Korean Church, inevitably attached to the Protestant Mission in Korea, and reported that “as representing the Christian sentiment of a majority of the American churches…we cannot remain silent while a defenseless people are made the victims of massacre.” 107 The American Protestant Mission Board, PCUSA, published reports of destruction in Korea and submitted them to the U.S. Congress, while missionaries in Korea wrote back to their home countries, revealing shocking details that were

99 Matsutami, 283; In addition, testifying to the divergence between missionaries and the Korean protestants, no missionary was prosecuted during the Conspiracy trial of 1911, and missionaries denied involvement in any of the independence activities suspected by the Japanese government.
100 Matsutami, 221
101 Pak, 130.
102 Pak, 33.
103 Wells, 9.
104 Pamphlets, 6.
105 Pamphlets, 6.
106 Kim In Soo, 173.
107 Kim, Insoo, 173.
published in the newspapers back home, “Korea seems to some observers to be punished for being Christian almost as much for being patriotic if not more,” blared a Literary Digest article in May 1919. Korean interests suddenly became American interests as Korean Churches, attached indirectly and inevitably to their American missions, were attacked and burned. Senator Norris in the United States Senate and Senator McCormick even read the reports of the Federal Council of Churches in Congress on July 15, 1919 presenting the destruction of the Korean church as a threat to the American Mission. Startled by the unexpected international criticism that had been triggered by the mission, the Japanese government finally deposed its own Governor-General, Hasegawa, in August of 1919 and quickly adopted a “conciliation” or “cultural” policy, ending militaristic governance over the Korean peninsula.  

Thus, in this way, although the Protestant Church’s organization and values had certainly never been structured for anti-Japanese activism, the Koreans joined the Protestant church in the early 1900s and under the relative independence of the Nevius Method reshaped Christian values to support their anti-Japanese sentiment, even at the cost of divergence with the missionaries. When the Japanese understandably turned towards this anti-Japanese, nationalistic Korean Church in an effort to throttle anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea, it unwittingly agitated the American Protestant Mission, inevitably attached to their work in the Korean Church. The allegiance of the Protestant Mission had been put to its final litmus test—and Christ had won.

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109 Pamphlets, 12.

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In this essay, I examine the role and position of plantation women of colonial Malaya between 1900-1940, arguing that women played an important, though often unrecognized, role as plantation laborers and were thus subject to violent and coercive colonial policies designed to extract the greatest amount of labor from them. Within the informal economy, moreover, women often bore the costs of social reproduction and in turn produced and sustained labor for the plantations at very little cost to the plantation owners and financiers. I argue that it is only through this triply marginalized position of plantation women – located at the intersection of race, class and gender – that we can understand the full extent of colonial exploitation and control in Malaya that sought to extract the greatest amount of surplus from its laborers at minimal cost. I draw on some of the well-established secondary literature on the economy of colonial Malaya, but will also discuss some newspaper articles from the 1930s that reflect popular colonial sentiments and policies towards plantation women

With its roots in the 1860s, the rubber industry in colonial Malaya grew significantly from the early 20th century onwards, as a result of growing demand for rubber from the US auto mobile and other European industries. Colonial Malaya was, however, a “world dominated by men – the Malay male court elite, farmers and fishermen, British colonists, planters and adventurers, English and Indian troops, Chinese miners and rickshaw pullers, Indian merchants and rubber tappers”.¹ In this essay, I examine the role and position of plantation women of colonial Malaya between 1900-1940, arguing that women played an important, though often unrecognized, role as plantation laborers and were thus subject to violent and coercive colonial policies designed to extract the greatest amount of labor from them. In addition, women’s contributions extended beyond the formal capitalist economy. Within the informal economy, women often bore the costs of social reproduction and in turn produced and sustained labor for the plantations at very little cost to the plantation owners and financiers. Women were spouses responsible for regenerating other laborers and mothers responsible for supporting and giving birth to children who might later join the labor force. I argue that it is only through this triply marginalized position of plantation women – located at the intersection of race, class and gender – that we can understand the full extent of colonial exploitation and control in Malaya.

Much has been written on the plantation industry and labor in colonial Malaya. W. L. Blythe wrote one of the first accounts of Chinese labor migrants in Historical sketch of Chinese labor in Malaya in 1947 and this was closely followed by Purcell’s The Chinese in Malaya. Collectively, both texts discuss the history of Chinese emigration to Malaya since the beginning of colonial rule, and give us a broad survey of the social aspects of the Chinese labor community in the tin mines and on estates. Blythe served as the Colonial Secretary of Singapore from 1950-53, whereas Purcell was a Malay­an civil servant and was involved in the administration of the Chinese community for more than two decades. In a similar vein, Sinnappah Arasaratnam’s 1970 work, Indians in Malaysia and Singapore, partly discusses

the immigration and settlement of Indians in Malaya, dividing the Indians into two main classes: the professional class and the lower class that was predominantly made up of plantation laborers. 2 Lim Teck Ghee’s 1977 work Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874-1941 appears to be one of the first books that studies the peasant community as a whole. 3 He considers the peasants not just as colonial subjects, but as individuals with agency reacting to the colonial government.

Recent scholarship on migration and Malayan plantation work has often taken a transnational perspective in order to see the connections between the Malayan plantations and the conditions in South Asia or East Asia. Behal, for example, analyzes the recruitment and transportation of Indian laborers from agrarian communities to the rubber plantations of Malaya either as indentured laborers or under the kangani system. In Crossing the Bay of Bengal, Amrith similarly sees Indian labor on Malayan plantations as part of broader regional developments, claiming “the sacred geography of India crossed the Bay of Bengal and implanted itself on the Malayan landscape”. 4 Similarly, both Wang Gungwu and Philip Kuhn have written about the Chinese diaspora in not just Southeast Asia but across the globe, and discuss in depth the reasons for emigration in the 19th and 20th centuries and the social contexts that the Chinese found themselves in. 5

Colonial officials and plantation owners often marginalized plantation women, and this subsequently led to an underrepresentation of women in both earlier and contemporary scholarship of plantation labor in colonial Malaya. Women were often completely absent from accounts of the history of the plantation, or presented as playing a peripheral role to their male labor counterparts. The default image of a tin-miner or plantation laborer was therefore an Indian or Chinese male. This lack of representation in scholarship might partly stem from the lack of colonial records on female labor, where “immigrant women workers were largely described in the appendices or subsidiary sections of the labor reports”. 6

In this paper, therefore, I attempt to examine the role of plantation women in colonial Malaya and make explicit the ways that they contributed to or were victims of an exploitative colonial economy. I will first provide a brief overview of the history of rubber plantations and the immigration of Chinese and Indian labor to meet the needs of the industry. Following that, I discuss the role of women as laborers in the formal capitalistic economy and as mothers and spouses within the informal economy. I will draw on some of the well-established secondary literature on the economy of colonial Malaya, but will also discuss some newspaper articles from the 1930s that reflect popular colonial sentiments and policies towards plantation women. Overall, I make the argument that it is only through the experiences of plantation women and their marginalized position that we can understand the full extent of colonial exploitation in Malaya.

At about the turn of the 20th century, rubber plantations in colonial Malaya grew significantly in scale and number. Spurred by the high demand for rubber from the US automobile industry and by the growing industrialization in Europe, the size of rubber plantations increased almost ten-fold from 20, 234 hectares in 1900 to 219, 744 hectares in 1910. 7 This increased further in 1920 to 315, 300 hectares. 8 This growth of rubber plantations was facilitated by a number of factors. James Hagan and Andrew Wells suggest that colonial legislation heavily favored plantation owners through the sale of cheap land and a policy of permanent settlement that allowed planters to own land for 999 years. 9

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8 Ibid.
Frank Swettenham, Resident General of the Federated Malay States, justified this policy by arguing that cheap land was needed to attract a high degree of investment.  

The growth of rubber plantations was also made possible by the development of railways into the Malayan rainforests, linking inland plantations to colonial port cities and turning what was perceived as unproductive land into a productive resource that complemented the industries of Europe.  

Crucial to this growth of rubber plantations in colonial Malaya was the availability of cheap and exploitable labor to work on the plantations. There has been a long history of labor migration from India to the Malay peninsula. Rana Behal, for example, claims that from 1844-1938, 1.4 million Indian immigrant laborers emigrated across the Bay of Bengal.  

This was done through both the indenture system until it was outlawed in 1910 and the kangany system from the 1880s onward and into the 20th century. The Kangany was a senior plantation employee who would return to India and would recruit laborers among his villagers and extended family. South Asian laborers were preferred over Chinese and local Malay laborers because they were perceived as docile, submissive, politically inarticulate and easily malleable, therefore making them easily controllable and suitable for plantation work. P. Ramasamy estimates that Indian laborers arrived at Malaya from an average of 28,000 per year.  

Laborers recruited under the kangany system were largely from the Tamil speaking areas of Southern India and were technically 'free.' However, extremely low wages and high passage costs quickly drew the laborers into a cycle of debt.  

The sheer number of emigrants ensured a constant supply of laborers and kept plantation labor costs to a minimum.  

Among the plantation laborers, both Indian and Chinese women played extremely crucial roles in the development of the plantation economy, especially from the early 20th century onwards. Citing the work of Kernial Singh Sandhu, Sharon Lee claims that Indian women comprised 25 to 45 percent of the Indian labor force, and more than 80 percent of Indian women were employed in the plantation sector.  

Similarly, Lai Ah Eng estimates that female Chinese participation in the plantation industry increased from about 20 percent of the total Chinese labor force to over one-third by the 1940s.  

Both Indian and Chinese women were employed in all the different aspects of estate work: in the factory processing the latex, as skilled labor tapping rubber trees and as unskilled labor removing weeds. Lai, however, observes that men were always employed as skilled labor to tap rubber trees.  

This gendered division of labor was based on the assumption that men were essentially more skilled than women, and were therefore given priority for skilled work. Groups that were perceived as less capable - children and old workers – were also primarily employed as weeders, adding to the impression that women were less capable than men. To the plantation owners, 'skill' was merely defined as the tasks that directly brought in the largest amount of revenue. However, this division of labor – of rubbing tapping as skilled and of weeding as unskilled – obscures the fact that weeding was arguably one of the most backbreaking tasks on the plantation and involved either squatting or being bent-over for prolonged periods of time.  

Moreover, it was also likely that weeding demanded a certain degree of skill in order to separate the weeds from non-weeds and to successfully pull out the roots of the weeds, instead of just the leaves.  

Unlike Indian laborers that were directly hired by and lived on the estate, Chinese laborers were often employed as contract workers, under a system where the estate owner would hire a third-party contractor who would then manage and pay the laborers.  

However, within this system, Chinese men were employed as regular contract workers, which meant having consistent
and regular work, whereas women were temporary contract workers employed only when there was a labor shortage. Chinese women were therefore seen as dispensable labor and were not accorded the same job security or social benefits as the men were. They were a pool of “surplus workers, to be used or ignored depending on economic conditions.” Women’s subordinate position could also be seen in the wage differential between male and female laborers. A Straits Times newspaper article in 1929 claims that in the state of Selangor, a male laborer over the age of 16 earned 50 cents for a day of work, a female laborer earned 40 cents, and a child earned 20 cents. Similarly, in the inland districts of Pahang, male laborers earned approximately 20% more than females, earning 58 cents a day, compared to the 48 cents that a female laborer earned. Men were paid more because of the perception that male laborers were more productive and able, but what this also suggests is that women laborers were an additional source of even cheaper labor that was used to keep production costs to a minimum. Within the plantation economy, therefore, there was the clear perception that women were subordinate and inferior to men, and they were thus fully and cruelly exploited by the colonial economy in order to maximize profit.

However, the exploitation of plantation women for economic profit extended beyond the realms of the formal economy and was observed within the informal economy through women’s roles as child-bearers, mothers and spouses, particularly from the 1930s onwards. In this next section, I analyze two ways that women were exploited in the informal sector and show the increased control of and regulation over women in order to meet the growing colony’s economic needs. An understanding of colonial control over women in the informal economy would then reaffirm the earlier argument that it is only through the triply marginalized position of women that we are able to observe the full workings of the colonial economy that sought to extract the greatest amount of surplus from its laborers at minimal cost.

The first way that women were exploited in the informal sector was through the process of female reproduction, which came under imperial regulation from the 1930s onwards when reproduction became the primary means of sustaining the labor force. Migration, which has up until the 1930s been the primary way of replenishing the labor force, was getting increasingly expensive. Resistance to British rule in India was growing, and there were pressures on the colonial government to limit migration across the Bay of Bengal. Starting from the 1920s, Indian and Malayan nationalists saw the kangany system and labor conditions in Malaya as humiliating and as “a potent symbol of the indignities Indians were suffering at home and abroad at the hands of the colonial power.” Globally, the Great Depression led to a significant fall in the demand for and prices of rubber, making planters look for new ways to defray the costs of labor migration. Moreover, the 1933 Alien Ordinance restricted Chinese male migration to approximately 4000 a month in 1937, and this restriction had the adverse effect of eventually placing upward pressure on migration costs. At the same time, mortality rates and desertions were very high. Lenore Manderson estimates that at the start of the 20th century, adult death rates of new immigrants were up to 50 percent, whereas infant mortality rate was approximately 250-350 per 1000 new births. Deaths were therefore expensive to planters, given the costs of immigration and the loss of potential output from the adults and children who passed on.

As a result of the large numbers of laborers dying, what Stoler has called the “microsites of familial and intimate space” thus became tied to colonial objectives and subject to greater imperial regulation. This combination of growing migration costs and a high mortality rate in the 1930s meant increasing labor costs, leading to the conclusion of the colonial government that the “more efficient long-term solution was to reproduce

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19 Lee, 322.
21 Ibid.

23 Lee, 312.
24 Manderson, 35.
the labor force locally”. Consequently, reproduction became the preferred and more economical means of sustaining the plantation labor force. A local labor force would mean children were acculturated to plantation work from a very young age, while at the same time minimizing losses accumulated from immigrant workers who die upon arriving on the Malay Peninsula. Motivated by economic rather than humanitarian needs, colonial officials implemented child health programs across colonial Malaya from 1905 onwards. Mander describes how village women were trained in “basic nursing and midwifery to replace bidan as birth attendants and community nurses”, therefore further disrupting local practices. In the 1920s, infant welfare centers were set up across the Straits Settlements to provide early childcare, with the hope of reducing infant mortality rates. Writing about the Dutch East Indies, Stoler argues that sexual prohibitions and regulations were a fundamental marker of colonial domination. Similarly, regulations over the reproductive process in Malaya – through these new colonial institutions but also through the unstated expectation that plantation women were to marry within their own race - helped to maintain this racial difference.

The importance of childbearing to the colonial plantation economy was also partly reflected in the growing demand for certified local midwives and female doctors. An article published in The Straits Times on 7 February 1937 advertised careers for local, urban women in the medical industry who were willing to work at infant welfare centers in rural areas, presumably to take care of the newly born children of plantation women. Local women were sought because they were “better acquainted with local conditions, local psychology and local customs, and more inured to the climate than her European prototype”. This made her “peculiarly fitted to cope with kampong illiterate patients”. Colonial officials viewed the tropics as a pathological Other, an environment that Europeans saw as incompatible with themselves and that they wanted to avoid at all costs. Writing about colonial India, Anthony King and Chang Jiat-Hwee suggest that it was the “systematic studies of the ‘airs, waters and places’ of the subcontinent and their effects of health” in the late 18th century that contributed to the perception of the tropics as pathological. Villages and the countryside were seen as miasmic, and sick local villagers therefore became physical embodiments of this pathology. Encouraging local women to join the medical profession would thus help limit European interaction with local environments, while at the same time ensure the survival of new born babies who would potentially work as laborers in the future.

Instead of merely saving lives, medicine became a technological tool of the colonial government to subjugate, control and acclimate female bodies in order to achieve the objective of a sustainable labor force. In the newspaper article, local female doctors were encouraged to “specialize in women’s and children’s diseases” and to serve in “infant welfare centers” in up-country locations. This demand for local doctors to work in villages specializing in gynecology and pediatrics grew out of this desire to decrease the infant mortality rate and increase the survival rates of mothers and children. This reflects this increased colonial desire to regulate and police the reproductive process, and thus subjects female bodies to greater scrutiny as compared to their male counterparts. Local female doctors thus became emblematic of this growing colonial penetration into rural areas and the increased surveillance over women’s bodies.

The second way that plantation women were exploited in the informal sector was through their roles as mothers and spouses, especially from the 1930s onwards as families became the basic societal unit on the plantation. When the ban on Indian immigrant to Malaya was lifted in 1934 after being imposed for two years, South Indians were encouraged to permanently settle in Malaya and migrate as families with women and children, instead of as individuals. In that decade, women accounted for about 30 percent of Indian immigration.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid, 36.
29 Ibid.
31 “Careers for Girls in Malaya II Medicine.”
Similarly, the Aliens Ordinance that restricted Chinese male migration and the unfavorable socioeconomic conditions in China in the 1930s had the effect of increasing female emigration during the period, and this partly addressed the gender imbalance and led to the formation of Chinese families on the plantation or in surrounding squatters. From 1933 to 1938, for example, an estimated 190,000 Chinese women between the ages of 18 to 40 years old entered the colony. 

The shift to families as the basic societal unit on the plantation was reflected in the changing architecture on rubber plantations, where single-line barracks housing that presumably housed laborers of the same gender were slowly being replaced by cottage-houses or detached villa houses that families occupied. In “Improvement of Estate Coolie Lines”, published in The Straits Times on 27 April 1940, the newspaper’s planting correspondent discusses this changing architecture. In existing coolie lines, laborers slept in rows in long barracks. These new family cottages, however, provides “separate and better living accommodation for the family man”. Within the family cottage were a central family room, a small kitchen, a bedroom, and another room that could accommodate two or three children. This construction of family cottages on this estate was motivated by the growing number of families on plantations, as opposed to single, migrant laborers. A sample of three plantations estates showed that two-thirds of the laborers were families whereas the last one-third comprised bachelors.

It is significant that plantation women were not explicitly mentioned in this article, despite their crucial role within these family cottages as mothers and spouses, thus erasing and rendering their work invisible in the colonial imagination. For example, in the author’s estimation of the proportion of families relative to bachelors, he or she completely excludes “children and unmarried girls” from his or her calculus. Women were therefore only recognized alongside men in the family, or not at all. Their relative invisibility in the popular press erases both their contributions to and exploitation within the colonial economy and family. The use of the term “unmarried girls”, moreover, creates the expectation that adult women were all married and perhaps alludes to a degree of imperial regulation over marriage practices and expectations. The family cottages created the expectation that women ought to be married and have children, and therefore becomes a subtle expression of the colonial desire to create a sustainable labor force. The description of the family cottage as “Model Type” suggests that this form of architecture would soon be replicated on a large scale throughout Malaya, yet accompanying this replication was also a new way of managing and organizing labor.

Within the family cottage, women were very likely responsible for cleaning, cooking, teaching, washing and caring for the children. This might be in addition to their roles as plantation laborers subject to a strict labor regime imposed by the planter. In other words, within the household, women were responsible for sustaining and maintaining the current labor force, while at the same time caring for non-workers who would later join the labor pool. This echoes an argument that Stoler makes about plantation capitalism, in which she argues that plantation industries rarely transform “a particular population into a full-fledged proletariat but more commonly (allow) – and more to the point by enforcing – some degree of self-sufficiency on the part of the laboring poor.” In Malaya, families were expected to have a certain degree of self-sufficiency when it came to raising kids or maintaining the household, and this “part-proletarian, part-peasant positioning of workers (was) an ingenious cost-cutting device on the part of capital.” Women’s roles within the household were often not financially recognized by planters. They were not paid for their work in the informal economy despite their important contributions to the labor force. Women were thus effectively subsidizing the formal economy by reducing the costs of maintaining labor, echoing Dasgupta’s argument that on the plantations of Assam, “the cost of reproduction of labor power was, to some

34 Ibid.
extent, externalized to a different economy – a non-capitalist economy and, in fact, was borne by the laborers themselves. In colonial Malaya, this way a layer of exploitation that men were not subjected to.

Both this article and the article on female doctors were published in The Straits Times, a local, English newspaper and read by either Europeans or members of the local, urban, English-speaking elite. The newspaper’s planting correspondent wrote the former article, whereas it was likely that a colonial administrator wrote the latter article. The articles are therefore distinctive for the ways that they reflect popular colonial sentiments and policies in Malaya. It is also significant that both articles do not explicitly discuss plantation women, even though we are able to decipher some of the patriarchal attitudes implicit within them. Not only were women not recognized financially or in the press, but women also rendered invisible in the popular imagination, thus making it even easier for the colonial economy to further extract and exploit them. It is also significant that both articles were framed as part of a very progressive narrative that was supposed to transform the unproductive to the productive, the uncivilized to the civilized and the traditional to the modern. For example, local female doctors, through their knowledge of Western medicine, will do their part “towards lessening the sufferings of her fellow creatures”. This adheres to a historicist understanding of development, where Western ideas and practices would become ubiquitous over time, first by being firmly rooted in the West before spreading over the globe. As part of this historicist explanation, local women and practices were rendered as backward, uncivilized and primitive. Similarly, the changing architecture on the plantation was couched as an improvement in labor welfare, echoing another article from 1933 that claims that these new cottages were “a paradise for Tam-


38 “Full Table of Dunlop Estates,” The Straits Times, 15 December 1933.
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SINGAPORE AND THE PIVOT:
THE CITY STATE’S ROLE IN SHAPING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN ASIA

In 2011, the Pivot to East Asia was introduced as part of Obama’s new foreign policy. This policy included new engagements in economics, diplomacy, security and democracy. While attention has been drawn to East Asia, Singapore has always been an important military partner for the U.S. This was further emphasized in 2013, when the latest littoral fleet, beginning with USS Freedom, was given approval by the Singapore government to be stationed for an extended period of time. Tracing the multi-dimensional relationship between the two countries, this paper establishes that Singapore has become a key partner for the US to maintain her naval presence in Asia. Cooperation between the U.S. and Singapore will only continue in years to come.

INTRODUCTION
As part of Obama’s new strategy to ‘Pivot to East Asia’ strategy, the administration has seen increased engagement with ASEAN and East Asian states. In particular, Singapore and the United States have shared an intimate defense relationship, with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 1990, which grants US access to Singapore’s military facilities, and the construction of an aircraft carrier facility that was completed in 2001.

This relationship was further extended in 2013, when the lead ship of the newest Freedom-class Littoral Combat Ship, USS Freedom, was dispatched to Singapore for eight months on her maiden deployment to the Pacific.

Such development of Singapore’s defense relationship with the US is unprecedented. The Clinton and Bush administrations helped to reinforce this relationship by signing of the “Strategic Framework Agreement for a Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defense and Security” in 2005. This treaty, the first with a “non-al-

1 This is particularly emphasized in Clinton, Hillary. “America’s Pacific Century.” Foreign Policy 189, no. 1 (2011): 56–63.
matic ties paved the way for further engagement as the US sets out her pivot in East Asia. By looking at various historical, security, economic and democratic factors, I analyze Singapore’s prominent importance for the new pivot policy. I conclude that the U.S., fearing that further engagement in East Asia will destabilize the region, has little reason to not choose Singapore as its strategic partner in Southeast Asia.

This paper will be laid out in the following structure: the first section will briefly contextualize Obama’s new ‘pivot’ policy towards East Asia; the second section will analyze the historical linkages between the US and Singapore and how their relationship has developed since the end of the Cold War. The third section, the centerpiece of this paper, will examine the strategic importance of Singapore to the pivot, and what both countries have to gain from this cooperation. The last section will make predictions as to how the two countries’ engagement will develop in the next decade.

**OBAMA’S PIVOT TOWARDS EAST ASIA**

Obama’s pivot policy towards East Asia was unofficially initiated in 2011 when Hillary Clinton’s article in Foreign Policy described the future of the United States as “(standing) at a pivot point.” She pointed out that the US should now focus on “substantially (increasing) investment… in the Asia-Pacific region.” In her description of the U.S.’s new strategy towards Asia, she identified four areas of focus – economics, diplomacy, security and democracy. As a result of this new paradigm, the US has increased its involvement in the regional and domestic affairs of the different actors in East and Southeast Asia. Ultimately, the U.S. believes that by building up economic and political ties with different Asian states, it can seek to benefit from the stability of the region, while keeping the regional power of a rising China in check.

I. ECONOMICS

The establishment of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), which involves countries in the Pacific (Peru, Chile and the US), the Southern Pacific (Australia and New Zealand), and various Southeast Asian states (Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei Darussalam) epitomizes the increase in US involvement in Asia.

7 Proposed in 2011, the TPP creates a consortium of states which enjoy lower tariffs on trade and investment. Through the partnership, the U.S. stands to gain access to a large sector of the Asian market, especially Southeast Asian economic powerhouses such as Indonesia, under the norms and conditions imposed by the TPP. Apart from gains from trade, the TPP also champions greater transparency, protection of labor rights and the environment, and open access to markets. Although the TPP remains unsigned, this initiative signals US commitment and interest in spurring the economic growth of East and Southeast Asia.

II. DIPLOMACY

After the end of the Second World War, the U.S. established various formal and informal partnership arrangements with Asian countries. This includes formal alliances with countries such as Japan, and trade and finance agreements with Taiwan, Vietnam and Singapore. In the Obama administration, U.S. engagement with Asia has increased through its involvement and participation in various multilateral institutions in the region. President Obama made the first visit to the ASEAN Secretariat by a sitting American president and assigned a resident ambassador to the organization, creating a voice in the ASEAN decision making process. The US has also shown a great deal of interest in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the East Asia Summit (EAS), in which President Obama also became the first US President to attend the meeting. The US reflected its concerns in maintaining maritime security, nuclear non-proliferation, and disaster response in the region, heavily emphasizing the strategic importance of East Asia to the US.

Although the US has always had friendly relations with Asian states since the end of the 20th century, Obama’s latest interest in the regional affairs of East Asia and Southeast Asia illustrates a new perspective towards the geopolitics of these Asian states. By estab-

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6 Clinton, 12
8 This was seen as most particularly important for the Pivot, which was a key point of Obama’s foreign policy. See Tsai, Sabrina. “Obama’s Second Term in the Asia-Pacific Region.” Project 2049 Institute, 2013.
lishing a channel for the U.S. to voice their concerns and interests, the US seeks to protect not just the interest of the region, but also its own, as it becomes more involved in the region's rapid economic development.

III. SECURITY

Security in the Asia Pacific region has always been a part of U.S. interests, especially for a largely maritime country. In South and East China Seas, the US has set up strategic installations in the Philippines, South Korea and Japan through various mutual defense treaties. With the increase in Chinese maritime power, the U.S. has sensed a greater need to assert her maritime capabilities more effectively to maintain dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. 10 This is explicitly stated in the latest guidance document issued by the Department of Defense in January 2012, which noted that the U.S. will “of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region”. 11 This once again symbolizes the U.S. commitment to safeguarding the stability and defense security of its Asian allies and partners.

Similarly, in 2011, Admiral Greenert, the Chief of Naval Operations, laid out his vision for the US Navy in a publication by the US Naval Institute. He explicitly indicated an interest in deploying new maritime or surveillance vessels to “Philippines or Thailand to help those nations with maritime domain awareness”. 12 The same article also noted that “(the) newest US littoral combat ships… (will be stationed) at Singapore’s naval facility.” 13 This was in line with the deployment of USS Freedom, and will be the first of 4 Freedom class Littoral Combat Ships that will be based in Singapore on a rotational basis. 14 At the same time, President Obama also announced the deployment of 2500 US Marines to Darwin, marking “the first long-term expansion of the American military’s presence in the Pacific since the end of the Vietnam War”. 15

Evidently, Greenert’s vision of a more Asian-centric Navy is slowly taking shape in the Obama administration. While the Obama’s pivot policy is necessarily more focused on stabilizing the security of the region, China may view this strategy an attempt to ‘encircle’ or ‘contain’ their rise. 16 US strategic rebalancing in Asia can either stabilize or destabilize US relations in East Asia. Having a strategic partner in Asia can help to minimize the risk of instability, while assuring the security of her alliances and partners. 17

IV. DEMOCRACY

During a visit to Australia in November 2011, President Obama made this statement:

“(Other political) models have been tried and they have failed… And they failed for the same simple reason: They ignore the ultimate source of power and legitimacy -- the will of the people”. 18

Thereafter, he reiterated his commitment to the development of democracies in Asia, specifically Indonesia, which “(the US will) partner with… to help strengthen the institutions upon which good governance depends”, Hillary Clinton echoed Obama’s words later in “America’s Pacific Century”, where she detailed a “strategic partnership” with Vietnam to “protect human rights and advance political freedoms”. 19 In the same month, Hillary Clinton took a step further by visiting Myanmar, opening the possibility of diplomatic relations between the two countries in fifty years. 20 These diplomatic gestures indicate the Obama administration’s renewed interest in stabilizing democracies in Asia.

These gestures are not always well-received. In response to the U.S.’s statement in Australia, then-Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono remarked that “it was no longer desirable for the region to be

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16 Zhao, Suisheng. (2013)
17 “Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament.” Canberra, Australia, November 17, 2011
18 Clinton, 14
dominated by a sole superpower”, cautioning other regional countries of American dominance.  
China also responded to Obama's latest stance by stating that countries in the region are “unlikely to approve of the US’ attempt to impose its values on them or the so-called ‘leadership’ it aspires to exercise in Asia”.  

Although the US has good intentions in promoting democracies in Asia, this must be done in moderation. Ensuring the stability of the region is still of utmost importance, especially because China remains a major player in the international economy. A strategic partner in Asia will help to alleviate some tension that arises from the multifaceted nature of the Pivot.

**DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND UNITED STATES**

Singapore and the US have shared a close diplomatic relationship since the city state’s independence in 1965. This relationship grew stronger at the turn of the 21st century with the rise in number of economic and military agreements that were signed in the Bush and Obama administrations. These agreements helped to establish strong foundations for deeper diplomatic ties between the two countries as Obama refocused his foreign policy towards Asia through the pivot.

I. ECONOMIC LINKAGES

In 2004, Singapore and the US signed a free trade agreement that allowed investment, goods and services between the two countries to be exchanged at low or close to zero tariffs. This marked the first free trade agreement signed between the U.S. and a non-ally Asian country. Both Singapore and US citizens enjoy visa-free travel to the other, allowing for a freer flow of tourism receipts between the two. In 2011, bilateral trade amounted to more than 50 billion USD, and Singapore was the U.S.’s 15th largest trading partner. More than 1,500 American companies have set up regional bases in Singapore, which contribute to job creation in both countries. Singapore is also a member of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

The Singapore-US Free Trade Agreement has since been lauded as the “most successful FTA globally”. As a major trading port, the Singaporean market has access to other rapidly growing Southeast Asian markets such as Indonesia and Malaysia. This therefore gives the US the ability to import goods at low prices from other Asian countries through Singapore, increasing U.S.'s overall trade with Asia. The strategic importance of Singapore as a springboard to the other Asian economies is evident in the burgeoning trade volume which the two countries enjoyed under this FTA.

II. ACADEMIC EXCHANGE

The two countries also share a very close relationship in education and academic collaboration. In 2002, the first Memorandum of Understanding for Education was signed to provide the US with tools and platforms to understand the Singaporean method of teaching mathematics and science in middle and high schools. The second MOU was signed in 2012 to enhance the cooperation developed in the first MOU and provide greater avenues for both countries to develop leadership skills in teaching and educational research. This MOU also led to the formation of a joint Masters in Arts program for Leadership and Educational Change between Columbia University and the National Institute of Education in Singapore. Beyond state-to-state agreements, colleges in the US and Singapore have also collaborated bilaterally to develop joint programs and institutions in Singapore. This includes the Yale-NUS College, Duke-NUS School of Medicine and the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), which was set up in

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22 The Chinese media reported on Obama’s new Pivot very frequently, and it was common to find articles that tried to draw upon the sentiments of other Asian, particularly Southeast Asian, countries. See Wei, Jianhua. “U.S. ‘Return’ to Asia Raises More Questions Than It Can Answer.” People’s Daily Online, 2011.
23 The Office of the Historian has a very good illustration of this history. Refer to “Singapore.” Office of the Historian. US Department of State, 2012.
24 The USSFTA has been deemed one of the most successful FTAs in the region. See “United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement.” Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2003.
25 Chanlett-Avery, 8
28 This is particularly true in 2011, when the trade volume between US and Singapore was at its peak. A WSJ article talks about this in detail. See Mohindru, Sameer. “Singapore-U.S. Trade Deal Pays Off.” The Wall Street Journal, December 13, 2011.
collaboration with MIT in 2011. The SUTD-MIT program allows students from Singapore to attend classes in the MIT campus for up to a year.  

In addition to these domestic collaborations, large numbers of Singaporean students attend prestigious US universities. In 2011, more than 4,500 Singaporeans were studying in the United States, the highest in 10 years, and this figure grew by 7 percent in 2012. David Adelman, then-US ambassador to Singapore, commented in 2013 that the US-Singapore relations “have never been better.”

III. REGIONAL DEFENSE COOPERATION

Singapore and the US have collaborated very closely in maintaining regional security. This began with a Memorandum of Understanding in 1990, which granted the US access to Singapore’s air and naval facilities. When the US decided to withdraw from the Philippines in 1992, the United States Navy relocated one of their logistic commanders to Singapore, allowing US navy vessels to use Singapore as a stopover during their voyages. In 2001, with the financial and logistical support of the US, Singapore completed a deep water extension to an existing naval base to berth aircraft carriers.

The cooperation was extended in 2005 when, under a new agreement, both countries agreed to work together to counter piracy efforts in Southeast Asia and the Malacca Straits. Singapore committed to deploy one naval vessel every year to assist the US task force that was stationed in the Gulf of Eden for regional security. Later, in 2013, the two countries also agreed that the Freedom-class LCS could be stationed in Singapore on a rotational basis. Certainly, the defense cooperation between the two countries has intensified through the mutual support for each other’s military deployments.

Both Singapore and the US have observed benefits from cooperating with one another in economics, education and defense. The pivot to East Asia, however, appears to take a unique stance towards Singapore, especially so with the latest intention to deploy littoral ships to Singapore on a rotational basis. Placing important military assets in Singapore, implies that the country does play an important role in fulfilling the goals of Obama’s new Pacific strategy. There are several characteristics that make the city state the prime choice for the US to extend her influence and power across Asia.

SINGAPORE’S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

When the U.S. decided to pivot towards East Asia in 2011, it coincided with the peak of a booming Chinese economy. It might appear that the US is sending a signal to indicate her presence in Asia, in the midst of a rising China. However, with military bases in South Korea, Japan as well as a friendly relationship with Taiwan, the U.S.’s attempt to increase its presence in East Asia may send negative signals to China. The US has to look elsewhere for a new strategic partner for her pivot towards Asia.

Southeast Asia became the next most accessible region, but picking a new strategic partner in the region is not an easy task, countries in Southeast Asia differ greatly in levels of political and economic development. It was important for the U.S. to select a country that

31 This is part of a student exchange program set up between MIT and SUTD.
32 “S’porean Student Numbers at US Varsities Hit 10-Year High.” The Straits Times, 10 February 2012.
33 Velloor, Ravi. “Singapore the Top Destination for US Investments in Asia.” The Straits Times, 26 August 2013
34 While there remains no official Press Releases of this MOU being signed, research in this area has often highlighted the existence of this initial agreement. See Smith, Anthony L. “Singapore and the United States 2004-2005: Steadfast Friends.” Special Assessment Des Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, 2005.
35 (Smith, 2005)
37 (Whitlock, 2012).
38 While perhaps there is no direct correlation between two events, the timing does seem to appear reactionary to some political researchers. Refer to Xiang, Lanxin. “China and the ‘Pivot.’” Survival 54, no. 5 (2012): 113–28.
39 In particular, Clinton makes direct reference to China’ rise in Clinton, 17
40 This is particularly seen as a move that would destabilize the East Asian region – a situation that the US wants to avoid. For more research on this scenario, refer to Christensen, Thomas J. “China, the US-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia.” International Security 23, no. 4 (1999): 49–80.
41 World Bank data illustrates this very clearly, with some of the lowest and highest GDP per capita in the region. A more consolidated view can be found in Gershman, John. “Is Southeast Asia the Second Front.” Foreign Affairs 81 (2002): 60.
not only had similar levels of political and economic openness, but one that was also willing to accept U.S. presence in its territory.

In 2013, when the US and Singapore signed an agreement to allow for the rotational deployment of US littoral ships to Singapore’s naval facility, the choice became apparent – Singapore would become the U.S.’s newest strategic partner in the pivot. 42 It is therefore pertinent to determine, in hindsight, the reasons that led the US to align with Singapore for the pivot. In the following section, I will attempt to assess these reasons through historical, geopolitical, security, economic and diplomatic lenses.

I. HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP

Singapore and the US have shared a continuous bilateral relationship since 1966, one year after Singapore’s independence. 43 Cooperation between the two countries developed during the last three decades, with the signing of multiple Memorandums of Understanding in defense and education, and the setting up of the Singapore-US FTA in 2004. The decision for the US to deploy vital naval assets to the Singapore naval base illustrates the trust and friendship which the two countries have after 50 years of bilateral relations.

These historic linkages makes Singapore an easier choice for the US in building greater inroads and access to the country’s resources. Familiarity with the others’ political systems and leaders allow both countries to negotiate more effectively and with greater understanding of each other’s interests. This sense of familiarity therefore reduces the time and necessity for elaborate discussions; the US can seek to achieve the objectives of the pivot at a faster pace without the possibility of diplomatic obstacles that will hinder US foreign policy.

II. GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE

Apart from efficiency, the geographical location of Singapore plays another important role in making the city state the prime choice for anchoring the pivot. Located in the crossroad of the Malacca Strait and South China Sea, Singapore is situated between two frequently used sea lanes of communication. This places Singapore in a favorable geopolitical situation which allows the US to expand her naval influence to the East and West of the Malaysian Peninsula, enhancing its abilities to regionalize the US fleet across Asia. Singapore’s geographical position therefore allows the US to set up a vital way point for the fleet’s naval operations across Asia.

Singapore’s location in Southeast Asia further bolsters US efforts in enhancing the fleet’s presence in Southeast Asia. With the U.S. Navy’s withdrawal from the Philippines in 1992, the US can capitalize on Singapore’s proximity to other developing Southeast Asian states to increase its security presence. 44 Specifically, the US can have greater influence in mitigating the territorial disputes in South China Sea that involve China and various Southeast Asian states. Docking the LCS in Singapore will allow the U.S. to respond more effectively and quickly to actions that are potentially detrimental to the region’s growth and development.

Furthermore, Singapore’s geographical distance from China, Asia’s rising power, helps to make any partnerships with the city state less threatening, and thus reduce chances for regional instability. 45 This also sets the South China Sea as a ‘buffer zone’, and minimizes the opportunities for Chinese vessels to meddle with US deployments in Singapore. Using Singapore is a strategic move that will safeguard U.S. interests with reduced concerns of Chinese intervention.

III. SINGAPORE’S NEUTRALITY IN THE US-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

Although Singapore and the U.S. share a close strategic partnership, Singapore has always maintained its neutrality, choosing to align with neither China nor the US in the struggle for influence and power in the Pacific. This was exemplified when the US Vice President, Joe Biden, visited Singapore in July 2013, when Singapore Prime Minister Lee made the following statement:

“Singapore is friends with America, also with India, Japan and China and the other major powers. And we would like to maintain our good relations with all of them.” 46

43 (Ministry of Defense, 2005)
His message is clear: as much as Singapore is interested in working with the US on security, economic and educational issues, the city state wants to remain neutral in the competition between the major powers. After Singapore agreed to receive the LCS in 2013, but only on a rotational basis, Singapore’s neutral position has never been clearer.

This might actually pose an advantage to the US, as utilizing Singapore’s resources and naval base to expand the navy’s influence will create less of a destabilizing effect. Singapore’s neutrality indicates that this will not lead to fear or suspicion of US intentions, especially from Singapore’s closest neighbors, where Islam is a predominant religion and US intent is sometimes questioned. By working with a country that clearly indicates its neutrality, the US can be assured of a more stable outcome from the pivot. In effect, US actions will not create as much backlash from Beijing, which is constantly uncertain of US intentions in Asia, nor will they arouse unnecessary suspicion towards the possibility of new US allies in Asia.

IV. ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS

In expanding its influence in Asia, the U.S. has been engaging with her economic partners and allies that have similar levels of economic development. These include the East Asian countries of Japan and South Korea. The U.S. does not have a formal alliance with any country in Southeast Asia, and as Southeast Asia begins to develop economically in the next two to three decades, the US has to start focusing resources to the region to ensure the region’s stability. It will be in the U.S.’s interest to work together with a country that has similar levels of economic development, so that common defense strategies and objectives can be met more effectively and easily without the need for huge technological transfers or capital outflows.

Using data from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, I will compare the levels of economic development for the different countries in ASEAN. Their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita will be used, and they will be adjusted for the countries’ cost of living, or at purchasing power parity. By looking at the countries’ GDP per capita, I will assume that Singapore, as one of the most economically developed countries in Southeast Asia, is the prime choice for the US to anchor her pivot.

Table 1 shows that the GDP per capita in Singapore is the highest in Southeast Asia, and is actually higher than the US when adjusted for cost of living. Consequently, Singapore will be able to afford the latest military technologies and facilities to work more in line with the U.S. This further implies that cooperation between the US and Singapore will be more cost-effective. Singapore’s high level of economic development will allow it to have superior infrastructure and resources as compared to other Southeast Asian counterparts. US soldiers who are stationed temporarily in Singapore can enjoy access to facilities and resources similar to these back home, making the country a more appealing location for regular deployments.

In addition, as the region’s main center of economic activity, the U.S. can not only ensure the region’s stability to support high levels of trade and commercial exchange, but also safeguard the U.S.’s own economic interests. The Singapore-US FTA creates surpluses of more than five billion US dollars each year, and creates more than a million jobs for both countries through Foreign Direct Investments. A U.S. presence in Singapore will therefore help to maintain economic growth not only in Singapore and the region, but also back home.

V. DEMOCRATIC TIES

According to liberal democratic peace theory, countries with democratic institutions are more likely to trust one another and thus less likely to wage war.

49 See Tables and Figures in this article.
50 The benefits of the USSFTA have yet to be fully measured, but preliminary studies have shown promising results. See Pang, Eul-Soo. The U.S.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement: An American Perspective on Power, Trade, and Security in the Asia Pacific. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011
51 This theory has been popularly cited as reasons for cooperation between countries, although new global institutions today, such as the G20, have somewhat invalidated this. More information on the theory can be found in Doyle, Michael W. “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs.” Philosophy & Public Affairs, 1983, 205–35.
SINGAPORE AND THE PIVOT

this respect, it is also possible that the U.S. would seek to work with countries in the region that are more democratic. To test this assertion, I will use two different freedom indices to illustrate the degree of democracy of different ASEAN states, and whether the US will be more or less likely to align with them.

The two measurements are “Freedom of the World” by the US-based Freedom House, a research agency that measures the degree of democracy and political freedom around the world; and “Democracy Index”, a measurement compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit. For simplicity, the democracy ratings increase for a country that has more political freedom. In the Freedom House index, the rating range between 1 (not free) and 3 (free); the ratings range between 1 (authoritarian regime) and 4 (full democracy) in the Economist Democracy Index rating. Ratings from both indices are then given in the aggregate to account for differences in their scales of measurement. The rating for the US will also be shown for comparison.

From Table 2, the democracy ratings for Singapore and the US are shown in bold. Singapore's democracy rating is ranked 3rd in the ASEAN region, with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand ranked higher in levels of political freedom. It appears that Singapore is not the 'most democratic' country in ASEAN, and in theory, the United States will prefer to cooperate with Indonesia, which is the most democratic.

However, the other countries ranked higher in the index do not share the same close ties with the US as does Singapore. Indonesia, for one, has only started experiencing democratization in the past two decades, after the end of the authoritative Suharto regime in 1998. Prior to that, the US viewed Indonesia as a 'problem state', and when the Al Qaeda affiliate Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) launched an attack on Bali in 2002, tension between the two countries heightened dramatically. While relations between the US and Indonesia have improved dramatically since the election of President Yudhoyono in 2004, Indonesia's turbulent political history has not allowed sufficient time to build trust between the two countries. On the other hand, the Philippines and Thailand have formal defense agreements with the US, and further engagement with these countries will only generate greater uncertainty with China.

Malaysia, on the other hand, has a capable naval force, but it remains slower than Singapore in developing new naval capabilities. Since the development of its latest naval vessels in the 1980s, the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) has been subjected to “(an) irregular development pace with a number of programs postponed or abandoned at the Malaysian government’s convenience”. This meant that the RMN has not seen a substantial expansion of its fleet since the 1980s. Working with Malaysia may require the US a huge amount of technological and capital transfer to be put on par with the US. This will not only pose high economic costs, but also imply an absence of any immediate facilities or infrastructure which the US needs now.

Although Singapore is not the most democratic, the country’s stable political system ensures regime predictability and accountability. Singapore also has the highest approval rating for US leadership in Asia-Pacific, and this measure has been increasing since 2007. Therefore, while Singapore may not be the most democratic country in the region, having strong historic diplomatic ties, economic linkages and a clear indication of neutrality ensures Singapore remains an option as a partner in the pivot.

VI. SINGAPORE AS THE BEST CHOICE

When it came down to picking a country to work

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52 See Page 23 – Tables and Figures
55 (Gershman, 2002)
58 Ibid
59 The spontaneity of Obama’s pivot policy meant that facilities have to be available immediately for new deployment of naval vessels. More information on the naval capabilities and facilities in Southeast Asia can be found in Storey, Ian. “Securing Southeast Asia’s Sea Lanes: A Work in Progress.” Asia Policy 6, no. 1 (2008): 95–128.
61 This is reflected by a survey done by GALLUP in 2011. Refer to “U.S.-Global Leadership Project Report.” GALLUP, 2011.
with in Asia, the US had many options in East Asia, but increasing military deployment in East Asia would unsettle a newly elected administration in Beijing. The next best alternative was to cooperate with a country in Southeast Asia.

The many factors described above essentially revealed that Singapore was the best choice for the US in securing a ‘secondary base’ for her naval vessels during long deployments. Through Singapore’s political neutrality, the U.S. can minimize retaliation from China. At the same time, the resources needed from the U.S. were low. The benefits indubitably outweigh the costs for the U.S.

Although Singapore often faces criticism for the country’s poor political development and low respect for human rights, the U.S. has placed its priority on economic and security interests. Singapore might not be the most ideal partner for the pivot, but it fulfilled most, if not all, of the requirements that the U.S. was looking for in the Southeast Asian region.

A NEW EAST ASIAN STRATEGY

Obama’s new policy paradigm towards East Asia, termed the “Pivot” by Hillary Clinton focused on 4 main areas – economics, security, diplomacy and democracy. These areas are fulfilled by increased US engagement with her regional partners and alliances through agreements, institutions and bilateral talks. Singapore and the US have shared many linkages since the former’s independence, and after 2011, this engagement was dramatically increased through the maiden deployment of the LCS to Singapore, with more rotational deployments in the next decade. It is evident that Singapore plays a strong role in assisting the US to achieve the goals of the pivot. The city state’s geopolitical, economic and diplomatic position make it the most viable and effective partner for the U.S.

I. THE FUTURE OF SINGAPORE-US COOPERATION

The Singapore-U.S. partnership is expected only to improve in the future. With the agreement to deploy more littoral ships to Singapore by 2017, Singapore can expect to work with the U.S. more closely on pertinent security issues in the region. The Republic of Singapore Navy has also been retrofitting her fleet of littoral ships since the turn of the 21st century, and a new class of patrol ships is expected to be commissioned in 2016. This will equip Singapore with more naval capabilities that can allow her to handle more diverse and complex problems in the surrounding regions.

The U.S. has a strong naval presence in Asia, and working with Singapore will enable greater opportunities to expand its presence. However, with Singapore’s neutrality, military cooperation will be limited to existing agreements. While the military relationship between the two countries were enhanced with the deployment of USS Freedom to Singapore, the insistence on “rotational deployment” and the lack of permanent facilities indicate a need for restrain in setting up new bases in Asia. A careful negotiation of the geo-political situation is necessary, for any uncalculated move might spark greater tension in East Asian waters. Singapore’s role in the U.S. foreign policy therefore remains as a strong “partner,” but not an official ally, as the latter will produce uncertain consequences with China and other Southeast Asian countries.

CONCLUSION

Singapore’s role in the pivot has become increasingly important. With a politically and economically strong partner in Southeast Asia, the U.S. can attempt to expand its navy’s reach in South China Sea and other surrounding areas. As the territorial disputes around Spratly and Paracel Islands intensify, it is timely for the U.S. to have access to naval resources at a prime location. Not only will the U.S. be more able and efficient in mitigating these disputes, she will also be more assertive in preventing China from acting aggressively. U.S. presence in the region can act as a form of deterrence to a more powerful Chinese navy, thereby maintaining a system of checks and balances that can bring stability to the region.

62 These ships will form the third generation of naval vessels for the Singapore Navy. More information on these ships can be found in “MINDEF Signs Contract with ST Engineering for the Construction of Eight New Vessels.” Ministry of Defense. January 30, 2013.
63 The US is often cited as a naval power, while China is deemed a land power in Asia. Singapore’s strong naval capabilities have been seen as a complement to the US, bolstering existing efforts to expand US naval presence. See Mearsheimer, John J. “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia.” The Chinese Journal of International Politics 3, no. 4 (2010): 381–96.
64 Refer to Whitlock, 2012 and Chow, 2013
Tables and Figures

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Table 1: GDP per capita in ASEAN and the US adjusted for PPP, in 2000 US Dollars
(Source: International Monetary Fund and World Bank)

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Freedom of the World</th>
<th>Economist Democracy Index</th>
<th>Total Rating</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>2</td>
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Table 2: Democracy Ratings for ASEAN Countries and the United States
(Source: Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


