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Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present the eighth edition of the Berkeley Student Journal of Asian Studies. Our annual journal serves as a method for undergraduate and graduate students alike to present their insightful and creative pieces of work on Asia, and to develop critical skills in writing, editing, and research. This year’s pieces were selected from a competitive pool of record-high submissions; we are excited and humbled to be presenting such an impressive array of submissions.

In this edition, Abhishek Dalal reevaluates the association with Buddhism of Asoka, the third monarch in the Maurya dynasty (321-185 BC) in North India for the purpose of informing today’s political activists in their search for a fair articulation of the nation-state. Gaoki Vang examines the various cultural and socioeconomic factors that affect the Hmong people’s access to health care. Fernando Salazar explores the immediate, transnational, and structural security problems that global climate change brings to Southeast Asia. Samantha Yen provides an in-depth analysis of food security in China and gleans lessons for other countries to achieve improve food security in the future. Wantakan Nicolette Arcado concludes that the level of centralization within a nation determines the level of subnational conflict by examining armed conflict in Indonesia and the Philippines. Win Htet Kyaw observes social hierarchy, modesty, and self-effacement in Myanmar Buddhism by looking at the formalities behind the act of prostration. Marylin Longley, Lauren Glasby, and Lorraine Pereira analyze the influence of economic participation on female political empowerment in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Rikio Inouye provides an explanation for the passage of Japan’s unprecedented Legislation for Peace and Security (JLPS), which codifies Japan’s right to exercise collective self-defense, allowing it to defend close allies like the United States.

As always, we would like to thank our supporters for their generous contributions of time and effort in creating this edition and look forward to a bright future as the journal’s mission contigues to grow.

–The Editorial Committee
Ashoknama, Akhilakathanak: Asoka’s Life, The Whole Story

By Abhishek Dalal

Special thank you to Professor Sanjyot Mehendale (Chair of the P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for Silk Road Studies, Lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Studies and Buddhist Studies, Vice Chair of the Center for Buddhist Studies)

Abhishek Dalal graduated in May 2017 with a bachelor’s in South and Southeast Asian Studies.
In this thesis, I re-evaluate Asoka’s intentions in his association with Buddhism and examine the historiography of Asoka utilizing developments in Buddhism that obfuscate an understanding of Asoka’s intentions. The narratives about Asoka used by secular and religious Indian nationalists extend from Buddhist sources that have eulogized Asoka as the ideal Buddhist king and I, therefore, challenge these narratives. This thesis combines multiple pieces of evidence including art, inscriptions, epics, political treatises and religious texts. I primarily rely on Asoka’s edicts, which were his only remains and which I further contextualize with the history of other empires, other rulers, Indic courtly culture, and Indic religions. This thesis provides a post-modern rendering of Asoka that would well inform today’s political activists in their search for a fair articulation of the nation-state.
The modern Asokan pillar in Wuxi, China,\(^1\) Asoka’s fanciful reconstructions in Tibet historical writing,\(^2\) and Asoka’s rediscovery in the nineteenth century demonstrate the perseverance and power of Asoka’s legend as the ideal Buddhist king.\(^3\) Asoka was the third monarch in the Maurya dynasty (321-185 BC) that was based in North India. Under Asoka, the Maurya empire would be first empire to include much of modern India and its western borderlands.\(^4\)

Asoka played an impressive role in shaping cultural thought compared to ancient rulers. His influence is seen even within his lifetime, as demonstrated by the manner that a Sri Lankan king established Buddhism after receiving gifts from Asoka.\(^5\) At a later time, and in a more culturally and physically distant China, Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502-49 CE) tried to emulate Asoka by erecting stupas and enforcing Buddhist dietary restrictions. This is not an isolated incident; Empress Wu Zetian (623/625-705 CE) relied on Asokan kingship when she modelled herself as a wheel-turning monarch or “cakravartin”.\(^6\) Throughout South and Southeast Asia, Asoka has been a precedent among Buddhist rulers.\(^7\)

In modern times and for nationalist ends, people have found plural philosophical possibilities in Asoka; on one hand, his rule has been transfigured “into a slogan that Buddhism had emaciated Hinduism.”\(^8\) On the other hand, he has been championed as a modern role model for India.\(^9\) These discussions based on Asoka’s portrayal in Buddhist sources are not immune from confirmation bias and lead to reading more into the evidence on Asoka than what is actually presented.

Asoka has captivated scholars despite a lack of biographical interest in ancient India’s rulers.\(^10\) Lahiri explains that Asoka has been popular among Indian modern writers because Asoka demonstrates remorse for political actions and not Machiavellian tendencies characteristic of self-serving politicians.\(^11\) The popularity of this Asoka has been motivated by an inverted inferiority complex, where in place of India’s lack of material wealth compared to Europe, there is an attitude that India was spiritually superior that was principally locat-
ed in India’s greater tolerance. Although Asoka may have plead for tolerance in his edicts, this should not be seen as testimony to India’s greater tolerance but the contrary, having required Asoka to make a special plea for tolerance. Moreover, Indian nationalist leaders who were led by Gandhi took Asoka as their political fountainhead. In so constructing a national consciousness that cuts across religious, economic and social factors, Asoka has assumed the pedestal of “humane rulership,” and modern writers have too often interpreted information on Asoka to this end, broadcasting India’s spiritual superiority by emphasizing Asoka’s personal connection to Buddhism (e.g., his ‘reconciliation’ of nonviolence with kingship and state).

I explore the figure of Asoka in his historical context by working with Asoka’s only contemporary remains (i.e., his edicts). Asoka had a series of inscriptions carved on stone surfaces throughout his empire (i.e., from North Afghanistan to South India) that reveals information about the Mauryan empire under Asoka and were written in an undecipherable script until translated in the 1830s. Conventional knowledge on Asoka were based on Buddhist writings, which described Asoka as a pious Buddhist king and were written centuries after Asoka’s time.

In addition to using Asoka’s edicts, I further describe the historical figure Asoka using information on neighboring localities, other historical figures, religious developments, and the political realities of the day.

Reconstructing Asoka within his historical environment would complicate the manner by which this history has been processed for national integration. All of the writers on Asoka have to re-interpret the relation between Asoka’s dharma, the moral teaching he expresses in inscriptions addressed to his people, and the Buddhist dharma or doctrine. In reality, Asoka was motivated by political expediency in his public pronouncements concerning his teaching – his dharma – rather than serving Buddhism.

Just as Akbar is credited with running the Indian medieval-age Mughal empire at its zenith, so too is Asoka with the ancient Indian Mauryan empire. It is debatable, however, if the Mauryan realm represented an empire and the esteemed Buddhist historian Romila Thapar says that the etymology of Asoka’s titles demonstrates his lack of imperialistic ambitions. She adds that “this is in striking contrast to even minor rulers who soon afterwards regularly refer to themselves as maharajadhiraja – the great king, the king of kings.”

13 Lahiri, Asoka in Ancient India, 12.
14 Lahiri, Asoka in Ancient India, 13.
15 Oliver, Communication and Culture, 101
16 Lahiri, Asoka in Ancient India, 14-15; Neelis, Early Buddhist Transmission, 83.
18 Thapar, Readings in, 231.
pauses here and does not further delve deeper into the question of the imperial nature of the Mauryan rulers. Thapar’s conclusion is premature, in my opinion, and needs to be contextualized better.

The Mauryas’ imperial ambitions are visible when comparing them with preceding empires. The Achaemenids, for example, were located primarily in modern-day Iran and ruled one of the largest empires in history with an efficient bureaucratic structure that allowed for impressive infrastructure development and whose influence can be seen in the public administrative system of the United States. Hazra says that “Asoka adopted the Achaemenian formula in his many records” and he specifies that “the Asoka inscriptions say, ‘The Beloved of the gods, King Priyadarsin spoke thus’ and Achaemenian records mention, ‘Says Darius (Xerxes, Artexerxes), the king’.” The fact that Asoka modelled himself on powerful rulers that formally existed outside the Indic realm demonstrates the extent to which Asoka must have sought to model himself as a powerful ruler and points out his imperial ambitions.

Asoka also modelled himself on the exemplar emperor Alexander the Great. Alexander called himself “the son of Zeus, tying himself to the mold of Achilles and Herakles,” and he “wanted to surpass the limits to which, according to tradition, Hercules and Dionysus had advanced in their eastward conquests.” In other words, Alexander contested divine figures and sought to portray himself as a son of the greatest god Zeus. These moves underscore Alexander’s ambition to justify his rule with the power of divinity. In his inscriptions, Asoka refers to himself by a variant of a common epithet. Hazra notes that “Asoka was mentioned as “Devanampriya Priyadarsi Raja, Devanampriya Raja Priya Darsi, Priyadarsi Raja, Devanampriya Raja or simply Devanampriya’.” These titles connote notions of divinity, in my opinion, if they are taken to mean “beloved of the gods” as is often the case. D.R. Bhandarkar remarks that ‘Devanampriya’ is comparable to the Christian “son of Jesus.” Asoka’s titular name, therefore, appropriates the manner by which Alexander the Great crafted his divine kingship. That Asoka modelled himself against Alexander the Great who also existed outside the Indic realm further underscores that Asoka went to far reaches in presenting himself as a powerful ruler.

The extent of Asoka’s realm is, moreover, huge. The Mauryan realm is proudly recalled by Indian nationalists for being the first pan-India state. Neelis uses Asoka’s inscriptions to reconstruct the geographical

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reaches of the Mauryan state. He says that “Asoka’s domain eventually extended to ancient Kalinga (modern Odisha) in eastern India, the Western coast of India (Girnar in Gujarat and Sopara in Maharashtra), southern India (as far as Suvarnagiri in Karntaka), and the Northwestern frontiers in modern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.” The Mauryan realm, thus, would have covered much of the modern nation-state India, in addition to parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and by virtue of its geographic reach, the Mauryan realm included diverse peoples as demonstrated by Greek and Aramaic Asokan pillar inscriptions in Afghanistan. The formidable reach of the Mauryas led to the acquisition of provinces from the Seleucids through trade of Indian war elephants; moreover, the powerful Seleucids sought to “maintain … diplomatic relationships with the Mauryas.” The Seleucids sought to be on friendly terms as they would have realized the Maurya’s power. The reach of the Mauryan realm through space and through the governance of different peoples as well as the power that the Mauryas cast to empires demonstrates that the Mauryas possessed imperial ambitions.

The Mauryan empire’s reach and influence to other empires is further underscored by Asoka’s inscriptions. The 13th major rock edict references five contemporary Hellenistic rulers. That Asoka’s inscriptions mention global rulers shows that Asoka saw himself as part of the global order and his empire as international.

The Maurya’s art also has an international character. The sculptures and motifs have close associations with the art of the Persians and Greeks. Elizabeth Stone notes that “the oblong platform of the Naxian sphinx ... bears a strong resemblance to that of an Ashokan Pillar from the village of Vaishali ... [that is] Crowned by a lion” and also that “the Rampurva bull resembles Greek statuary in its naturalism, particularly the realistic proportions of its anatomy, as well as the careful artistic attention paid to the animal’s genitals, sculpted so as to suggest a heightened sense of virility.” The utilization of artistic styles from distant empires indicates that Asoka wanted to elevate his realm on par with (or perhaps, saw his realm as being part of the system of) the global empires of his time. Asher notes that “Ashoka would have had no difficulty drawing his artists from any part of the civilized world, much as the sixth–fourth century BCE Achaemenian monarchs did.” This demonstrates Asoka’s attempt to partake and ensure his empire’s place in the global order, especially considering that “the major world economies and cultures were in regular contact.”

Neither is Asoka’s iconography necessarily Buddhist, thereby not confining him to a particular community. The Allahabad-Kosam pillar has a lion that “doesn’t feature prominently to religion pre-Aśoka but are frequently found in relation to the authority of royal power.”

Another example is the use of elephant motifs. According to Trautmann, “kings are drawn to elephants because of their size, which is useful to kings as a signifier of the superlative character of kingship.” Therefore, Asoka was incorporating a symbology that had great power in the Indic environment and that was meant to display his power. The similarities between Asoka’s use of animal capitals and the Greeks’ as well as Persians’ would have connected Asoka to the world system of major empires. In short, Asoka was using symbols of power in his project of kingship and empire-building.

Rather than acting in service of Buddhism, Asoka more likely used Buddhism in his project of statecraft. For example, the manner that Asoka used the term ‘dharma’ is not Buddhist. The 2nd pillar edict defines the governing principles of ‘dharma’ by stating “Thus speaks the Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi: Dhamma is good. And what is Dhamma? It is having few faults and many good deeds, mercy, charity, truthfulness, and purity.” That is, references to ‘dharma’ consist of general exhortations to social goodness as part of explaining the actions and principles of Asoka’s rule. A.L. Basham says that “much of the ideology of Dhamma which [Asoka] enunciated was inspired by Buddhism. But…to suggest that Asoka was propagating Buddhism as a state religion is to read more into the edicts than was intended.” In other words, Asoka sought to use Buddhism for political expediency. Thapar mentions that Asoka’s ‘dharma’ served as a “group of unifying principles” rather than a narrow sense of religious piety. The use of ‘dharma’ connected Asoka to piety, nevertheless, and as seen with Asoka’s titular name ‘Devanam Priyadarsi’ tying to ideas of divine kingship, this would be useful in elevating Asoka’s image as a divine ruler and in persuading the masses of Asoka’s principles of rule. Therefore, ‘dharma’ as used by Asoka has less to do with serving Buddhism and more to do with statecraft.

The fact that ‘dharma’ conveys social ethics and not religious values is repeated in accompanying translations. In a bilingual Greek-Aramaic inscription and in partial Greek translations of the 12th-13th major rock edicts in Kandahar, Falk notes that “dharma is translated as Eusebia.” Bongard-Levin observes that the Greek term “conveys the idea of righteousness, not religious belief” and explains that Asoka’s moral precepts were

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35 Trautmann, Elephants & Kings, 46.
37 Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 262.
38 Basham, A Cultural History, 42.
39 Thapar, Early India, 201.
40 Falk, Asokan Sites and Artefacts, 206.
“traditional ethical principles easily comprehended by various strata of the population regardless of their ethnic origin or religious allegiance.”

Asoka was, therefore, utilizing Buddhist terminology or ideas inspired by Buddhism to convey his ethics of rule in a manner that was accessible to and inclusive of many peoples.

Although Asoka seemed to have relied on Buddhism for political reasons exclusively, the extent to which Asoka was personally Buddhist is open to question. In some of his edicts, Asoka identifies himself as a follower. Specifically, 14 versions of his minor rock edicts state “More than two and a half years have passed since I became a Buddhist layman (upasake), but I was not zealous. Now more than a year has passed since I approached the sangha and have become more zealous.” Asoka clearly gravitated to Buddhism and he was not afraid of making this clear, while at the same time crafting an egalitarian social ethos and utilizing secular principles to bring many communities together. Another Asokan edict found at Bairat, Rajasthan “recommends particular texts to Buddhist monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.”

Asoka may have simply inherited his forefather’s gravitation toward non-Brahmin religions. His father, Bindusara, is hypothesized to have been an Ajivika. Candragupta Maurya, according to a Digambara legend, became a Jain monk near the end of his life, before handing the Maurya throne to Bindusara. Hence, Asoka would have been following the precedent set forward by his fathers to turn toward the heterodox traditions of the day.

The depth of Asoka’s personal religious life is revealed by his practice of non-violence or rather, violence, given Buddhism’s doctrinal rejection of violence from the early origins of the religion. The 13th major rock edict states “On conquering Kalinga the Beloved of the Gods felt remorse, for, when an independent country is conquered the slaughter, death, and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to the Beloved of the Gods, and weighs heavily on his mind.” However, Asoka was clearly not afraid to use violence as the same edict states that “the Beloved of the Gods conciliates the forest tribes [the Kalinga] of his empire, but he warns

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42 Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline*, 259.
45 Sengupta, “Rewinding the Ancient,” 258.
47 Tikhonov and Brekke, *Buddhism and Violence*, 7.
48 Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline*, 255.
them that he has power even in his remorse and he asks them to repent, lest they be killed." The 13th major rock edict demonstrates that Asoka was seeking assimilation, ultimately. Asoka’s proclivity toward warfare is further revealed by his empire’s military strategy. Trautmann says that “what we see is a tightening of the ownership of horses and elephants by the Mauryas as the policy of an ambitious kingdom, centralizing in this way the means of warfare with spectacular success.” If practicing Buddhism were important to Asoka, he would have used his administrative sources elsewhere. For Asoka, assimilation and empire-building were at the forefront; non-violent means were preferred and certainly, would have been easier to enact and more consolidative from an administrative standpoint, but Asoka’s personal religious beliefs notwithstanding, using violence or not (and thereby practicing Buddhism or not) were put aside toward his empire-building goal.

The manner that Asoka positions the Buddhist community in relation to others underscores that Asoka used Buddhism for political expediency. There are inscriptions dedicated to the Buddhist sangha but Asoka is also careful to endorse all sects. The 7th pillar edict states “Thus speaks the Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi: ... I have appointed some to concern themselves with the Buddhist order, with Brahmans and Ajivikas…, with the Jainas…, and with various sects.” That is, Asoka recognizes different groups without elevating any. The 12th major rock edict also states that “The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, honours all sects… This progress of the essential doctrine takes many forms, but its basis is the control of one’s speech, so as not to extoll one’s own sect or disparage another’s.” Asoka, therefore, sought to place all religious communities on an equal playing field as part of an inclusive government policy. Asoka’s emphasis on good speech about one’s own and others’ religious beliefs highlights how the doctrine of varied religions is less important than them co-existing peacefully. Moreover, Asoka’s other inscriptions promote inclusion of “religious communities.” Asoka did not elevate Buddhism from other religions as he attempted to bring the empire’s factions together.

Asoka’s desire to bring together various communities and the fact that he was not elevating Buddhism to a state principle calls into question his reliance on Buddhism at all. One reason that Asoka may have favored Buddhism is that Buddhism was nascent. Thapar says that “a new religion can be used as an emblem or a symbol of a new unity.” Buddhism would have, thus, been useful to “act as a cementing force, welding the

49 Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 256.
50 Trautmann, Elephants & Kings, 131.
51 Thapar, Asoka and the Decline 265.
52 Thapar, Asoka and the Decline 255.
53 Sircar and Dineschandra, “Two Inscriptions from,” 55.
54 Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 145.
55 Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 145.
smaller units” and Asoka had built his ‘religious’ symbols in areas of high traffic and throughout his empire, thereby bringing his authority to distant areas. Asoka’s administration would have required regular movement and Asoka notes in the 3rd major rock edict that his officers went “on tour every five years, in order to instruct the people in the Dhamma as well as for other purposes.” Asoka likely sent members of his administration to places where he built symbols of his rule to spread imperial words and bring back intelligence from the hinterlands. Asoka’s reliance on Buddhism may also have lay in its followers’ greater mobility than those of the other major religious traditions. Buddhism does not have restrictions on movement as compared to the Jains with their ideas on nonviolence and austerities, to the Ajivikas with their confining austerities, and to the Hindus with their ritual notions of purity and explicit constraints on movement. The fact that Buddhism would eventually spread to East and Southeast Asia attests to its followers’ mobility, which was necessary in Asoka’s administration. Asoka used Buddhism effectively to pull together distant factions and bring the center of power throughout his empire. The manner that Asoka used Buddhism as an administrative glue has been a successful strategy elsewhere. In Europe, it is known that “Charlemagne conquered the Saxons and then used Christianity as a cementing factor.” Moreover, in the Indic environment, there is the “Chola queen Sembiyán Mahadevi (tenth century C.E.), who built temples and installed gods not at the center but rather on the periphery, precisely where royal authority would feel distant and diminished.” In short, Buddhism served Asoka’s ambitions because of its newness and mobility.

Asoka’s reliance on Buddhism would have had political reverberations that were also strategic in his project of empire building. The Arthasastra is useful for reconstructing the political climate of the Maurya period with its earliest form first having been composed in this era. Within this political order, the Brahmins held great power and the Arthasastra says “Kshatriya power, being advanced by the Brahmanas, enforced as with a spell by consultations with mantrins and endowed as with a weapon by the observance of canonical rules, becomes invincible and secures success.” Brahminism, thus, had a huge precedent in the courtly culture of this time and the Brahmins would have been knowledgeable men, serving as administrators and wielding great po-

57. Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 251.
58. Long, Jainism: An Introduction, 68; Thapar, Readings in, 231.
60. Thapar, Readings in, 231; Long, Jainism: An Introduction, 4.
61. Winston and Bober, Charlemagne, 104.
63. Trautmann, Elephants & Kings, 188.
64. Goyala, Kautilya and Megasthenes, 61-62.
itical influence. The political system functioned on the political elites deriving their legitimacy from Brahmins and hence, serving the Brahmins to an extent.

Asoka undermined this system. He built an equitable administration that lessened Brahmins’ formerly great political power as demonstrated by the 7th pillar edict. James Fitzgerald notes that Asoka “elevated the world-denying, Brahmin criticizing movements to positions of imperial honor equal to or superior to that of the Vedas.” In other words, Asoka put into power those factions that were in some ways diametrically opposed to the heretofore powerful Brahmins.

Historical memory shows that the Brahmins were not happy. The first clue lies in Asoka’s portrayal in the epic literature. Neelis notes that “a virtual silence in Brahmanical Sanskrit sources with regard to Asoka’s legacy contrasts sharply with his legendary status in Buddhist literature.” Given that Asoka has been eulogized in Buddhist literature, it is strange that Brahmanical sources do not praise Asoka highly and often ignore him. Neelis translates the European scholar Biardeau who observes that “characters associated with Asoka are hardly found in the Mahabharata and only so in association with demons, such as the asura Asvapati who became the invincible king named Asoka (Biardeau 1.672.13b-15a).” That is, when Asoka is specifically brought into the epics, he is associated with being a demon.

Another clue to the Brahmins’ dissatisfaction with Asoka lies in the portrayal of his family lineage. The Puranas indicate that the Mauryas are sudras. For example, the Matsya Purana describes a king Moru, who will restore sudra (barber) rule in India and found the Morya (or Maurya) dynasty. The play Mudrarakshasa also describes the Mauryas as being of sudra lineage. This is not a favorable description, because the sudra caste is the lowest in the varna system and not the sanctioned twice-born caste. The Brahmin sources discredit the Mauryas by describing their lineage as from one of the lowest rungs of society. Moreover, within the varna system, sudras would not have been eligible for administrative positions. Therefore, describing the Mauryas as sudras would be critiques of their right to rule.

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65. Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 265.
68. Neelis, Early Buddhist Transmission, 92.
69. Padmanabh Jaini, face-to-face communication, November 7, 2016.
70. Agrawala, Matsya-Purāṇa, 266.
72. Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism, 49.
73. Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism, 49.
Following on the more plausible theories of Asoka’s family background, there is indeed evidence that Asoka would not have been formally part of Vedic society. The Greek sources say that “as the result of the treaty between Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus, who invaded Maurya territories but suffered a defeat, there was matrimonial alliance between the Maurya and Seleucid houses.” Thapar says that “among the more romantic hypotheses regarding the birth of Asoka, perhaps the one with the greatest possibilities is that which suggests that either his grandmother or his mother was a Greek princess.” As Asoka himself states in the 13th rock edict, there was no varna system in the Greek society. By having Greek blood, Asoka would have stood outside of varna society or certainly, would not have been recognized by those most responsible for maintaining its norms; that is, the Brahmins. Thapar also states that Asoka’s Greek ancestry led him to not being “given due importance in the Brahmanical circle, and this might have been one of the reasons for his converting from Brahmanism to Buddhism.” To be sure, Asoka would not have been readily acceptable to the Brahmins and less so as a king.

There is evidence that Asoka struggled for succession and consolidation of the throne unlike his forefathers Chandragupta and Bindusara, and that “in the early years of his reign, while he was consolidating his position, Asoka did not have the enthusiastic support of the older and more orthodox elements at the court.” These ‘older and more orthodox elements’ would have likely supported the normative practices of courtly culture, which was to have Brahmins sanction Ksatriya rule according to the Arthasastra. Therefore, that Asoka was probably not of the recognized social group privileged by birthright for a chance to rule (or to put more simply, not a Ksatriya) is underscored by the fact that the ultraconservative Brahmins were not accepting of him (the groups for which his lineage would have mattered most). Given the political situation, it would have made sense for Asoka to have become more interested in Buddhism.

Buddhism would have supported Asoka, as Buddhism does not have caste-based discrimination, and a relatively nascent tradition would have responded favorably to imperial patronage. Asoka was “moving away from orthodox Brahmanism though not opposing it, … giving open support to Buddhism and certain other sects.” Specifically, Asoka was simultaneously building rapport of new factions and breaking apart his opposi-
tion by placing them on an equal playing field with new groups and hence, trying to move his opposition toward supporting him, lest they be downgraded further. Asoka’s decision to turn toward Buddhism was clever given “the fact that these sects had the support of the newly risen commercial class and the mass of the population was not antagonistic to them.”83 In essence, Asoka’s reliance on Buddhism would have enabled him to curry favor among the masses through an increasingly popular ideological system and build a supportive court, overall enhancing his legitimacy. He was doing away with the political system that had restricted kingship to a particular group privileged by birthright and that had sustained Brahmins’ political power. Therefore, in the quest for authority and legitimization, and by relying on Buddhism, Asoka was altering the nature of kingship.

Buddhism’s memorialization of Asoka is further indicative of their elevation to imperial patronage just as the Brahmanical sources’ antagonism toward Asoka is indicative of their loss of power. Buddhist chronicles like the Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa have cherished Asoka as the ideal Buddhist king. Asher writes that “Nearly a half millennium after his time, a text known as the Ashokavadana (the story of Ashoka) was composed from memories about the monarch.”84 Asoka has been eulogized to a great extent as an ideal Buddhist king. Moreover, he has served as a benchmark for other rulers establishing Buddhist monarchies,85 as well as becoming nearly deified with Buddhist sites around the world naming themselves and taking inspiration in Asoka, such as the Buddha park in Wuxi, China.86 Asoka’s idolization, however, may create misleading a priori assumptions that cloud the historical figure Asoka.

The later Buddhist cooption of Asoka’s example would make it appear that Asoka was elevating Buddhism to a state principle. His animal motifs illustrate how later Buddhist developments may lead one to consider the evidence on Asoka as proof that he served Buddhism when his art was not considered Buddhist at the time,87 had a strong resemblance to the Greeks’ and Persians’ use of animal capitals,88 and were essentially symbols of power.89 Another example would be how the concept of cakravartin is expounded in a different manner by Brahmanical and Buddhist texts. It is known that “the first gives primacy to conquest and the protection of caste society” while the latter gives primacy “to the universally applicable social ethic, projected as the law

83 . Thapar, Asoka and the Decline, 144.
85 . Kinnard, The Emergence of Buddhism, 82.
89 . Trautmann, Elephants & Kings, 46.
that protects society, and not to conquer.” In other words, the Brahmanical and Buddhist texts go in opposite
directions and they were written in post-Mauryan times. The correspondence between the later Buddhist develop-
ment of cakravartin and Asoka’s ideals as set forth in his contemporary remains (i.e., edicts) demonstrates
how Asoka was ultimately coopted by the Buddhist tradition which eulogized him greatly. That Brahminism
went the opposite direction with cakravartin goes hand-in-hand with Asoka’s negative portrayal in Brahmanical
sources. Given that Buddhism incorporates Asoka’s example and glorifies him, Asoka would appear to have
served Buddhism but his only contemporary remains (i.e., edicts) suggest otherwise.

Buddhism was used by Asoka for political expediency in his project of statecraft. Asoka modelled
himself against the exemplar emperor Alexander the Great and the powerful rulers of the Achaemenid empire,
and he associated with the large empires of his day (e.g., Seleucid and through international art). He expounded
a policy that combined a justification of his own paramount position by, for example, connecting himself to
notions of piety and hence, amplifying his image as a divine ruler, as well as an effort at bringing into his fold
the varied peoples from North Afghanistan to South India. The personal dimension in Asoka’s gravitation to
Buddhism was limited as Asoka followed the precedent set forward by his forefathers to turn toward hetero-
dox traditions, as Asoka’s practice of Buddhism was put aside for his political ambitions, and as his rejection
by Brahmins due to his lineage would have led him to support non-Brahmanical sects. Moreover, Buddhism’s
newness, mobility, and increasing popularity among masses were useful to pull together distant factions and dis-
tribute the center of power throughout his empire. In the process of increasing his central authority and building
legitimacy, Asoka took power away from orthodox factions (i.e., Brahmins) and empowered more supportive
groups (e.g., Buddhists) to move his opposition in his favor as they ran the risk of losing additional power. That
Buddhist literature and art incorporates Asoka’s example and Brahmanical sources express antipathy toward
Asoka is an artefact of their respective group’s shifting political statuses.

How Asoka’s figure has been reproduced by situating him in his historical context, examining his politi-
cal and personal life, and parsing out later Buddhist developments informs an understanding on the relationship
among kingship, empire, and religion in heterogeneous environments (e.g., Caliphs of Spain or Sultans of Indo-
nesia). Asher ponders the significance about historical writing by asking “Do they, in other words, tell us at least
as much about subsequent periods and the construction of history?.” Asoka’s use of Buddhism as an adminis-
trative glue has historical reverberations (e.g., with Charlemagne) and so does his erection of pillars (e.g., with

90 Thapar, Readings in, 231.
Sembiyan). The strategy by which Asoka maintained central control resembles, in my opinion, the strategy of
the Mughals who had ruled another pan-India empire nearly 2 millennia later. The nature of India’s secularism
whereby the state is equidistant from all religions additionally has resonance with Asoka’s levelling of religious
communities and rather than rhetorically repackage history for creating a national identity, I demonstrate Aso-
ka’s dharma was motivated by political expediency and not by Buddhism, although Buddhist developments and
modern writers distinguishing India as spiritually superior would both make it appear. The history of Asoka is as
significant today as during pre-modern times.
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The Importance of Culture: Health Disparities in the Hmong Community

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Abstract

Health disparities research within the Hmong population has shown that there are various cultural and socioeconomic factors that affect the Hmong people’s access to health care. Researchers and scholars have demonstrated that cultural barriers and low socioeconomic status play important roles in how the Hmong population access the health care system in the U.S. This paper will analyze and argue that the cultural practices and beliefs are just as important when considering health disparities within the Hmong community. Through interviews and ethnographic study of the Hmong population in Fresno, CA, I will describe and analyze the cultural and socioeconomic risk factors in relation to the health disparities they encounter in the community and present a study of a Hmong shaman and the traditional healing practices and beliefs. Health disparities studies in the Hmong community will provide more information for health educators and providers to become more culturally competent and develop progressive ways to alleviate health disparities.
I. Introduction

In this research, I will address how certain cultural and socioeconomic factors that cause health disparities affect health care access in underserved communities. I will be focusing the research on the Hmong population in Fresno, CA to provide information about how they navigate the health care system and apply it to refugees and populations with similar background. The Hmong people came to the United States around the 1980s as refugees after the Secret War\(^1\) that occurred from 1962-1975 (Leary, section Backing the Resistance paragraph 3). As with any resettlements in a new country, the Hmong people experienced cultural and social shocks in the United States. By studying the factors of health disparities within the Hmong population, we can better understand how vulnerable populations are affected and further address health disparity implications.

The methods I will use for the research are interviews and secondary sources in an ethnographic research approach. I will be interviewing a small group of Hmong elders in Fresno, CA. The time period restriction will be from refugee settlement in the United States to the present 21\(^{st}\) century. The interviews will deliver a better understanding of individual experiences of the cultural beliefs and practices and Western medicine. The secondary sources will mostly be of similar studies on health disparity cases or the Hmong population’s health. I will be using these secondary sources to show possible correlations or counterarguments of the effects of health disparities in health care. These methods will provide a holistic view and understanding of health care access in the Hmong population in Fresno, CA.

i. **Hypothesis**

In my hypothesis, I state that cultural beliefs and practices are often prioritized over Western medicine which reduces the likelihood of the Hmong population’s usage of health care. Although studies often focused on how socioeconomic factors affect a population’s health care access, I will be analyzing how cultural beliefs and practices are crucial in understanding health disparities within a vulnerable population as well. In the conclusion of the research, I will discuss health care access implications for minorities and propose recommendations on how to improve health care access by decreasing health disparity gaps, improving cultural competence, and providing minorities with better knowledge and access to health care.

ii. **Theoretical Context**

Research on health disparities has focused on socioeconomic factors and their influence on individuals’ access to health care. Here I will concentrate on two theories of health disparities and how these approaches have helped structure the research studies for health disparities. Bruce G. Link and Jo Phelan’s Fundamental Cause Theory\(^2\) focused on how socioeconomic status is a fundamental cause of health inequalities and how individually-based risk factors must be investigated to explain the perseverance of socioeconomic health disparities (Link and Phelan, 80). The Anita L. Stewart and Anna M. Nápoles-Springer’s Health Disparities Framework\(^3\) focused on two contexts: the global or public health approach that outlines the social determinants of health and another that centers on the health care system (Stewart and Nápoles-Springer, 1207). Each theory focused on similar yet different ways to understand the relationship between health and health disparities and how to address these causes and effects to improve the nation’s overall health.

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i. Fundamental Cause Theory

Bruce G. Link and Jo Phelan looked at social conditions as fundamental causes of disease. They discussed the contextualization of risk factors and analyzed how particular social conditions are essential causes of disease. By contextualizing risk factors, they try to understand how people are exposed to individually-based risk factors such as high blood pressure and cholesterol (Link and Phelan, 81). An individual’s lack of access to resources that prevent diseases is a fundamental cause. These resources have a variety of mechanisms, such as biological and psychological mechanisms, to show the relationship between a disease and fundamental cause; however, mechanisms should not be the only aspect to look at when linking fundamental causes to diseases since these aspects can challenge efforts to address the relationship. Often sociological processes are overlooked, and the focus is on individually-based risk factors instead, which limits our ability to improve the nation’s health (Stewart and Nápoles-Springer, 1211). Both social conditions and individually-based risk factors should be brought into discussion when researching the relationship between individuals and diseases.


ii. Global and Public Health Approach

Anita L. Stewart and Anna M. Nápoles-Springer created two types of health disparities frameworks that helped in constructing interventions and diminishing health disparities within the healthcare setting. The first type of framework involves a global or public health approach that focused on the social determinants of health and the second is a more health care system approach. These two structures looked at the potential mechanisms of health disparities: socioeconomic status, discrimination, acculturation, and quality of care and looked at qualitative and quantitative methods to examine self-report concepts and measures that determine health disparities within racial and ethnic health disparities (Stewart and Nápoles-Springer, 1210). The measurement research they conducted showed that there were problems in the quality of the measures and conceptualizations of the four concepts and not enough information to interpret them across various groups (Owens, section *Country of Origin* paragraph 1). They concluded that more research on measurement quantity is needed to reduce health disparities with the help through systematic and collaborative efforts.

iii. Western or Traditional Healers?

Maichou Lor et al conducted a recent study on the influence of cultural values and traditional health practices on Hmong immigrants in the United States discovered that the Hmong people made decisions about seeing a Western or traditional healer based on the classification of the illness or the effectiveness of different treatment options (400). The study showed that physical evidence of illness and expectations for effective treatment in Western or traditional healers often caused the Hmong participants to go back and forth from one type of care to another. Immigrants’ health care utilization is influenced by cultural values and traditional practices. Over one fourth of Asian Americans (29%) are foreign born which caused them to have less to no knowledge of Western health systems (Gryn and Gambino, 1). They concluded that the Hmong participants held both traditional and Western health beliefs, used both methods and practices of healing, and had complex ways of choosing where to seek care from and when to change it (Lor et al, 410). However, the Hmong participants look at physical and spiritual causes of illness when making their decision which brings up the implications for health communication and the need for a holistic care model to address the needs among the Hmong population (Lor et al, 410).

6. Ibid.

III. Historical Background

i. Who are the Hmong?

The Hmong people lived in mountainous areas of Southeast Asia before immigrating to the United States and other countries as refugees after the Vietnam War. In 1961, the United States Central Intelligence Agency recruited Hmong men and boys to serve as guerrillas in helping defeat the communist regime in Southeast Asia¹² (Hamilton-Merritt, 42). When the United States pulled out of the Vietnam War, the Hmong people encountered persecution when the North Vietnamese army defeated Laos and Vietnam. It wasn’t until the late 1970s and 1980s that the Hmong were given refugee status after years in Thai refugee camps¹³ (Baker et al, paragraph 8). Family separation and loss were experienced by the Hmong population as they were displaced in refugee camps and transported to other countries to escape persecution.

Their transition into host countries was unexpected and distressing. The Hmong people had lived a sufficient lifestyle by relying on agriculture as the source of living. They did not know Western cultures of urban living in these countries, such as the United States. Their placements were often in poor communities, putting them in governmental public assistance programs which decreased their chances of employment and financial support for their families. Poor communities often have difficulty finding good-paying jobs, resulting in government programs assisting their transition which turned into long-term assistance due to no knowledge of English and the Western culture. The Hmong population in the United States faced certain health care barriers due to their origin, socio-economic position and use of traditional healing

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11. Ibid.
practices\textsuperscript{14} (Global Health Affairs, 2). They rely heavily on traditional practices and beliefs and although Western medicine has been incorporated into their structure of health and health care, it still holds a less important role in the Hmong people’s conceptions of health. The Hmong people continue to be reluctant in using Western medicine and rely heavily on traditional health care practices. The traditional practice of health care, lack of formal education, and low rates of English literacy are the major factors affecting the Hmong population\textsuperscript{15} (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, paragraph 2).

i. Why Study the Hmong?

Historically, the Hmong people have been categorized under the Asian Americans category that only makes up about 6\% of the population in the United States\textsuperscript{16} (Her, 3). Asian American ethnic groups are often put together in one category which takes away the information of individual ethnic groups in public health statistics. These data are often not segregated into categories where Hmong people. In the few censuses that have included the Hmong population, California has the highest concentration of Hmong people at 91,224 and Fresno consists of 31,771 Hmong residents, making it the second largest Hmong community in the United States\textsuperscript{17} (Her, 3).


\textsuperscript{17}. Ibid.
The Hmong people did not have a modern health care system where they emigrated from thus resulting in their lack of education about preventative measures and disease control. The geographical barriers to where they were offered health services in places such as Laos and Thailand also restricted the Hmong people from accessing health care facilities. Their heavy reliance on traditional healing practices can be seen through these health disparities that they’ve encountered. Often refugees and other populations with similar backgrounds and experiences are stated to be the most vulnerable groups in the United States\textsuperscript{18} (Finney and Smith, 1). These groups are deemed vulnerable populations due to inadequate health care and increased risk of physical, biological, and social health outcomes. Social and political marginalization and the absence of socioeconomic and public resources are the core reasons as to why refugees, such as the Hmong people, are labeled as vulnerable population groups.

IV. Cultural Values, Beliefs, and Traditional Practices

The Hmong believe in traditional medical practices, including animism and shamanism. The practice of shamanism is an important aspect of the Hmong people’s beliefs in animism because of its goal to foster and preserve spiritual balance and harmony\textsuperscript{19} (Gerdner, 3). According to the Hmong, there are two worlds—physical and spiritual—that exist. The physical body and the souls work together to provide life and good health to a person. This relationship has to maintain its balance in order for a person to be well physically, mentally, and spiritually.

When this relationship is broken, such as when a soul is lost or taken by other spirits, the person becomes sick.


\textsuperscript{19}. Gerdner, Linda A. “Shamanism: Indications and Use by Older Hmong Americans with Chronic Illness.” Diversity in Diaspora, January 2013, 1-22.
The shaman is the traditional healer in the Hmong community and serves as the connection to both worlds. There are two ways a person can become one: the spirits choose the person or the person makes the decision to learn and become a shaman20 (Lee). Once a person is chosen by the spirits or has made the decision to become a shaman, they have to seek out a master to help them learn the ways of shamanism. The shaman’s spirits play a significant role in assisting the shaman during his/her travels and help answers questions. In a way, these spirits serve as guardians and helpers of the shaman. When a person is chosen to become a shaman, they’ll develop an unusual illness and will have dreams telling them what they have to do next to fulfill their duties in becoming a shaman21 (Lee). In most cases, a person cannot refuse to become a shaman if chosen by spirits, but a person can choose not to become one until later in life or have it passed down to another family generation. It is important to note that “some shamans specialize in the very illness that afflicted them when they were chosen and will only treat people with similar ailments” and there are others “referred at as “generalists” and treat more common spiritual causes of illness22 (Plotnikoff et al, 31).

There are different rituals performed by the shaman based on the issue or event taking place for a person or the time of the year. The soul-calling ceremony is a highly practiced ritual in making sure the body and souls are balanced and harmonized. It is performed when a person is sick and their soul has been taken by spirits, when a person is sad and their soul has wandered

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21. Ibid.
off, or during the event of calling for souls of family members to all come home to create a balanced household²³ (Lee).

i. The Soul-Calling Ceremony

During my interview, shaman Lee was performing a soul-calling for all the family members to return to the household and making sure they were all physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy. Every year or in the case of emergencies, a family has to conduct a soul-calling ceremony to maintain a good well-being of each family member and a wishing of wealth and blissful life for the family. In certain cases, when there’s a member who’s depressed or whose soul has been wandering, the shaman would have to take the extra step of retrieving the soul by calling and soothing the soul back into the physical body in order for the family member to be healthy again. Another way to perform the soul-calling ritual is from The Split Horn: Life of a Hmong Shaman in America film, when the shaman Paja Thao performed a soul-calling ceremony with seeds, each representing his family member, to see if his family’s souls have wandered off since arriving in the United States²⁴ (The Split Horn). If a family member’s soul were still intact with the physical body, then the seed would fall into the opening of the container; however, if the soul were wandering off, then the shaman would have to call the soul specifically back to the body. During shaman Paja’s soul-calling ritual, he discovered that his soul has strayed from his body and fell into deep depression, preventing him from healing himself and others. In this case, two other shamans were summoned to perform a healing

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ceremony to help retrieve his soul back. Similar to how doctors have other doctors to take care of them, shamans also have other shamans who can help them heal when they can’t do it themselves.

The soul-calling ceremony can take up to hours or multiple times to heal a person’s health by bringing back the soul into the physical body. It’s a long process that requires a lot of work and effort from the shaman. If the journey gets too difficult in retrieving the lost soul, the shaman performs the ceremony for a longer time. The soul-calling ritual is a healing ceremony for a person and a family and in order to make sure everyone’s souls and body are balanced and harmonized, the ritual is recommended whenever a person contracts an illness or when a family is experiencing too many difficult challenges in life.

V. Case Studies

i. Participant 1

Participant 1 is around her mid-60s and practices shamanism. She has been residing in the United States for 25 years and is not fluent in English. She considers herself to be low-income and does not hold a Bachelor’s degree. The participant is partially blind in her right eye and completely blind in her left eye caused by diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of vision loss in adults aged 20-7425 (Lee, 2). She goes to her doctor for her bi-monthly check-ups and eats her medicine regularly. However, she initially saw a shaman to help with her partial blindness, afraid that she has seen something she shouldn’t have but then her children encouraged her to get it checked out at the doctor. Although she sees a doctor from

time to time, her first choice would always be a shaman because she grew up practicing the beliefs.

When she first noticed her eyesight going bad, she sought out a shaman to help her. The shaman would perform a small ritual and blow incense in her eyes and give her some herbs to drink to help cure her eyesight. At first it seemed to be working because she would be able to see for a few days but then she wouldn’t be able to see some other days. She continued seeing the shaman for a while because it gave her results. As time went on, her vision got really bad in one eye so she finally listened to her children and had them take her to the doctor’s for a check-up. She thought that if the shaman wasn’t curing her eyesight she can seek Western medicine to help her because although she does not like the idea of Western medications, she has heard that it can possibly help her.

When asked about her health care experiences, she has mostly positive reviews. Her current check-ups are a lot better than her first time at the doctor’s since she lacked good interpreters and did not have the knowledge of the fancy terms the doctor used. She explained how she was scared during her first few visits about her eyesight. She hasn’t been taking her diabetes medication because it made her really tired and caused her stomachaches. During her first few visits she had her daughter translate but it was difficult to understand the medical terminology and she would tell her daughter to lie about taking the medications and how her eyes are hurting. She thought that if she could get the medicine for her eyes to help her then she wants to take them because she blamed herself for not taking her diabetes medication which caused her blindness.

After she was prescribed the medicine, she took it during the assigned days and times but did not see any results. She stopped taking her medicine and went back to the shaman for help. The shaman did the usual ritual by blowing in her eye with an incense and providing her herbs to drink. At this point nothing seemed to work anymore and she completely lost her vision in her left eye and became partially blind in her right eye. She currently takes her diabetes medications yet still seeks shaman assistance for her eyes and other illnesses she experiences. She knows that she won’t get her eyesight back but she believes that the ritual always seemed to help a bit by clearing her vision right after. Even if it’s slightly, she believes it’s still better than being completely blind in both eyes. The participant said she blames herself for not taking better care of her body but she is now both taking her medications regularly and resorting to a shaman for help when she needs it. Overall, her initial response was to seek help from a shaman due to her cultural beliefs and traditional practices. She went back and forth between the doctor and shaman but she eventually resorted to the shaman for her eyesight and the doctor for her diabetes medication.
ii. Participant 2

Participant 2 became a shaman in her mid-20s and is now around her early-70s. She considers herself to be low-income with no Bachelor’s degree. The illness she had during the process was epilepsy, but more known as “the spirit catches you and you fall down” by the Hmong people (Fadiman, 4). She would experience them and sometimes have blackouts causing her not to remember what occurred. During this time, she was still living in Thailand and through the diagnosis of a shaman, she was to become a shaman and have to start learning and practicing in order to control the seizures. Similar to how Lia Lee experienced epilepsy in her family, Lee’s family loved and showed her a lot more affection since she was to become a shaman (Fadiman, 16). Although Lia’s case took place during a different time, her story is relevant in discussing the Hmong traditional beliefs and how sometimes not everyone becomes a shaman when diagnosed with epilepsy.

When she experienced her first seizure in Thailand her family did not seek medical help. The hospital was too far to travel and they did not have the money. However, the most important aspect was that her parents believed she was to become a shaman because she was having seizures. They went to the town’s shaman and asked for help for their daughter. The participant was scared during this time because she did not want to become a shaman because she has heard terrible stories of how they see evil spirits and get really sick if they do not perform rituals or ceremonies to combat the illness. Her parents brought her to the shaman and instead of her being diagnosed with epilepsy, she was diagnosed as a soon-to-be shaman for the community. She practiced under the town’s shaman but also continued to have seizures. She was told by the shaman that once she perfects her learning, she’ll be able to control her seizures and won’t experience them ever again. This motivated her to learn to become a shaman because she did not like losing control of her body and being weak in the eyes of others. She never once went to the doctor to ask for medical assistance and only relied on her cultural values and traditional practices.

After she mastered the art of being a shaman around her late-30s, she said she has never felt better about herself. She was married around the time of her diagnosis and had 3 children before immigrating to the United States around her late-50s. In the United States, she only took her family to the doctor when it’s required by the state or when someone has a physical illness, such as a heart condition, that shamanism can’t fully cure.


27. Ibid.
She tries her best not to go to the doctor’s because she believes in her spirits to help her heal instead of relying on Western medication. Her husband supports her but is always the one who takes the children to the doctor’s in fear that they may have contracted something in this foreign land. Whenever someone is sick in her family, she performs a soul-calling ceremony to balance their spiritual and physical well-being. The medicine she provides for her family and others that come to her are types of Asian medicine and herbs. She often gets asked to perform rituals and ceremonies for other community members but before she agrees, she would always diagnose the issue first before deciding if a ritual was needed for the illness.

The participant understands that her role as a shaman is to help heal her community members; however, she acknowledges the fact that there will be times when shamanism can’t heal an illness and that may mean they will have to resort to Western medicine for assistance. Although it’s difficult to balance her traditional practices with Western medicine, she always makes her decisions in the best interest of her patient. She ended by stating that she’ll continue believing and practicing shamanism because it’s what she values and it’s the life that was chosen for her. It’s not her role to force others to believe in what she does because she believes in what she does for her community and that’s guiding them towards a more spiritual and physical balance.

iii. Participant 3

Participant 3 came to the United States at the age of 1 and is currently in her early-40s. The family converted to Christianity a few years after their arrival to the U.S. due to relatives persuading them about the belief of God and how the priest and church community will help support and guide them in the U.S. She considers herself to be middle-income and she holds a Bachelor’s degree. Although she practices Christianity, she also turns to shamanism for help after her cultural experience of soul-loss.

The whole family converted to Christianity in believing they’ll get a better life by taking this first step in trying to belong in a country they know nothing of. According to Plotnikoff et al., “Despite 25 years of Hmong acculturation in the United States and conversion to Christianity, Hmong shamanism maintains its traditional role in health and healing” (30). Many elders within the Hmong community continued their beliefs and practices in the Hmong culture despite the new generation’s appropriation of the Western culture. There were still many Hmong people who saw physicians who also relied on shamans for restoring health and balance to their body and soul (Plotnikoff, 31). Although she identified as a Hmong-American with Christian values, she was starting to lose some of her Hmong identity by not pushing herself to be closer to the Hmong culture nor pre-
serving her Hmong language.

In the month of July during summer break, the participant and her family decided to go on a camping trip with some close relatives to celebrate the 4th of July together. She remembered having a great time there and it wasn’t until the night before they were going to head back home that she experienced something disturbing and didn’t tell anyone about it until later on. The Hmong people associate those who have a sixth sense as someone who will become a shaman or those with weak souls that can become vulnerable to seeing or hearing spirits who may lose their souls to them. In this case, the participant was considered to have a weak soul that made her vulnerable to spirits attaching themselves to her.

After the camping trip, the participant developed cold-like symptoms and she couldn’t get out of bed without feeling very dizzy and needing to throw up. Her parents took her to the family doctor and the doctor prescribed cold medicine for her along with another medicine that she can’t recall for her dizziness that seemed to make it worse. No one was suspicious of anything and only assumed she caught a bad cold during the summer. But it wasn’t just the cold-like symptoms that were bothering her; she was also seeing things where they shouldn’t be and having constant nightmares where she’d wake up crying. In the case of nightmares and sleep paralysis, the Hmong people believe that evil spirits haunt the dreams and lives of people they want to take the souls away from30 (Lee). During a person’s sleep paralysis, the evil spirit is actually sitting on top of the person’s chest and speaking in languages to the person to scare them and make their souls weak before taking them.

When the participant’s health got worse, she finally told her parents about what she saw during their family camping trip in July. She told them she saw a spirit and it has been following her around and coming into her dreams saying it wants her to go with it and it will not leave until she comes with it. She described the spirit in detail and all the awful things she’s been experiencing.

29. Ibid.
Her mother called the priest right away asking for help and the priest came over the next day to bless her and the house. Her father didn’t say much but told her to stay strong and not give in to the spirit. The next day when the priest came over, he marked her forehead with holy water and went around the house throwing holy water and saying prayers from room to room and ending at the front door. She had a seizure after the priest left and fainted. The father advised them not to take her to the doctor or call the priest over and that same night, her father brought over a trusted relative who was a shaman to take a look at her. The shaman told her parents that an evil spirit from her past has come back and attached itself to her. When the priest came into the house, the spirit got scared and hid but when the priest left, the evil spirit got very angry at the family and at her for trying to get rid of it which caused it to try to take her soul right then but resulted in her having a seizure and passing out instead. The spirit was very strong and had almost completely taken her soul with him. They needed to do a soul-calling ceremony right away to stop this from happening and the father went right away to set up everything to do the ritual tomorrow. The ritual took almost 5 hours for the shaman to complete his travel from retrieving and getting rid of the evil spirit. The next week, another ceremony was held by the shaman to change her name to confuse the evil spirit and misguide it from finding her. The name changing ceremony is not often performed and only done so in extreme cases such as this\(^{31}\) (Lee).

Her experience caused her to develop a stronger sense in believing in the Hmong culture’s beliefs and practices, yet she still holds dear to her identity as a Christian. The multiple identities she has made her stronger and encouraged her to learn more about the different healing practices within the Hmong shamanism, Christian beliefs, and Western biomedical setting.

i. Participant 4

Participant 4 is around her early-70s and immigrated to the United States around the age of 35. She is somewhat fluent in English and somewhat accustomed to Western culture; however, she still holds onto her cultural values and traditional practices. Her father was a shaman and he had a significant impact in her life thus strengthening her beliefs in shamanism. The participant’s initial response is to contact a shaman for most health-related issues. She does not like visiting the doctor or taking Western medicine because she believes it doesn’t work. The participant considers herself to be low-income and does not hold a Bachelor’s degree.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
The participant has had her share of illnesses but the most memorable one was when she became paralyzed from the waist down after a car accident. She was diagnosed with quadriplegia which changed her life forever. Although she was held at the hospital and treated there first, she asked for her father to perform a ritual for her and call her soul back because she was afraid that the car accident may have frighten her soul to run away, thus taking her ability to walk. She told the doctors about her soul-loss but they did not understand and made her seem crazy. The doctors informed her that she won’t ever be able to move her body from the waist down from there forward but she believed she will be able to walk as soon as her soul comes back to her body.

She tried various Asian medicines to help regain her strength after the Western health care had failed her but it was also of no help. She resorted to many shamans to performs rituals and blessings for her to get better but she was still quadriplegic in the end. The participant eventually accepted the fact that she’ll never be able to walk again but she realized that she has become very bitter over the years by holding grudges on both the Western and traditional health practices for not being able to assist her. She went back and forth between traditional and Western medicine in order to find what will cure her but she said she also failed herself.

She believed that because she couldn’t decide and stick to one type of healing practice, she messed up her physical and spiritual body. The participant talked about how she went into depression and she took it out on her family. She has now learned to love herself again and is now only practicing Hmong traditional healing because it’s her roots and since she started with it, she wants to end with her cultural values and practices as well.

ii. Participant 5

Participant 5 is around his late-70s and immigrated to the United States around his early-50s. He considers himself to be low-income and does not have a Bachelor’s degree. He is not fluent in English nor accustomed to Western culture and doesn’t intend to do so. The participant is comfortable in his setting of Hmong cultural values and traditional practices and tries to avoid Western health care. He has been diagnosed with late-stage stomach cancer and has endured hospital stays and traditional ceremonies to help with his illness.

When he was admitted to the hospital for severe stomachaches, he didn’t know he had cancer. He has not visited the doctor in a while because he’s older and believed that all old people get sick but will be fine for the long while. When the doctor diagnosed him with late stage stomach cancer, he was devastated. There was nothing more they can do for him and only provided pain medications for him to take home. His family asked a
shaman to perform a healing ceremony for him but he believed it was just to make him happy since his family is separated and they hardly get to see each other.

He also used to be a shaman in his younger years so he was able to provide information about how a ceremony is performed. The shaman’s altar is necessary for the shaman to perform rituals because it serves as the connection from the physical world to the spiritual world. The bamboos and strings tied up on the ceiling allows the shaman to use it as a bridge for their travels to the spirit world. There are a few containers on the altar and outside the house use to store incense and the spirit papers on the side are burned for the spirits as money. The incense on the altar is used to light the way in search of lost souls, the egg is used to lift up the soul and take it back to the physical world, and the chicken figure serves as the helper to guide the shaman back when he/she is lost. The divination horns are used as tools to answer questions the shaman needed to know and the rattle is used as the tool to hold everything together during the ritual. The finger ring bells are the tools the shaman uses to heal a person such as attracting the lost soul from the spirit world and bringing it back and the shaman’s veil serves as the defense against evil spirits when the shaman is traveling to the spirit world.

Even though he practiced shamanism, he still used Western medicine to care for his body. When he first immigrated to the United States, he stayed away from Western culture and medicine because he did not know it or understand how it works. His poor English literacy also affected his utilization of the Western health care but when he does require Western medicine, he’d take along a family interpreter or ask for an interpreter at the doctor’s office before going in. He utilizes both traditional and Western medicine for certain illnesses. If he has a bad cough, he will go to the doctor’s and get a prescription on cough medicine but if he is feeling weak and under the weather, he would consult with a shaman about his spiritual and physical balance first. It’s challenging for individuals to find what works for them in terms of health and how to work around the health care system. The issue of cultural and language barrier in his case makes it difficult to understand much of what is happening with his body but with Hmong individuals in the health care field or those with understanding of English and health literacy, the Hmong population and especially the elders can be helped when facing these issues.

i. Participant 6

Participant 6 is around his late-40s and immigrated to the United States around his late-teens. He is somewhat fluent in English and is somewhat accustomed to Western culture but still values and practices Hmong traditional culture. He sees himself as low-income and does not have a Bachelor’s degree. He has been diagnosed with gout and has never went in for Western medical attention. He relies on traditional healing practices and adapts his daily activities whenever he is experiencing intense joint inflammation in his legs.

The participant has never consulted with a doctor about his illness before because he has heard stories about the side effects of the medication and he still wants to take care of his health issues with traditional practices. When he first experienced the pain in his legs, he was driving on the road. He was able to pull over to the side of the road to wait for the inflammation to swell down. Although it shocked him, he wasn’t surprise that he has gout because his family has a history of arthritis. When he was able to get home safely he made a call to a shaman for medicine to help him with his pain and swelling in his legs. He later picked up the medicine from the shaman and used it as instructed to reduce the pain and swelling. The results were not quick but he assumed this type of pain and swelling will take time to heal itself and go back to normal. He would stay home mostly when he experiences this but there have been times when it has caught him off guard which has endangered his lives and others as well.

There was an event where he had to travel by car to Wisconsin to see his relatives. He decided to take his children with him because he thought it would be a nice family trip. About half way through the drive from California to Wisconsin, his legs started acting up. He was very scared because this time he had his children with him and he wasn’t able to control the car with his feet. He had to drive with his left foot for a while until they could pull over in a rest stop to wait for his gout to disappear. He didn’t take any medications with him so he was stuck enduring the pain and swelling. Even though he could have gone to the store to get over-the-counter medication, he didn’t want to mix medications. He called the shaman back home and the shaman advised him of another shaman nearby in the state he was in. He went to see the shaman for some medicine and since the shaman was a friend of his community’s shaman, he helped out by providing medicine free of charge. The shaman also massaged his legs to give it better circulation and soon enough the swelling went away but there was still minor pain. The shaman advised him to rest for the night and they stayed over at his place to rest before moving forward with their trip to Wisconsin.
The participant was scared for putting his children at harm but he had no control of when his legs will start to act up. He knew that he could have went to the store and bought over-the-counter medications or gone to the hospital instead of rerouting to see another shaman before continuing the trip but his children were with him and the traditional medicine has worked for him so he didn’t want to waste money or time trying another new type of medicine, especially since it’s Western medicine that has side effects to it. His strong traditional beliefs and practices did not waver during this scary moment but he said that if he could do it over again, he’d probably have gone to see a doctor about his arthritis and get prescribed medications that he would always have instead of driving from place to place trying to find the traditional medicine that is limited when traveling through places with no Hmong communities.

ii. Participant 7

Participant 7 is around his mid-70s and immigrated to the United States around his late-50s. He has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder from the Secret War. He also can’t hear from his left ear and is farsighted. He has experienced severe weapon firing and bombing that caused him to be deaf and hyperopia. Today he still continues to have nightmares about the war and has never reached out for proper health care to address this issue. He considers himself to be low-income and does not have a Bachelor’s degree.

The participant was recruited for the Vietnam War when he was in his 20s. He knew nothing during the time but to fight and survive. It was a very difficult time for him because he had no contact with his family and he saw death every day. After the war he suffered from these health issues but was never properly treated. When he immigrated to the United States, he was provided with a health screening and they provided him with a hearing aid and glasses. The Western health physicians did not know about his severe PTSD because he has never admitted to it or told anyone but his family knows. Although it’s not as bad today, he wished he could completely wipe away the horrors and memories during that time period. It was around his 70s that he started to experience severe headaches.

He didn’t go to the doctor to treat his pain but resorted to traditional medicine to help with his headaches. He confirms that the medicine works for him but the pain would always come back. He does not believe the headaches have to do with his PTSD but it may be due to him working too hard in the fields. He farms every single day of the week because he grew up farming with his family back in Laos and he enjoys doing it. His family tells him to stay home and relax instead of always going out to farm but he doesn’t like the idea of
not having anything to do and the farming keeps him busy. When the pain was too much to endure, his family took him to the hospital to get checked out and they discovered that it was due to stress that was giving him migraines. He went through a series of tests and the doctor diagnosed him with PTSD. He was assigned to go to therapy to help but he was a private man who didn’t want to share his experiences. He felt powerless being exposed as mentally disabled because of his experiences. He didn’t attend the sessions and just stayed home and continued taking medicine to help with his migraines.

The participant didn’t get Western health care for his PTSD but he eventually learned to talk about his experiences with his family and friends which allowed him to feel better and have less migraines. Although he still needs Western medicine to help with his illness, he still resorts to traditional medicine occasionally to help him when he believes the Western medicine isn’t working. The interchangeable usage of Western and traditional medicine has allowed him to understand what illness he has and how to address his issues. The Western physician diagnosed him with the mental illness and the shaman provided traditional medicine to help relieve his pain. He uses both practices to make his body feel a lot better. He believes that if he was to use just one another not the other, it would cause him to still be stuck with severe headaches and nightmares. It’s difficult having to choose only one method of healing and he doesn’t believe that there is only one way of healing. He has strong cultural values and traditional beliefs but he does not let that prevent him from getting the necessary health care he needs when traditional medicine does not work for him.

VI. Discussion

By researching social conditions and individually-based risk factors of the Hmong-American community in Fresno, CA, we can better understand how this vulnerable population is affected by health disparities in their community. Social conditions such as income and education can play a role in the resources a Hmong-American individual has to access health care such as the higher the education and income level, the more knowledgeable and willing they are to acquire health care for their needs. The physical and social environments of Hmong-American individuals also contribute to the conditions they live in that may prevent them from

getting the health care they need or causing them to be more vulnerable to certain diseases. Also, and most importantly, the cultural and language barriers of the Hmong-American population can inhibit them from choosing Western medicine for help thus seeking for assistance from their cultural practices instead. The individual risk factors to focus on in the Hmong-American community is to understand their narrative and how the elderly population may differ in opportunities and limitations that make them more vulnerable to diseases and have poorer access to health care.

Certain social determinants affect the Hmong-American community in Fresno to have a lower access range of health care and higher vulnerability to certain diseases. The Hmong people were originally from the hills of Southeast Asia, where they are known to live off agriculture mostly, which exposes them to certain diseases such as Tuberculosis and Hepatitis B34 (Owens, section In the United States paragraph 4). By not having the proper health care access, they’re limited to suffering from these diseases and resorting to their cultural practices instead of Western medicine to help them deal with their physical and spiritual connection. The approach of looking at the health care system is an excellent way to assist in the research of understanding what type of Hmong individuals have access and use the health care system. We can learn what sort of reasons a Hmong individual goes in for health care and compare it to when they seek their community cultural practices to help them with their illness. If we’re to look at Participant 1’s case, we could see how she transitioned between traditional and Western medicine to treat her eyesight because she felt that there were times when neither worked or actually benefitted her eyesight improvement. Participant 5 did the same in which she went back and forth between both practices of medicine to try and heal her legs but later realized that her illness is something that can’t be changed but to live with and improve her lifestyle to benefit her. Participant 7 has a physical and mental case in which he resorted to traditional medicine instead of Western medicine because he didn’t want his family or his community to see him as mentally disabled. He eventually was able to talk more about his experiences with his family instead of a Western psychiatrist, thus alleviating his stress and decreasing the headaches he had. Participant 3’s case was labeled as a cold, according to Western medicine, due to the change of climate when her family and her went camping.

However, in a traditional view, it was a spiritual frightening that made her very sick. The family were Christians so they first resorted to Western medicine for help but when the parents took a closer look at understanding their daughter’s narrative, they believed it was a spiritual loss that needed traditional healing practice. Whether it be a physical, mental, or spiritual illness, we should look at each individual’s own narrative and medical history to understand how to better assist each individual. All these factors are beneficial in understanding how the Hmong population continues to be vulnerable people in the United States today.

The social determinants of health and healthcare system can provide a better understanding of how ethnic minorities such as the Hmong-American population, are limited in health care access and more vulnerable to certain diseases. This study about the Hmong-elderly community in Fresno, CA serves as research demonstrating how certain risk factors affect health disparity theories; we can propose recommendations to address issues of why health disparities within various populations differ on a group and individual basis.

VII. Conclusion

Despite the health disparities that restrict the Hmong population’s access to health care, they turn to traditional healing practices to treat their illnesses. Western biomedicine is still seen as an outside source that is treated as a second resort if traditional healing practices fail. Although there’s a distinction between when Hmong people choose traditional healers or Western physicians, the level of education and income determines when a Hmong person decides to do so. The older generation tends to be more traditional in their ways by seeking shamans to help with their illnesses since they possess a limited understanding of Western biomedicine and are more comfortable with their own practices and beliefs. The social and physical environment of the Hmong population also holds true to how Hmong people access health care. Since Fresno is the second largest Hmong community in the United States, the reliance on the Hmong people themselves instead of Western biomedicine is still strongly practiced due to the close-knit community. The traditional practices and beliefs of the Hmong community are not widely accepted which therefore creates skepticism about the right health care pathway; however, there’s a lot that the outside community can learn about the Hmong population in regards to their traditional healing practices if they can come with an open mind. Individual risk factors and narratives can help not just traditional medical practices understand how to treat individuals, but also allow Western biomedicine to understand how vulnerable populations, such as the Hmong community, differ in opportunities and limitations
that makes them more susceptible to diseases and have lower access to health care. By commissioning a dual system of medical care, integrating both Western biomedicine and traditional medical pathways, we can provide a means of closing the health care disparity for minorities in the lack of adequate public health resources.

It’s challenging to present the Hmong traditional practices into the biomedical setting without it sounding like a bunch of nonsense yet it’s a practice and healing that the Hmong communities here in the United States still practice and rely on despite also seeing physicians for health care. Just because a person can’t define the illness doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist or that the person is mentally dysfunctional. According to Plotnikoff et al, “Because the shaman continues to play an important and powerful role in the lives of many Hmong people, the shaman should be considered a resource and ally for health care professional serving Hmong patients” (34). When struggling to cure an illness, individuals should try other forms of healing when one doesn’t work because there are different types of healing and it’s not just limited to the Western biomedicine or traditional practices.

There need to be educational programs to inform the Hmong population about preventative measures and disease control. The socioeconomic factors highly affect the Hmong population’s access to health care but their strong knowledge of traditional healing practices overpowers their little knowledge of Western biomedicine. The interviews with all seven participants show different, yet similar views in their access and usage of Western biomedicine and traditional medicine. Whether their illnesses show symptoms or not, they reach out to the medical practice they believe will help benefit them the most. Their narratives and medical history helped the providers and traditional healers understand how to treat their physical, spiritual, or mental illness. The absence of knowledge in Western biomedicine from the Hmong community and lack of understanding in traditional medical pathways from the Western biomedicine community makes it difficult for vulnerable populations to access the appropriate care for themselves. The more someone knows about the purpose of Western biomedicine, the more likely the person will access the resources wisely. It’s also very important that Western biomedicine provides physicians with culturally competent information about ethnic groups, such as the Hmong people. When both parties can be more knowledgeable about one another in their different aspects of beliefs and practices, both parties and improve their chances of higher benefits and positive health outcomes.

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Bibliography


The Green Threat: Transnational Security Problems in Southeast Asia

a non-traditional security analysis of environmental degradation and its many externalities in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

As climate change begins to take a more palpable toll on the planet, it has already begun to wreak havoc on nations in the Global South. Nations found in the tropics, like those of Southeast Asia, have begun to bear the brunt of the planet’s continuous and rapid process of warming. In the face of such a threat, Southeast Asian nations have nonetheless decided to continue the economic status quo and have grown at impressive rates—all at the cost of ignoring the larger, transnational problem they face in climate mitigation. Climate change threatens not only the individual nations, but it promises a grim future of a plethora of issues that transcend their often-arbitrary boundaries. In terms of solutions, climate change also poses a much more structural issue in challenging the pre-eminent regional institution’s founding principles of hyper consensus-building. Climate change is, therefore, demonstrated to be an immediate, transnational, and structural security problem for the nations of Southeast Asia.
INTRODUCTION

As the world grapples with the prospect of climate change and its many implications, regions like Southeast Asia have already begun to struggle with the progressively worsening externalities of human-induced environmental disaster. The nations of Southeast Asia have been growing by leaps and bounds in recent decades, becoming major productivity hubs of the Asia-Pacific in the process; however, the remarkable growth has come at the cost of exacerbating environmental degradation that has itself been accelerated by global climate change. Thus, a vicious positive feedback loop of growth-fueled, climate-accelerated environmental degradation is born. The nature of these threats, begotten from the prioritization of growth over environmental stewardship, has established a regional atmosphere of general reluctance when it comes to climate issues—producing a major non-traditional security problem for the region.

States in Southeast Asia and the world have become preoccupied with aging concepts of security—that of traditional security, with a state-based model of potential threats to that security. However, as the world moves into uncharted climactic territory, states would be better off focusing on human security—one focused more on the well-being of individuals and one moving towards the recognition that the primary threat to that security is no longer state-based. Rather, primary threats to state security in Southeast Asia (and indeed the world) have morphed into transnational issues that have no basis in a human state.

Environmental degradation is a major security problem for Southeast Asia, threatening instability, conflict, and institutional problems. Given that the issue of climate change as being an inherent risk to a nation’s (let alone a region’s) security is a relatively new phenomenon in the literature, the first part of this paper will focus on how the changing climate and its accompanying environmental degradation is a threat to the security of Southeast Asia as a regional entity. Following the analysis of the depths of the climate challenge in Southeast Asia, this study will delve into key case studies in Southeast Asia to reinforce the notion of the climate challenge and its threats to regional stability. From the burning forests of Kalimantan in Indonesia generating intense haze problems for neighboring countries to the progressive degradation of the Mekong River’s ecology, these case studies will further the point of climate change as a security challenge. This paper will take a look at the role of the pre-eminent regional institution, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in its efficacy (or lack thereof) in handling the issue of transnational security issues stemming from climate change and environmental degradation. In the realm of regional institutions, the question becomes: can the unique institutions of Southeast Asia handle the security problems that come with climate change? Are they too thinly institutionalized? Are they structured in a way that prioritizes traditional security over non-traditional security?
Are they too committed to the so-called ASEAN Way to effectively tackle the issue?

This paper will be divided into five distinct sections, each answering key facets of the overarching climate security question. The first section will focus on the specifics of climate change’s destabilizing forces. Section I will focus on how climate change enters the fray as a major security problem for the nations of Southeast Asia and their governments that are often complicit in their own environmental undoing. Section II will elaborate further and establish the immediate relevance of the climate change in Southeast Asia and how it exacerbates the existing problems of the region. Section III is where we’ll go even deeper and delve into several case studies that highlight the destabilizing forces of climate change and how they manifest themselves in the form of interstate disputes. Section IV will take a critical look at the role of the region’s institutions—in particular, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—and whether or not it’s effective in fully tackling the transnational issues faced by the region. Section IV will go even further and question the very nature of Southeast Asia’s institutions in determining their efficacy in taking on the climate security problem. Lastly, Section V will wrap up the remaining strands of this paper’s arguments and offer solutions and alternatives to the approach of the Southeast Asian nations towards the climate challenge.

I. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Climate change and environmental degradation are critical threats to the planet at large, yet it is only in recent years that the concept of climate-induced security risks has entered the geo-political fray. As the Cold War began to wane, national security and climate experts began to warn of the changing nature of security threats—from a state-centric model to one concerning man’s relation to the environment (Kurtman 3). As the object of security concerns for almost half a century, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’ collapse in 1991 presented the opportunity for a paradigm shift in national security thinking itself. The political and strategic headwinds now blew in favor of the reality of the changing climate—despite generating intense blowback from skeptics.

According to Kurtman, the defense establishment in the United States (and later around the world) began to incorporate environmental degradation into its strategic documents as recognition of the major threat that it posed to national security (4). The environment is often brushed aside when threats that are perceived to be faster and much more imminent are on the horizon—whether they are increased military challenges from shooting wars or the turmoil wrought by natural disasters. Even in pursuit of elusive terrorist organizations, strategists around the world fundamentally misunderstand the threat of climate-induced environmental destabilization.
Climate change and environmental degradation threaten the global food and water supplies, which would force people to seek alternatives to the state for their most basic of needs—rendering them susceptible to the grip of terrorist or clandestine organizations (Kurtman 10). Societal destabilization is the first step in the environment’s disruption of security. Even in the absence of terrorism, this phenomenon can manifest itself in the form of fierce resource competition; in areas particularly sensitive to sea-level rise and flooding, like Southeast Asia, fierce competition for the remaining land and resource use will upend social stability (Scheffran et al). In reverting to the most basic foundation for quarreling, i.e. resource use, humanity risks stepping into a more violent reality. Not only does the competition for resources signal a reversion of human progress, it also presents the opportunity for the deterioration of a nation’s security (which could in turn spill across arbitrary, often human-drawn borders). Therefore, the regional implications of resource competition have immense force behind them to threaten the social fabric of both country and region—with the potential for devolving into resource competition hotspots without significant mitigation or adaptation measures in place.

How susceptible is Southeast Asia to the effects of climate change? The security implications of climate change are significantly amplified given the region’s location in the tropics. The region is identified by Yuen and Long as one that is extraordinarily susceptible to major droughts and flooding as a direct result of temperature and sea-level rise, respectively. Southeast Asia stands to lose in the climate security battle, as many of its constituent countries are either islands or very low-lying nations—making them prime targets for the reclamation of the land by the rising seas. The region already suffers from large, poorly planned urban centers with colossal challenges from pollution, poor water supplies, sanitation, energy usage, and general disaster infrastructure (Yuen and Long 6). As a result of rapid, uneven development, Southeast Asia already stands to lose a significant amount of resources and infrastructure in the face of the climate challenge. Even with that in mind, the urban centers of the region continue to rapidly and recklessly urbanize, creating an incredible strain on resources (ibid). The poorly planned cities of the region threaten to displace more people (as Yuen and Long identify in places with increasing numbers of squatters in regional metropolitan centers like Manila), leaving them vulnerable to the climate’s wrath and essentially forsaking them to sub-state networks operating locally in various Southeast Asian nations (a point to be explored later).

If the regional approach to rapid and volatile growth seems unconcerned about the negative externalities to the environment, it’s because the evidence points to the conclusion that it is. For decades after decolonization, the general approach to economic development in the region has been seen as “grow now, clean up later” (Yuen and Long 7). Thus, as identified in the introduction, the nations comprising Southeast Asia have clearly
deprioritized the environment in favor of rapid economic growth. This accelerated game of catch-up admittedly has its immediate economic benefits. Growth, after all, is seen as a boon to the economy and helps incumbent governments win election in democratic regimes and legitimizes dictatorial rule in authoritarian ones. What is not immediately visible, however, is the ticking time bomb that unrestricted growth has created in the region. The primary culprits of climate vulnerability in Southeast Asia, rapidly urbanizing metropolitan centers (such as Manila, Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Jakarta, Hanoi, and much more), are complicit in their own undoing. As Kurtman notes, climate change threatens large-scale flooding (or even inundation) of economic urban hubs like Hanoi (85). Climate change, therefore, threatens the internal stability of a nation. Internal complications aside, the problems created by climate change can compound other transnational security issues.

II. THE GENERATION AND EXACERBATION OF SECURITY CHALLENGES

In a cruel twist of reality, transnational issues like climate change often birth or exacerbate other transnational security issues. The displacement of human populations and other climate-fueled environmental destabilization as direct results of climate change in Southeast Asia are the foundation for the progressive worsening of existing regional sticking points such as reduced state capacity, human trafficking, piracy, disease, and terrorism. These challenges strain international relations in Southeast Asia and upend their otherwise peaceful state of affairs that has been in place for decades.

A. REDUCED STATE CAPACITY

In a region with lower-than-average levels of state capacity, climate change’s reduction of capacity can threaten the security of a state by challenging its legitimacy by way of low-scale challenges of sovereignty. According to Jasparro, climate change proactively erodes state sovereignty by stripping it of its capabilities to serve its population (especially true of states in the Global South). As a result, it dramatically increases a state’s vulnerabilities to different transnational security issues (233). As the state’s functions are gradually reduced by the shifting of resources towards a scramble to contain the effects of climate change, local populations may look towards non-state entities to fulfill their basic needs. The stage is essentially at risk of being set for a reduction in sovereignty and the introduction of social networks that assume state functions in the absence of the state itself. One can already see this happening with sub-national networks beginning to form in Southeast Asia as a result of these conditions, most notably in vulnerable coastal communities in Vietnam, which seek to serve those that are threatened and displaced by the changing climate (Jasparro 240). While these groups operating in marginalized communities are not conducting illegal operations, the door is nonetheless open for such groups to begin doing so—as we will see later. Regardless of the legality of the activity of such groups, their very existence
is a threat to the stability of a nation and region. The state’s relevance and therefore its monopoly on providing for its citizens is threatened and being challenged. This low-scale subversion of state sovereignty threatens the future of the concept of a centralized state. With the prospect of localization, the risk for competition increases; the potential for nationwide devolution into warring factions is neither exaggerated nor is it unlikely.

The changing climate produces the societal disarray and human security problems that traffickers seek to exploit in a region that is already subject to volatile waves of migration (notwithstanding those to come as a result of further degradation) (Jasparro 242). The social conditions on the ground favorable to human trafficking (poverty, little room for opportunity, etc) are already prevalent in Southeast Asia; however, allowing environmental degradation to continue to progress would only intensify the pressures for people to enter the dark business of human trafficking, as well as further incentivize those already in the business to take advantage of the subsequent climate chaos to recruit women and children both forcibly and non-forcibly through sale. Though it existed decades prior to the development of a global climate conscience, human trafficking can be seen as a by-product of environmental degradation. After all, those who are coaxed into entering the business are responding to their physical and social environments for different reasons. More often than not, those who are trafficked are usually forced to work in industries that generate the environmental pressure on vulnerable communities that make them prime targets for trafficking in the first place (Hakuta). Climate change essentially creates another one of its heinous feedback loops exclusively for human trafficking. Those who are taken by sale are often put into the trafficking circles by parents responding to an economic situation precipitated by the changing climate. The progressive degradation of the climate simply sharpens the conditions necessary for trafficking and enhances its recruitment pool via its displacement of entire populations.

B. PIRACY

As a crossroads for global commerce and trade, Southeast Asia is no stranger to acts of piracy; however, the unique threat of climate change is likely to increase the scourge of piracy in the region by forcing impoverished coastal communities to turn to it as a means of keeping their heads above water. It is well documented that the majority of piracy in Southeast Asia is conducted by “small time” pirates, who engage in such acts as a last resort under unique moments of economic distress (Jasparro 244). However, those unique moments are becoming much more common as climate change threatens to coastlines of several nations and the depletion of fisheries due to the ecological pressures of both pollution and increasingly warming seas. Climate change further exacerbates piracy by disrupting marine food chains and producing an overall decline in fish stocks, creating a dearth of opportunities which leaves an increased pool of potential pirates via a swell in unemployed males, and
reducing state capacity to deal with piracy via the subversion of sub-state networks (Jasparro 245). The three-fold nature of climate-induced piracy indicates the complexity of the problem; yet there, is a common denominator—displacement, depletion, and a dearth of opportunities precipitated by the changing climate. Piracy has long been a hallmark of maritime crime in the region, but it threatens to spiral out of control as more and more fishermen are forced to engage in it due to shifting conditions in their environments as a consequence of degradation.

C. DISEASE

The scourge of disease also threatens to upend the social order and destabilize region-wide security as climate change exacerbates the spread and vulnerability to disease in conjunction with the rapid urbanization of Southeast Asia. The increases in population, urbanization, and decreases in water quality coupled with the warming seas’ growing capacity to produce deadly water-borne bacteria all spell a troublesome future for both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia (Jasparro 249). Southeast Asia’s regional vulnerability is relatively high compared to other regions of the world; however, the warming of the climate stands to dramatically increase the vulnerability of the region and open it up to more opportunities for infection. Diseases like malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, and Lyme disease threaten to become much more prevalent than they are at the current moment. Climactic upheavals have long been associated with devastating outbreaks of disease, but the current (and unprecedented) warming trend of the planet stands to dramatically increase the profile of many of these diseases (WHO). The climate-accelerated spread of disease can also unnecessarily burden military and security forces, disrupt trade, break up societal order through the decimation of families, and create scores of casualties (Jasparro 248). The threat of pandemic-levels of disease brought about by the changing climate essentially attacks both the traditional and non-traditional aspects of security. In the former, disease threatens to undermine the ability of security forces to exercise control under times of national distress and can severely hamper their daily functions. This can force the region to spiral into chaos if defenses are compromised by disease. The most prevalent impact of disease, however, is on human security (with important connections to state security as well). The impact of mass casualties precipitated by infectious disease brought about by climate change threatens to upend the social order of Southeast Asia’s developing nations. This is particularly true when one considers that, in the immediate aftermath of such a crisis, there would be a major loss in the number of working age adults. The disruption of the labor force, and subsequently trade, would severely hinder both the state and individual citizens in their search for security.
The massive disarray that an infectious disease outbreak fueled by climate change promises plays into the aforementioned transnational security issues. Those who are displaced may be drawn into piracy for the economic purposes of keeping their heads above water. Those whose families are decimated may be pushed into human trafficking, perhaps forcibly. Communities devastated by disease may be drawn to terrorist or clandestine networks for support and assistance. Disease, when spurred along by climate change, is a nexus issue. It connects the different risk factors and arguably helps spur other transnational security problems along in a way that brews an incredibly deadly and complicated problem for the nations of Southeast Asia.

D. TERRORISM

Perhaps the most immediate transnational security risk posed by climate change involves the increased specter of terrorism in Southeast Asia. Uneven development, state weakness, and economic shocks all prompted by climate change can dramatically shift the landscape of the region in favor of terrorist groups (Jasparro 246). Environmental degradation has already contributed to economic shocks in food prices that have led to riots capable of bringing down entire regimes (see: Indonesia’s President Suharto). This kind of political instability brought about by climate change produces conditions that are ripe for terrorist groups to gain a foothold in a given country. These terrorist groups are able to take hold in destitute regions of Maritime Southeast Asia that are especially vulnerable to upheavals in the climate, particularly in the Philippines and Indonesia.

The transnational nature of climate-induced terror can be observed in three key facets: the existing conditions on the ground in Southeast Asia ripe for terror groups to take hold, the competition between terror groups and disaster relief agencies amidst climate-enhanced natural disasters, and the perception of developed countries contributing to global climate change (Jasparro 247). In places like the Philippines, a very low-lying nation comprised of thousands of islands, climactic upheavals could potentially decimate entire communities and provide an animus for those same communities to rely on and support terror networks. Furthermore, climate-induced disasters such as strengthened typhoons in the region can create a battlefield between terrorist networks that assume state functions in certain areas and disaster relief agencies. Not allowing the West to be seen as saviors of their target populations, terror groups operating in the region such as Jemaah Islamiyah compete to provide resources to people in the aftermath of a disaster; the disaster ground zeroes also provide more impoverished spaces for terror networks to thrive. Lastly, as information on climate change and its key contributors becomes more readily available, it becomes increasingly easy to tie big polluters like the United States and its western allies to the problems at home in Southeast Asia. Thus, environmental degradation provides terrorist groups with a warped moral high ground and an anti-imperialist zeal that can further its own ambitions.
Terrorist organizations operating in the region disseminate accurate information that they then proceed to manipulate, giving them the rhetorical advantage. If they are able to successfully tie the region’s woes to a common enemy in Washington, they can successfully market themselves as those on the right side of the struggle and win over converts to their cause. Though it is through a manipulated lens, terror networks often (and easily) tie their enemies to the environmental degradation that forced people to turn to them in the first place—creating an even greater incentive to join them. Terror networks provide themselves, in that sense, a key source of legitimacy and sustainability for their organizations. Terrorism, thus, becomes a quite pressing transnational security risk facilitated by climate change that threatens the stability of nations in which it is found as well as the region that it predominantly operates in.

**E. CLIMATE-INDUCED DISTRACTIONS?**

Climate change has been well-documented to produce or exacerbate other major transnational security risks. The relationship between the two is undeniable, yet it is much easier to focus on readily available externalities of climate change than it is to focus on the very source of the undermining of human security in the region. As Jasparro notes, transnational security problems are distracting the governments of Southeast Asia from taking a proactive stance in favor of mitigation and adaptation measures against further environmental degradation. Not only is it fallacious thinking, it is dangerous thinking. Ignoring the root causes of these critical transnational security risks creates a negative feedback loop for the region; trying to stamp out trafficking, piracy, or terrorism without first making meaningful headway into at least softening the effects of climate change on the population will be irresponsible at best, futile at worst.

The vicious cycles generated by the slow-moving environmental collapse of Southeast Asia are exposing the existing vulnerabilities of the region and prompting governments to focus excessively on the effects while foregoing the causes. As governments move against transnational threats created by climate change (however right that is) and ignore the foundational aspect at the core of such threats, the human and state security of the region is being continuously undermined. The unfortunate situation with climate change and the many other transnational security problems it exacerbates reminds one of a sinking boat in rough waters. With the crew of the boat focused on plugging the holes that are causing the ship to sink, they forget the fact that they knowingly ignored the rough seas they sailed into that caused their problem in the first place. The progressively degrading environment, therefore, represents an inherent threat to the stability of the nations in Southeast Asia as well as a major threat to the carefully-woven order of the region itself. The many problems caused by climate change give Southeast Asian nations an opportunity to conveniently ignore the growth that is causing the problem; at
the same time, they are able to claim their commitment to climate change in their recent efforts to tackle its related transnational security problems. In essence, the general approach of the region has demonstrated itself to be one of taking on the effects of climate change rather than the source itself.

III. CASE STUDIES IN CLIMATE SECURITY

In the first half of this paper, there has been a concerted effort to address all the problems that climate change can exacerbate and generate. Section 3 will analyze the issues analyzed in the first section and apply them to concrete, regional examples to assess the ways that Southeast Asian nations do (or do not) handle the fundamental problems posed to them by climate-induced environmental degradation.

Several case studies in Southeast Asia demonstrate and reinforce the destabilizing forces of the changing climate. The transnational dimensions and implications of environmental problems highlighted in the previous section materialize into the very real problems of smog and river delta management.

A. SOUTHEAST ASIAN HAZE

A critical problem facing Maritime Southeast Asia is the persistent issue of air pollution via smog, most of it coming from land development the burning of agricultural plots by small farmers in Indonesia, resulting in a thick haze that pollutes the air of Indonesia, the origin country, but also several neighboring countries. The de-prioritization of the environment in favor of economic development in Indonesia has parallels across the entire region. The Indonesian government has been complicit in making a plethora of land concessions in forests and peat land to palm oil and timber companies that subsequently conduct the burning to manage the land (Jones 434). Of course, this is completely within Jakarta’s prerogative as the legitimate government of a sovereign nation.

What really creates the problem for climate mitigation and a true resolution of the transnational smog problem are the economic incentives the Indonesian government has to continue to turn a blind eye to the burnings. So long as the timber and palm oil companies produce a profit and contribute to Indonesia’s tax revenue/economic development, the central government has an incentive to maintain the status quo and refrain from castigating those that produce for it. Successive governments in Jakarta have strived to prevent admissions of culpability and have largely avoided measures that could potentially disrupt economic growth, even if it means allowing the fires to continue.

The domestic incentive to maintain the status quo, no matter how damaging, is frustrating relations between the originating country and its inadvertently polluted neighbors. According to many estimates, up to
The widespread effects of the fires have, of course, frustrated relations between Jakarta and its neighbors in the region, particularly Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei. The smog problem, which actively compounds the problems created by climate change (which, in turn, intensify the effects of the smog in a feedback loop), undoubtedly sours relations with nearby countries. Therefore, despite being incentivized to retain the status quo that benefit its own economic development, Indonesia became a party to the response to the pollution of its own forest fires—The Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution of 2003.

The agreement, which nominally pleased the signatories, proved much more difficult in its implementation and actually reflected weaknesses in both the institutions and domestic polities responsible for implementation. Aside from the economic incentives to deprioritize human security and emphasizing a commitment to economic growth, the Indonesian state lacked the capacity to deal with the issue—a by-product of climate change, which ultimately damages the state’s ability to provide human security. At the core of the Indonesian inability to abide by the Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution is the state’s lax enforcement, which itself stems from a severe deficiency in institutional capacity and the overwhelming of its development-focused government. For example, Indonesia has passed 23 laws since 1985 mandating the protection of forests and the combating of forest fires/their perpetrators (Jones 442).

The lack of institutional capacity in a developing nation like Indonesia is not surprising, but their lack of commitment to solving problems that will only get worse as they look away is. State capacity is critical in engaging climate-induced and worsened issues, but the Indonesian state is directing its resources elsewhere—to its ultimate detriment. As Indonesian forestry officials throw their hands in air in surrender to the fires (Jones 443), the problem grows bigger with passing years. As noted earlier, the fires contribute to a progressive drying of the region; this is especially true of the origin country of Indonesia. With the reduction in state capacity coming from climate change, ignoring the forest fire issue is tantamount to being complicit in the reduction of capacity. To ignore the problem is to worsen and entrench it for years to come, with major repercussions for the state’s already-low capacity to deal with climate-induced disasters such as these.

Weakness in domestic implementation reverberate across the region, particularly with the body that negotiated the Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (hereafter referred to as ASEAN). The agreement, surprisingly, took a step away the values of the institution that nego-
tiated it, replacing the militant adherence to the principles of national sovereignty in favor of creating ASEAN’s first collaborative (and binding) environmental framework for tackling transnational security issues (Jones 439). The fact that the agreement was binding, as superficially groundbreaking as it may seem, did not stop many of the signatories from violating the terms; in fact, the binding nature of the document actually precluded the accession of the Philippines, Cambodia, and most importantly Indonesia to the agreement for several years.

As much as the agreement is praised by local and national environmental groups, it is set back by the lack of an enforcement and deterrence mechanism (Jones 440). That, unfortunately, falls to national governments to enforce on their own. This revives the issue that Indonesia had in coming to the negotiating table in the first place: domestic economic incentives for keeping things the way they are. The empowering of national governments to enforce the provisions of the agreement may have been a nod to the founding values of ASEAN; in doing so, however, ASEAN opened the door for governments to turn a blind eye to the activities of developers that spur economic development for their countries. The Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, as useful as it has been in certain contexts, brings up more questions than it seeks to answer. The agreement itself can be understood to be a manifestation of a larger, region-wide institutional problem in handling transboundary problems. ASEAN, it seems, is poorly equipped to handle problems extending beyond the traditional security it was established to secure. Can the institution (and others in the region) adapt to global security challenges that are shifting away from a state-based model? This question will be explored in section 4.

B. GOVERNANCE OF THE MEKONG RIVER

Though the concerns and quarrels over smog have not necessarily led to actual conflict, the transboundary nature of shared river systems in the area pose that specific threat. In a world of increasingly scarce water resources and ever-straining bilateral relations over those resources, armed conflict is very much a possibility over river systems that flow across national boundaries (Gleditsch). The prospect of armed conflict, let alone actual armed conflict, threatens regional stability. When looking at the Mekong river system, chiefly flowing through China, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, we can determine the potential impacts of instability in a crucial river system on the security (both traditional and human) of a region as a whole. As Gleditsch notes, the possibility of armed conflict over shared water resources is not only likely but it could be commonplace in a progressively warming planet (980). The Mekong River, a particularly climate vulnerable water source shared by six different countries, presents the unique threat of destabilizing the region with its convoluted issues of governance and human security.

By the very nature of international politics, institutions often encounter problems with compliance and
relations with non-signatory third parties. These problems often stir controversy with the aforementioned third parties, as is the case with the governance of the Mekong River. The Mekong River Commission (hereafter the MRC), a key governance structure of the river, was set up in 1995 by all major countries along the river with the notable exception of China. China, being upstream, has developed plans for more dams in the pursuit of hydroelectric power in its southern provinces—all in exchange for the mass relocation of people who are usually peasants living in one of the many downstream countries far-flung from the Chinese border (FairObserver). The dams that have been built have resulted in diplomatic rows between Beijing and its neighbors over the construction practices and the general disregard for non-Chinese citizens living downstream from these projects. Social unrest and interstate tensions have been left in the construction’s wake. To date, there is no comprehensive agreement on the dam issue—leaving the potential for further domestic unrest downstream and anger at Beijing.

The refusal of China to participate in the MRC’s governance of the Mekong’s resources reflects a vested national interest with little regard for the human and state security of the Southeast Asian nations found downstream. Joining the MRC would subject China to its rules and regulations, potentially reducing its capacity to develop hydroelectric power in its southern regions. As Jacobs identifies, the challenge of dealing with a non-signatory China will define the actions of the MRC for decades to come (361); therefore, it is worth analyzing why China pursues this route and the implications for regional human security. China contains about half of the Mekong and, most importantly, has no upstream neighbors to worry about; therefore, the incentive to build and dam with no regard for whoever is downstream is tempting. The fact that China is essentially free to do as it pleases with the river sans repercussions is likely to be incredibly convincing.

One must also consider the power politics of the region and how that influences China’s decision to undercut the MRC’s legitimacy by refusing to join. To begin with, China is much stronger by every measure relative to its smaller continental Southeast Asian nations. With this in mind, China can have the understanding that the other riparian nations have neither the will nor the resources to actively challenge its upstream actions. China’s refusal to be an equal in the governance of a river it essentially shares with no one else therefore follows logically. The consequences for its actions are, at least in the short-term, born by its neighbors down the river. However, the destabilization wrought by China’s damming efforts have far-reaching consequences that could hurt Chinese interests in the long-term. If they are free to do as they please with the river, the temptation for those downstream to do the same will be strong—threatening the MRC’s governance itself.

The upstream actions taken by China have regional, climate-linked consequences for the overall security of the region. China’s aggressive pursuit of hydroelectric power in the upper Mekong River has dramatically al-
tered water temperature, river flow, and fish migration in downstream areas to the detriment of the other riparian nations (International Rivers). In an area that has already been designated as Southeast Asia’s most vulnerable ecosystem in terms of climactic upheaval (Jasparro 239), China’s construction of dams and hydroelectric power stations in the upper Mekong is actively contributing to a destabilization of the region’s state and human security. The new swings in water temperature have been found to disturb the reproductive patterns of key fish species that are the keystone of the livelihoods of many Southeast Asian peasants living along the banks of the Mekong. This only compounds a problem that has been documented as being a part of the global climate change phenomenon. The river flow alterations have led to a marked decrease in agricultural production in the Mekong River Delta, since the redirection of river water often leaves traditionally flooded farming areas without a key source of irrigation. Perhaps the most important consequence to local populations, the hydroelectric pursuit of power in China leads to a blockade of key fish migration routes. This disrupts the natural cycle of reproduction and dramatically affects the profitability of downstream fisheries. The livelihoods of the citizens of several countries south of the Chinese border are therefore under assault on several fronts by the upstream Chinese construction projects. This, on top of the existing pressures of climate change on the ecosystem, leads to a significant undermining of human security in Southeast Asia at the hands of just one nation in conjunction with global climate change.

IV. THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

ASEAN

With the threat of climate-induced security risks being well documented and solidified in a regional context, existing regional institutions have been called to act swiftly and decisively—something that this paper will demonstrate to be easier said than done. The difficulties regional institutions experience in tackling the climate security question are rooted in the way that these institutions engage their member nations—the very core of their being, their raison d’être. These transnational environmental problems are gnawing at the principles of the ASEAN Way—at the core of which stands a fierce consensus on respect for national sovereignty, a consensus actively challenged by the transforming nature of regional threats to security. As security threats lose their nation-based personas in favor of nature-based ones, principles like these are increasingly challenged. An institution like ASEAN, built on those principles, faces long odds in overcoming issues that transcend national borders.

Hearkening back to the Indonesian smog problem, ASEAN had (and continues to have) no concrete way to suppress the forest fires generating the smog in Indonesia as well as no way to enforce the 2003 Agreement
on Transboundary Haze Pollution; with no political means to do so, desperate ASEAN elites turned to outside groups to do the ground work that they themselves had no means to do (Cotton). In doing so, ASEAN sparked a legitimacy debacle amongst its own members, who questioned the activity of the outside groups doing what is ostensibly an ASEAN mission. The debate surrounding ASEAN’s capability for tackling major, multilateral problems like climate security stems from its very nature. Professor Quah of the London School of Economics, then, rightly questions: “is the ASEAN Way the right way?” (the Economist). Is the ASEAN Way of extreme consensus-building and the primacy of national sovereignty the best model for moving forward on issues like economics (as the article intends) or even on issues like climate change? As Quah notes, ASEAN countries often use the ASEAN to delay the implementation of certain policy directives when it suits the obstructionist country in question. Quah brings forth the notion that the very founding ideals of regional institutions like ASEAN may be insufficient to progress in the realm of climate security—a notion to which most of the evidence presented seems to point to. The answer is, of course elusive and complicated. What is becoming clearer is that, after years of struggling with wide-ranging transnational security issues, ASEAN is ill-equipped to handle most of them.

In this paper’s analysis of the ASEAN handling of the smog problem, ASEAN was noted to have made a meaningless break with tradition by making the Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution of 2003 into a (toothless) binding agreement; the agreement’s nonexistent enforcement mechanism, as mentioned earlier is a bow to ASEAN’s excessive commitment to consensus and national sovereignty. The agreement, though it partly departed from the institution’s principles, ultimately bent to those same principles—manifested in the absence of an enforcement mechanism in the Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. The problem with the transboundary haze, therefore, is not a singular environmental issue, it is an issue that challenges the very character of ASEAN at every turn. With the intricacies of a binding, collective, and enforceable agreement being simply too difficult for the hyper-consensus stance of ASEAN, a 1998 communiqué sent out by ministers meeting in Singapore signaling a desire for NGOs to join the operation on the ground (Cotton 348) is essentially a waving of the white flag and is very telling of the state of ASEAN governance. The seriousness of the issue at hand, the progressive degradation of the environment poses an existential threat to the globe (let alone a specific region) that is too much for the informal and indirect modus operandi that is characteristic of Southeast Asian diplomacy. The inability to negotiate a solid environmental policy in the face of the daunting challenge from the warming climate represents a critical institutional failure that can only be addressed by major structural reform that the region, as of 2017, is largely unwilling to stomach.
ASEAN’s own internal reports point to how its model of regional engagement causes entanglements when it comes to something all member states generally agree with—that climate change must be tackled through sustainable development and clean energy sourcing (Letchumanan). The title of Letchumanan’s piece, “Is there an ASEAN policy on climate change,” aptly sums up the role of ASEAN in multilaterally obtaining climate security. ASEAN does have a policy on climate change, but there are so many contradictions from each member state that it is difficult to the non-discerning eye to tell whether or not there’s a uniform policy there. The ASEAN regional model is predicated upon across-the-board consensus and characterized by a lack of efficacy in executing major directives passed by its voting body. Most of the evidence points to a reality that regional institutions like ASEAN often enable diplomatic processes that lead to more confusion and policy entanglements than actual solutions. In the sector of climate security, ASEAN is hindered by its founding principles. That is perhaps why it has so mightily struggled in reaching a concrete, enforceable agreement on regional climate security. Institutions, at least in the context of Southeast Asia, are often a detriment to the achievement of climate security by their region-specific nature.

The principles of ASEAN, though noble and respectable, ultimately undermine the institution’s ability to handle transnational security problems that fall under its purview. ASEAN as an organization was built around the need for traditional security, where it was much easier to build consensus and rally around a common cause of neutrality and secure their collective regional security; as traditional security begins to step aside for non-traditional security, however, ASEAN does not seem as capable of effectively dealing with those issues. Non-traditional security challenges like climate change and its subsidiary problems require mandated, binding cooperation pacts operating across borders to effectively be solved. Thus far, ASEAN has not moved in a significant direction away from its founding principles that are seemingly holding it back in problem solving capacity.

V. SOLUTIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

Southeast Asia is at a fundamental crossroads. The region is slowly, but surely, entering into one of the most uncertain points in its centuries-long history. The specter of climate change has come into the fold, and it shows no signs of receding anywhere in the near future. Despite the presence of the slow moving environmental threat, there are no signs of a let up in the general approach of Southeast Asian nations towards the environment: grow now, clean up later. The prevailing questions center around how climate change manifests itself into various security challenges that grow beyond the capacity of short-sighted governments and weak regional institutions to deal with. Climate change is a change agent, creating its own unique problems for the region while morphing existing problems into monstrous versions of the original ones. From rising seas to human trafficking
to piracy to disease and terrorism, the changing climate has proven that it is more than capable of making the situation on the ground much worse for human beings. It threatens the social and economic order of a nation, with the additional capability of spilling across artificial borders and ultimately unraveling a region’s security. Conflicts over resource usage promise to surge as the world enters an unprecedented era of warming. With all of the region’s environmental problems threatening a major societal upheaval and the overall security of Southeast Asia, the primary institution—the Association of Southeast Asian nations—leaves little room for hope with its ill-equipped transnational security infrastructure and inability to create sweeping, enforceable agreements. The ASEAN Way itself impedes the fight on climate change.

As the focus shifts to regional bodies like ASEAN, the question becomes two-fold. Is the problem centered around ASEAN strength, or is it a structural problem within ASEAN as it currently stands? This paper takes the latter position, since a strengthening of ASEAN wouldn’t be of much benefit if it still had no power to enforce what it approves. ASEAN as a whole could benefit from a significant overhaul to equip itself to address the transnational nature of the threats it faces today. The current approach it uses to deal with complicated, transnational security issues is excessively concerned with consensus and is therefore extremely inefficient. ASEAN would significantly benefit from a change into a more comprehensive, political polity in the mold of the European Union. Relinquishing certain amounts of sovereignty to a supranational body could potentially serve the climate struggle by empowering such a polity with the ability to pass enforceable legislation to deal with the problems plaguing Southeast Asia that transcend individual borders. The creation of such a body would enable the nations of Southeast Asia to do away with hyper consensus-building and turn to debate in its hypothetical legislative body instead. The process would allow for implementation and enforcement of a binding agreement, with a proper debate and amendment process. The EU-like nature of such a body would also do more to tackle refusals to implement by making it extremely costly to exit such a body once it is formed. Such costly signaling would require adherent nations to abide by the laws of the new organization and heavily disincentivize both refusals and threats to leave, much like the current EU is set up. The ideal solution, therefore, would be for Southeast Asian nations to join together in such a body politic. However, with constituent nations demonstrating an unwilling appetite for structural reform, a regional resolution seems almost out of reach. With regional institutions compromised, it is therefore left to individual nations to do what they can to tackle the climate challenge; however, with the ongoing reduction in state capacity, state-based solutions seem like a foregone conclusion. The haze over Southeast Asia therefore is not only literal, but is also symbolic of the dark problems hanging overhead.


Food Security in China: The Convergence of Past Experiences and Tomorrow’s Lessons

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Abstract

For much of Western society we enjoy a selection of foods in our super markets from all over the world. Moreover, we almost never have to question if our food is fit for consumption, or if there will be enough. However, the same cannot be said for China. In recent years, China is proving to be resilient to global ebbs and flows, but their inevitable growing pains can be seen in historic and recent food security issues. To remedy this problem the Chinese have imported massive amounts of staple foods such as wheat, corn, rice, and dairy. However, this can only provide a temporary solution to their problem. The pursuit of economic expansion and increased foreign market share across the globe has left China terribly polluted. Now, at the crossroads of chasing larger profits, meeting domestic and international demand, and building sustainable farming practices, food security in China serves to provide lessons and experiences to move others—both developing and developed countries—to achieving improved food security now and in the future.
Introduction

Food is increasingly becoming a complex and multifaceted subject. An ever-growing global population must be supported by finite resources that are seemingly already stretched to their limits. Exacerbated by large disparities of wealth and poverty, food security is highly varied throughout the world. Until this point we have often asked ourselves “How can we feed everyone?” or “Why do certain people go hungry?” Deceptively simple questions have raised years of research, policy experimentation, and social criticism. Now at a global crossroad, perhaps we should shift our questions to encompass the future. How can we continue to feed our populations? Is it possible to provide nutrition and abundance in a way that is cost minimizing, environmentally conscious, and socially aware? Is it possible to capture even just one of those characteristics?

In searching for answers, one cannot ignore a country that has such a rich history with food, for better or worse as China. A true behemoth in terms of size and scope, it encompasses 3.7 million square miles and 1.4 billion92. More recently, China has increasingly taken larger roles in international politics, trade, cultural exchange, as well as regional dominance. Thus, the intersection of food and their captivating society and culture paints a massively complex picture of food security.

Though China’s histories span millennia, for the purposes of this essay it is helpful to have a glimpse of China from the 20th century. Their histories of political struggle for power and cultural grapple with true Chinese identity, values, and ideals are nothing short of tumultuous and dramatic. Since the inception of the People’s Republic in 1949, China’s grain supply has seen massive highs and lows mainly due to agricultural policies set by Mao Zedong in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. What resulted was perhaps the largest famine in the 20th century. During the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1962, millions died in the countryside from famine and famine related illness.93 To this day the estimates of impact on human life are so wildly varied because of lack of information and record keeping. Surely, we cannot afford a disaster of this level to happen again.

Today, food in China is abundant.94 Upon acceptance to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, China is active in commodity and agricultural exchange. China has created a much more open economy by reducing trade barriers and tariffs which have significantly decreased the potential costs of trying to maintain high levels of food security. Today, China is the largest net importer of food in the world. However, this bares adjustments that the Chinese agricultural sector must undergo, namely moving from more resource intensive agriculture activities such as grain productions to more labor-intensive activities. This is where China captures their competitive advantage. But not only is it a daunting to task to feed over a billion mouths, Chinese consumption patterns are rapidly changing to include larger portions of more environmentally resource intensive dairy and protein products. Furthermore, food safety risks have been paramount since the millennium. A quick internet search of Chinese food safety returns jarring results. Pesticide residuals, illegal additives, environmental pollution, and other similar stories have dramatically reduced consumer confidence in domestically produced products. Economic liberalization has brought about immense economic growth but also has changed the way Chinese people produce and distribute food, at the expensive of quality. Thus, many families, regardless of income, are willing to pay premiums for imported foreign goods to ensure higher and safer qualities. The collective memories and tragedies of scandals like the 2008 melamine additive in baby formula are enough to drive consumer choices and avoid “big head babies.” Paradoxically, there is little incentive for producers to meet the high-quality stan-

standards that the market demands. This is driven by complex and long food chains that disconnect consumers with their products. While China has clearly made immense strides in the issue of food security, challenges remain for future consumption.

What lies ahead for China’s agriculture sector seem daunting but aren’t impossible. In fact, there has already been moves to remedy potential threats to the future of food security, such as severe environmental pollution, persistent food safety, food waste, and increasingly disparate incomes, to name a few. Policy changes as recently as November 2017 have signaled for the move towards sustainable farming practices, organic production, emission reduction, and water reduction. Structural adjustments have been and will continue to be made to ensure Chinese agricultural resilience. Even in the face of phenomenon as detrimental as climate change, the central government is working to ensure high risk areas will be able to adapt. In China’s quest to feed themselves and contribute to global trade, it is imperative to plan for the future and seek cooperation on a global scale to provide solutions to some of the most complex food security issues that transcend borders.

**Defining Food Security**

The WTO’s definition of food security is access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. However, more rigorous definitions and frameworks exist to evaluate this term. In 1994, Oshaug, Eide, and Eide proposed a normative food security framework which as two major subdivisions (see figure 1).

![Figure 1: A normative basis for food security by Oshaug, Eide and Eide, 1994. Above the dotted line are guiding principles; below the dotted line are examples of policies, strategies, and means](image)

The main components comprise of adequacy of food supply and stability of food supply and access. It is important to note that food security should encompass both of these components, not just simply the availability of food. While still an important component, the two terms are not synonymous.

Oshaug, Eide, and Eide take a human rights approach to the topic of food security, which provides a unique lens to address the topic. Conventionally, it is thought that a state or government defines and protects the economic and social rights of its citizens, and that they are obligated to ensure those rights. This includes the right to food, nutrition, and health. Seeing that many governments have failed to do this, Oshaug, Eide and Eide develop a framework composed of a number of sub-goals that must be attained for food security to be achieved as a true development goal. The adequacy of food supply means that the overall supply should potentially cover over-all nutritional needs in terms of quantity (energy) and quality (provide all essential nutrients). Furthermore, the


97 Ibid. 500
conditions necessary to satisfy food security also requires safety, quality, and cultural acceptability. Stability and access to food supply implies that there is public and community management of natural resources which have a bearing on food supply (environmental sustainability) and that there are economic and social conditions and mechanisms securing food access, including but not limited to income distribution, effective markets, various public and informal support, and safety nets.

A Recent History of Food Security in China

Understanding the history of food security in China since the birth of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) sets the foundations and contextual understanding for studying food security issues today. The legacy and precedent of agricultural policy in the 20th century have shaped how Chinese value food. Following the inception of the PRC, socialist leaders set forth to build a new, centrally planned economy. Unlike economies like the United States, a command economy allocates all authority to the central government to set prices and quantities for every good. This creates large market distortions and in China’s case created an incredibly inefficient state-owned enterprise system. These enterprises had no control of authority of their businesses and often generated large profits for Beijing. Additionally, Beijing channeled their resources into their “Big Push” industrialization strategy, closely modeled after the Soviet Union. This strategy focused on developing capital-intensive industries while maintaining all ownership of goods and the supply chain with the central government, but ultimately moved China away from their competitive advantage of labor intensive household industries. In 1953, the Chinese government established compulsory grain quotas from farmers that created a monopoly over staple crops. Farmers had to meet these quotas, and at artificially low prices. This did not incentivize farmers to produce surpluses, a foreshadow of later events in 1958 when communes were established in the countryside.

1958 also marks the start of the Great Leap Forward, the biggest and most peculiar tragedy of the Mao Zedong era. This economic and social campaign had disastrous effects for the development of agriculture policy and moreover, the output of grain during the subsequent three years. All cash or material incentives and free markets in the countryside were eliminated and communes had to produce more grain for the cities. Of course, this was generally unpopular in the countryside and many were forced to join these massive collectives of thousands of families. Additionally, many workers were pulled away to factories while the fields reflected more commodity crops such as cotton that would feed the raw supply need of rapid industrialization. These trends implied that there would be less food produced in the agriculture sector and that the state would take more of it.

Additional stressors exacerbated the situation. First, officials in the countryside were driven by pseudo-scientific techniques of farming that claimed to double or triple yields when in fact, these techniques generally decreased yields. Officials were pressured into dramatically overstating the grain production of each commune to meet quotas. Consequently, these false production figures led the state to demand more grain than production groups could sell, further intensifying the low stock of grain in the countryside. In some places, starvation had already set in. Secondly, grain exports still continued to other parts of the world, despite urban areas suffering with reduced rations. The continuation of exports was mainly due to Mao’s intention of maintain face to showcase the success of his plans. Thirdly, a drought and Yellow River flooding in 1959 contributed to lower outputs of grain. While many perceive bad weather or natural disasters to be primary causes of famine, it is often mismanagement in government or failure of markets that increase fatalities related to famine. This can be observed in other instances of famine such as the Bengal famine in 1943 in which government mismanagement of the Calcutta municipality and inflated rice prices significantly contributed to famine related death tolls.

It is impossible to know how many deaths resulted in from the Great Leap Forward, but it is estimated that 45 million people died prematurely during this campaign. This makes “The Great Famine” the largest and most

98 Ibid, 500
99 Ibid, 500
catastrophic famine of the 20th century. Yet, the opacity of the event leads some Chinese people to not recognize its existence or believe the death toll. The Chinese government has yet to publish the official death toll from their period. They also never refer to this time as famine, rather the “three-year natural disasters” or “three-year difficult times.” Researchers or commentary on grain policy during the Great Famine was censored until the 1990s when Chinese scholars finally had more freedom to express their opinions.

By the 1980s, grain availability was abundant and stable. A multitude of factors including decollectivization, increased farming technologies, and market reforms all incentivized and increased crop yields. Additionally, the development of the household responsibility system allowed households to contract land, machinery, and other facilities from collective organizations. By 1983, this system was nearly universal and aided agricultural production surges. By 1984, it was deemed that there was finally enough grain for everybody in China. Another important factor contributing to abundant food supply was China’s participation on the world market and their ability to import food. The memories of the Great Famine allowed Chinese officials to be more sensible and import food whenever necessary. However, this also led to a dramatic decrease of food quality and safety and corruption amongst government officials. Food safety has grown to become a pressing contemporary issue in China.

This glimpse of China’s long and convoluted relationship with food in the 20th century underscores that food security is not actually a relatively new issue but has only recently been taken up by a majority of consumers. For decades the primary concern mostly centered on food availability. This is quite simply the most basic form of food security and does not even begin to address other qualities that define truly having access to safe and nutritious food. The humanitarian catastrophe and economic damages of political campaigns take years to recover, an extremely disproportionate consequence of these ventures. Moving forward to address current food security concerns, we can juxtapose it to long strides of reform and improvement that occurred in the 20th century to support an ever-growing population.

**China Today: Expanding the definition of ‘Food Security’**

Because food is abundant in China today, it is natural to expand the evaluation of food security from food availability to other aspects that comprise this term. For this, we can turn to a framework developed by Norwegian researchers Oshaug, Eide and Eide. Instead of looking at the causes of food security, they sought to understand the conditions for reaching it (refer to figure 1).

While there are other frameworks of evaluation, the Oshaug, Eide, and Eide model is suitable for evaluating food security in China for its clearly defined components that are, for the most part, quantifiable. While China today does not struggle often with availability of food, there are components of adequacy and stability of food supply which China has not met. Pollution and scandal have ridden Chinese food markets, decreasing consumer confidence in products available. By studying these causes we may be able to better derive the underlying causes of food insecurity in China today.

**Changing Consumption Patterns**

In addition to current issues China faces today with their food supply, safety and sustainability, Chinese consumption patterns are rapidly evolving. Since the 1980s, the amount of food and composition of food consumed is quite different from their early PRC counterpart standards. In general, there has been a decline in per capita

consumption of food grains while seafood, meats, eggs, and dairy products have increased steadily.\textsuperscript{105} From 1995 to 2011, dramatic increases can be observed; milk and dairy products increase was 706 percent.\textsuperscript{106} Similar patterns are observed in poultry meats and seafood. Since 2000, household expenditure on food also increases while consumption food grains decreases. This implies that the composition of Chinese diets since this time has evolved to include more complex sources of nutrients that were previously unavailable or very strictly rationed during the middle 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Moreover, we can expect to see that an additional decrease of grain consumption will happen in rural areas.\textsuperscript{107} As rural incomes rise, people in these areas will move away from eating grainy and starchy foods.

Chinese cuisine is complex – developments over generations have perfected distinct cuisines across the country. To the north, cuisines are generally simple and high in protein and grain. To the east, seafood is highlighted because of proximity to sea ports. In the south, it’s tangy, sour, and spicy. But despite these culinary differences, each region has overlap of types of meat used in cooking. Pork is the most popular, followed by poultry and beef. This increased production of these proteins and dairy products come at an expense. The change in consumption combined with other economic activities are increasingly burdensome on the environment and natural resources. This is mostly noticeable in land, water, and air pollution. For many years, the central government favored economic expansion, and while medium and long-term food development strategies called for environmental conservation, it was largely ignored.\textsuperscript{108}

**Pollution in China: Effects on Safe Food Production**

Some forms of pollution in China are blatantly observable, while others are not. For example, in bustling cities like Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou, it is common to see many people wear face masks to provide some level of protection from extremely smoggy air. A large manufacturing sector has severely affected air quality. In 2014, only 16 out of 161 evaluated cities met the national air quality standard.\textsuperscript{109} While heavy pollution is expected in large metropolitan areas, it is not isolated to urban areas. To illustrate the level of air quality in a large city like Beijing, we can compare it with other contemporary events that occurred in the world. In November 2017, enormous wildfires all across California’s coast and especially in Sonoma County caused the San Francisco Bay Area to have some of the worse air quality in history.\textsuperscript{110} Safety precautions like cancelled public events, an urge to stay indoors, and wide news coverage occurred for the dramatic downturn of air quality. People started to walk around with breathing masks, not unlike the ones you can see in China. While this was shocking for residents of the Bay Area, those few days in October 2017 was a small glimpse of what residents in Beijing deal with for much of the year. These high levels of pollution are not only detrimental to human health, but contribute to acid rain whose adverse effects on the agriculture industry are felt by decreased consumer confidence in food safety. Additionally, expansion in meat industries contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. At every stage of meat production, potent gasses such as methane are released into the atmosphere.\textsuperscript{111} These gas particles stay in the atmosphere for many years afterwards and are counterproductive to China’s current efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. 101.  
Other less obvious forms of pollution are water and land (or soil) pollution. Many of China’s lakes and rivers are severely polluted. Waterways often provide a convenient dumping ground for industrial waste.112 This attitude towards waterways seems to be socially acceptable as illustrated by the 2013 incident of 16,000 dead pigs in the Huangpu River which had been dumped off farmlands in Shanghai.113 Over half of groundwater is unfit for consumption.114 Most people in urban areas drink, cook, and perform other personal hygienic activities like brushing teeth with bottled water because they do not trust municipal water. These current conditions stipulate that securing healthy water sources in the future will be increasingly expensive and complex. However, it is necessary to support population growth and expansion of industry.

Soil quality is of primary importance as it is an indicator of the expected performance of the soil under food production. Fertilizer use has exacerbated the amount of arable land available in China. 19% of arable land is polluted with heavy metals like mercury, arsenic, and copper.115 Though vast, China actually has much less farmable land than a country like the United States due to confining geographical features such as desert and mountains in the west and most of the country’s population in the east.116 Additionally, the amount of arable land used for crops is decreasing due to conversion of industry crops like cotton. These conditions, combined with water and air pollution, make it incredibly difficult to produce enough safe food.

These components of environmental pollution have broken Chinese consumers’ trust in domestically produced food and further violates the stability and conditions of food security by ignoring environmental sustainability and jeopardizes food safety and quality. Researchers have argued that rampant food safety problems have become a crisis that has contributed to the deterioration of general social trust in China and political tension.117 Though stricter food safety laws promote a standardization, mixed or missing information cause further confusion and distrust in food. Often, people just “eat it and hope for the best.”118 While many employ this attitude, the illustration of two severe incidents in the last 10 years underscores a varying degree of quality released on the market and the difficult task of enforcing food safety regulations.

Recent Cases of Food Security Scandal

In 2013 the rivers of the Huangpu were filled with dead pig carcasses. The source was traced back to the Jiaxing in the Zhejiang province where pig farms are common but often overcrowded. In Jiaxing, dead pig processing plants are actually common, but strained due to lack of funding and land to build more dead pig processing plants.119 Out of convenience and coupled with the incentive to reduce costs, many carcasses are thrown into the river. Burial or cremation can become costly, and coupled with a low level of technical sophistication in of pork farming practices in Jiaxing, this event was inevitable.120 It drew public scrutiny and international press because the river serves as a source of drinking water to the city of Shanghai. But perhaps more alarming than seeing this catastrophe unfold was the black market of swine sales. Shortly after China Central TV exposed how illegally processed pigs by way of intercepting dead stock have been in meat markets for years. Black market

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113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
118 Ibid. 34.
120 Ibid.
dealers buy up meat unfit for sale and repurpose it into the legal market.\textsuperscript{121}

The pork industry isn’t the only one affected by tragedy. One of the largest food safety scandals occurred in 2008 when baby formula was discovered to have been tainted with melamine. The chemical gives the appearance of high protein content in milk but actually leads to a protein deficiency. It is known to cause kidney stones in humans, which were found in 6 infants in the Gansu province following the outbreak of this scandal.\textsuperscript{122} The formula was tied to the Shijiazhuang-based Sanlu Group.\textsuperscript{123} Thousands of babies suffered sickness, hospitalization, and acute kidney failure, sparking an international reaction and domestic response to crack down on political corruption. Eleven countries stopped trading dairy products with China, and melamine testing on various products ran in Hong Kong, the EU, and the United States in addition the subsequent testing in China.

These large-scale food safety incidents in China dramatize the growing pains of an expanding economy, supply chain, and a pressurized agricultural sector to provide high yields with limited amount of funding and resources. If China continues to operate in a way in which scandals are a common occurrence, it is safe to conclude that their food security strategies will be unsustainable. These scandals also point to the fact that consumers are now more aware and demand to be more informed about the food they consume. Chinese people are very proud and attentive to their eating culture.\textsuperscript{124} They value diversity, appearance, and presentation, and consistently look for new and innovative ways to enjoy eating experiences across the many cuisines present in China. There is no reason that both sustainable food security practices cannot meet the Chinese’s enthusiasm for tasty and diversified dishes.

\textbf{Moving Forward: Creating Sustainable Food Systems for the Future}

China has already seen small moves towards improving food security. They have straddled roles between developed and developing economies in multilateral trade negotiations and engaged on the issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.\textsuperscript{125} In 2016, China’ 13\textsuperscript{th} Five Year Plan (2016 – 2020) also included a number of environmental targets that were more aggressive than previous plans, with core missions of raising the quality of the environment, strengthening the holistic management solutions, and speeding up the amendment of environmental issues.\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, the plan also emphasizes enforcement, which provides a strong legal foundation to China’s pollution control efforts.\textsuperscript{127}

It will not be easy to correct issues such as air pollution, long supply chains, or a lack of education amongst farmers. These issues will take time to resolve. However, small and incremental changes from a multidisciplinary approach may be the seedlings for wider, more dramatic institutional change in the agriculture industry.

We have already seen the start of community supported agriculture (CSA) in places like Beijing, spurred by the public’s increasing concern of food safety. CSA is a system that connects producers and consumers within the food system by more closely allowing the consumer to subscribe to the harvest of a certain farm. It aims to provide a sustainable socioeconomic model of agriculture. A group of consumers will purchase “shares” of a farm’s production prior to the growing season and become shareholders of the farm. In turn, the farm commits


\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{125} Zhou, Jiayi. “China and (world) food security.”


to ecological practices and providing safe food throughout the growing season on a weekly basis.\textsuperscript{128} This may sound familiar to similar western counterparts. However, the motivation for engaging in CSA in China is usually not associated with strong social or environmental issues, rather a political and economic response to the consumers’ increase demand to reliable and safe food. But no matter the motivation, the bottom line of movement towards CSA models should be encouraged.

Shared Harvest Farm was established in 2012 and by 2016, had about 660 shareholders and 3 production bases. Their CSA model adopted the term “company plus peasants” – the company manages the operation of the CSA while the peasants are in charge of the production.\textsuperscript{129} This particular model allows peasants to have more influence in decision making and profit sharing. But like other CSAs in China, the main issue was building and maintaining trust among consumers. This was done a number of steps. First, to demonstrate the farms commitment to agroecology and quality of food, Shared Harvest delivered third-party reports of soil test and chemical-residual tests of their products to customers with their shares. The results were closely related to organic standards, but like many other CSAs, Shared Harvest did not want to rely on this certification to gain their consumers’ trust. They also provided venues to promote shared learning among consumers and producers, social media updates on WeChat, and educational programs for school curriculums of all levels. This approach removes the information asymmetry present in traditional agrifood supply chains. Moreover, these systems allow farmers and peasants to make better wages and have social contact with customers. The CSA system is promising, but still does not address the root of structural dilemmas that cause food security failures in the first place; still, this system has proved to be historically viable and promising for the future of food security ahead.

Another approach to increasing food security in China looks beyond its borders – placed-based food systems. Global exchange has already brought agricultural products to every corner of the Earth. Place-based food systems are a great catalyst of regional development and cultural preservation.\textsuperscript{130} Sometimes scholars refer to this as a “re-socialization” of food which reconnects people with the farms and farmers that produce the food. Moreover, it allows advantages of natural geographical characteristics or climate conditions to work to a farmer’s advantage. While socioeconomic factors stand to benefit from place-based food systems, one cannot forget that these food systems are, in fact, systems made of many different crops. It is important to preserve a variety of plant species to ensure biological resilience. For example, the Fraser River Valley in British Columbia, Canada, is known for their production of blueberries exported throughout the world. Increase demand in the crop forced farms to specialize in this single crop which swelled to popularity after being labeled a “super fruit.” Thus, the valley incurred a risk of losing biodiversity and a pollination shortage.\textsuperscript{131}

The place-based system framework can work to China’s advantage both within and beyond its borders. As previously mentioned, China only has a relatively small amount of arable land to cultivate large amounts of crops. Place-based systems can take advantage of landscapes that favor certain crops, while others can be imported. This will allow China to allocate land use more efficiently and yield large harvests while promoting ecological sustainability, social responsibility, and political pragmatism.

**Conclusion**

In looking to the future of food security in the world, a large piece of the puzzle lies in China. While China has grown from more pressing issues of basic food security like food availability, there is still much work to be done. Currently, China is facing growing pains in their transition from developing to market economy. Food safety still stands to be a pressing issue of social and economic importance. Long supply chains, pollution, con-

\textsuperscript{128} Si, Zhenzhong. “Rebuilding Consumer’s Trust in Food.”
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Kalsssen, Susanna E. et al. “Place-based food systems” in “Sustainable Food Futures.” Routledge Studies in Food, Society, and the Environment. 2017. 52
tamination, and low standards of regulation and inspection have unfortunately led to absolute catastrophes from other major world players. But now more than ever is the time to correct these failures. China, like much of the rest of the world, participates in international trade, agriculture products included. If we lose confidence in products imported or exported, we cannot stand a chance to work on other issues that transcend borders and require cooperation on an international level. Fortunately, the first glimpse of institutional reforms can be seen in China. Not only are national policies supporting environmental stewardship, but the consumer’s demand to be connected back to the source of their food is driving visible change in Chinese food security. Community based farming models and place-based food systems serve as a remedy for such grievances while fostering social and environmental responsibility. Though a small solution, it serves as an optimistic starting point to tackle bigger challenges, both within China and around the world, to achieve a more comprehensive definition of food security. This is an issue that has spanned generations; with a little bit of luck, looking towards China will uncover a realm of possibilities from which we can begin to solve this problem, one step at a time.


Reclamation and Recentralization in Southeast Asia: The Case of Indonesia and the Philippines

By: Wantakan Nicolette Arcado

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The common structure of armed conflict has changed exponentially over the past century. Throughout the 20th century, armed conflict was defined by cross national disputes, most famously defined with the occurrence of World War I and World War II. We now see the emergence of smaller, longer, and deadlier intrastate infighting within *subnational* territories. This phenomenon is known as subnational conflict. Violence is enacted both sides—the state justifying its usage by claiming it seeks to maintain order and oppositional movements utilizing it as a means to contest for local autonomy and self-rule. This asymmetrical type of warfare is further convoluted with the rise of terrorism, ethnic hostilities, and separatist sentiments. While one might believe that the largest and longest incidents of subnational conflict occur in fragile or failed states, subnational conflict is most prominently found in areas of relatively stable, middle-income countries with an established government and regular elections; Southeast Asian states. This begs the question; why does subnational conflict exist in Southeast Asia and how did it emerge? While academic literature argues that ethno-nationalist sentiment, religious separatism, or systematic discrimination are the root causes of such conflict, I see these points being derived from a much larger, structural source; centralization. In this paper, I argue that centralization has a causal effect on subnational conflict in Southeast Asia. To make my case, I will focus my argument on three main time periods: eras of centralization, decentralization, and recentralization. When Southeast Asian states centralize or recentralize their state policies, political marginalization, systematic discrimination, and economic degradation give rise to subnational conflict. On the other hand, during periods of governmental decentralization, we see the decrease in subnational conflict. Therefore, I conclude in this paper that the level of centralization within a nation determines the level of subnational conflict.
I. INTRODUCTION

Why does subnational conflict exist in Southeast Asia? While some argue that ethno-nationalist sentiment, religious separatism, the rise of terrorism, or systematic discrimination are the root causes of such conflict, I argue that subnational conflict originates from a much larger source; centralization. To demonstrate this, we will focus make my case, I will focus my argument on three main time periods: eras of centralization, decentralization, and recentralization. When Southeast Asian states centralize or recentralize their state policies, political marginalization, systematic discrimination, and economic degradation give rise to subnational conflict.

More than any other regions in the world, Southeast Asia has grown at extremely fast rate between the mid 1960s and early 20th century. While the region began with more than half of its population in extreme poverty, high performing Asian economies such as Thailand and Indonesia began committing to the ideas of shared regional prosperity. These Southeast Asian countries focused on making income distribution more equitable by promoting rapid capital accumulation, fostering more positive business environments, and overall, raising the standard of living within the region (Birdsall, Campos, Kim, and Corden 3). Yet Southeast Asia’s regional growth hides an inconvenient truth; that despite its advancements, the region is plagued by deadly subnational conflict.

Subnational conflict is prevalent in Southeast Asia and covers a relatively large geographical range compared to the rest of the world. According to the Asian Foundation, in the past 10 years, over 60% of active subnational conflict are located within Asia (Parks, Colletta, Oppenheim 14) [See Figure 1]. Of the twenty-six active subnational conflicts in Asia, thirteen are in Southeast Asia (Parks, Colletta, Oppenheim 14-15) [See Figure 2]. To put this into perspective, these areas of conflict cover about 1.76 million kilometers of land; roughly the size of Indonesia itself (Parks, Colletta, Oppenheim 14-15). Currently, more than 12 million people in Southeast Asia are living in areas of conflict, averaging about 3.5% of each state’s national population. According to the Uppsala Battle Related Death Dataset of 2012, subnational conflict deaths in Southeast Asia are highly underreported and can range anywhere from 200,000 to 600,000 (“Uppsala Battle Related Death Dataset 2012”). The report concludes, that regardless, subnational conflict exceeded all other forms of conflicts in Southeast Asia combined [See Figure 3].

Second, Southeast Asia is highly centralized, which is reflected in the region’s governmental structures. Out of the 11 countries in Southeast Asia, 10 are unitary states. Unlike federalist states where “power is con-
stitutionally shared between a national government and its constituent states” in unitary systems “all power is vested in a central government…[that] may delegate specific power to local or subdivisio
nal government, but possess the authority to revoke those powers at any time” (Elliot and Ali 25). My goal is to explore this phenomena and see whether there is a causal link between state centralism and subnational conflict.

II. ARGUMENT & EVIDENCE

A.) Dutch Centralization in Indonesia

Centralization due to Dutch colonialism gave rise to subnational conflict in Indonesia. Before colonization, Indonesia consisted of independent indigenous states, all which had distinctive cultural and religious practices. When the Dutch arrived in 1596, the islands were first subjected to a form of economic exploitation that sought to maximize profits through trading monopolies rather than through the consolidation of political rule (Hammarlund 7). However, when the Dutch East Indian Company went bankrupt in 1799, the Dutch government soon forced Indonesia under its political and administrative control. This “centralized and hierarchical administration, based in Jakarta” sought to control the entire archipelago (Hammarlund 10). Through the use of systematic military campaigns, economic and social conquest, and the annexation of indigenous rivals, the Dutch succeeded.

Dutch state centralism was first aimed at the island of Java. Imposing a monopoly on the cultivation of export crops on Java, the Dutch reaped the benefits of slave labor, fixed compensation, and high world market costs, transforming the island into a major source of revenue. Between the years 1832 and 1852 “around 19% of total Dutch state income was generated from the Javanese colony…between 1860 and 1866 this figure reached around 33 percent” (“Indonesian Investment”). Dutch colonists also “never afforded opportunities [for Indonesians] to climb the administrative and educational hierarchies of Dutch rule” (Hammarlund 10). By the 19th century, the Dutch had complete control over the archipelago, except one independent province; Aceh.

Recognizing the financial benefits of agricultural exploitation, the Dutch sought to centralize Aceh under its economic and political control. The region held great pride in being the first area in Southeast Asia to establish a Muslim Sultanate and a distinct Acehnese Islamic identity (Shaw 2). Though the country was under Dutch colonialism, the Aceh region managed to remain autonomous due to Britain’s 1824 London Treaty, which recognized Aceh as an independent region (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 9). Convincing the British to “abandon its ‘guarantee’ of Aceh’s independence in return for trade concessions,” the Dutch began to occupy the Aceh
region (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 9). When the Dutch sent its forces to take over the palace of the Sultan, their troops were met with extreme pushback from Aceh guerilla troops. In comparison with other regions of Indonesia, Aceh managed to resist foreign military occupation. The battle between Dutch soldiers and guerilla Aceh rebels lasted for almost a hundred years. Between the years 1873 to 1904, subnational conflict resulted in over 116,000 deaths, 100,000 being Acehnese citizens and the remaining being Dutch colonists (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 9). Despite the eventual colonization of the region a few years later, the Acehnese fight for independence still remained.

Influenced by the Acehnese success, an anti-colonialist movement in other Indonesian islands began to emerge. Though centralization meant that Indonesia had no economic or political freedom, the Dutch did allow Indonesians the right to an education, a policy known as the Dutch Ethical Policy. Ironically however, the policy “contributed significantly to the awakening of Pan-Indonesian nationalism by providing Indonesians the intellectual tools to organize and articulate their objections to colonial rule” (Ricklefs 12). Instead of adopting to Western ideals, Indonesians used their acquired education as a means towards independence.

A nationalist movement called the Kebangkitan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Awakening), began encouraging a nationally conscious Indonesian identity. When the Dutch tried to re-colonize Indonesia after the end of World War II they were met with nationalistic opposition. After four years of rigorous fighting and mediation between the United Nations, Indonesia finally gained its independence in 1949 (Butt and Lindsey 100). The first president of Indonesia later publicly acknowledged Aceh’s pivotal role in Indonesian independence stating “The people of Aceh carried this struggle to the very end; they attacked, staved off and held back Dutch imperialism from entering the prince of Aceh” (Shaw 2). From there on, the president enacted policies that both unified the Indonesia social sphere and undermined the legacy of Dutch centralized control. This initiative would later trigger a series of events that encouraged government decentralization.

B.) Spanish and Post-Independent Centralization in the Philippines

Centralization in the Philippines under both Spanish and American colonial forces contributed to the rise in subnational conflict. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16th century, the Philippines consisted of autonomous political units—called barangays—that were overseen by a mixture of local chieftains and a council of elders, who “exercised all executive, judicial, and legislative authority” (Brillantes and Moscare 2). By then, Islam in the Mindanao region had already bloomed. The regions combined housed thirteen traditional indige-
nous Muslim ethnologist groups, each possessing “their own distinct cultural, social, and political institutions” (Luga 2). However, with the Spanish arrival on the island, territorial autonomy ended and a “long tradition of over-centralized government” began to take its place (Brillantes and Moscare 2).

The Spaniards who themselves were “organized under a highly centralized, autocratic kingship” sought to “impose its own state structure” onto the Philippine archipelago (Abinales and Amoroso 26). Using Manila as their main base but taking instructions from Spain, the Spaniards began to consolidate the previously independent villages, cities, and provinces and organize them around newly built Catholic churches overseen by friars. Not only were these units a means to collect taxes, but they also prevented Filipinos from accessing any representative institutions and constricted their political freedom (Atkinson 344). With the Spanish rule, all governmental functions were centralized in imperial Manila.

The Spaniard then attempted to centralize control over Muslim Mindanao. Still plagued by the history of the Muslim Moor takeover a century before, the Spaniards “carried to the Philippines a fanatical hatred of Moros (ie. Muslims)” and attempted to both convert and exploit the natural resources of the southern islands (Gowing 30). Though they attempted to extend their power upon the islands, they were met with resistance from the Muslim civilians who fought vigorously to maintain their independence, religion, customs, and natural resources (Luga 17). Seeing the Mindanao takeover as more difficult and problematic than they initially believed, the Spaniards began recruiting and mobilizing a number of Christian Filipinos into their military campaigns. These encounters would later breed a legacy of animosity, religious intolerance, and subnational conflict between Muslim and Christian Filipinos in the Mindanao region.

While Muslim Mindanao was successful in maintaining their autonomy despite the Spanish and Christian Filipino threat, the introduction of American colonialism was a different story. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898 which granted the American government control over the Philippine archipelago, America had inherited the Moro conflict (Luga 3). During the first few years, conflict between the Muslim population in Mindanao and the American foreigners was stable. President McKinley made it an effort to ensure Muslims of America’s disinterest in obtaining control in Mindanao, stating in 1898:

“We come not as invaders or conquerors but as friends, to protect the natives in their homes, in their employment, and in their personal and religious rights . . . that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule” (Agoncillo 274).
In 1899, American General John C. Bates also made efforts to ensure such respect to autonomy was in paper by meeting with Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram II to sign an agreement called the Bates Treaty, “declaring the sovereignty of the United States over the Sulu Archipelago and its dependencies...[and] pledging to respect the rights and dignities of the sultan and his clan leaders, the datus, and not to interfere in the Moros’ practice of their religion and their customs (Luga 24).”

Therefore, Moros believed that their way of life was protected by the American mandate.

That thought was short-lived once the Philippines was granted independence. With the passage of the Philippine Bill of 1902, that granted partial independence to the Philippines, policies of forced assimilation were made to ensure that the Moros were under “direct rule” to the “body-politics of the Philippines” (Luga 22). Christian Filipino nationalist who gained political power under the bill claimed that lands under Moro rule were “inseparable from the Philippines” and overturned the Bates Treaty in 1904. With the additional intervention of Christina-Filipinos in Mindanao offices, abuse of power, suppressive measures of the Philippine Constabulary, and mysterious deaths of Moro leaders, led to the re-emergence of the Moro-Christian conflict (Luga 26).

Many rejected Philippine independence and instead sought to return under direct American rule. American lawmakers, such as Robert L. Bacon, supported the Moros’ request and introduced the Bacon Bill to the US Congress in 1926 that, if enacted, would detach Moro provinces from the Philippines and subject it to American control (Fry 261). Another similar bill followed, titled the Cooper Bill, but due to strong protest from nationalist Filipino leaders in Manila. Both bills failed and Mindanao was again left under the political discretion of the Filipino state (Growing and McAmis 339).

The end of American occupation saw an increased concentration in nationalistic policies from Manila. The Filipino state “worked towards the integration, assimilation, and transformation of multiple ethnic identities into a single national identity—a downward exertion of state nationalism” (Buendia 37). These policies included the imposition of various tax systems, educational reform to fit Western values, Tagalog language requirements, and encouragement of Christian migration into the region. This drew resentment from Moro citizens, who resented paying taxes to a system that did not recognize their autonomy, who felt that their youth were being deprived of their Islamic education, and who saw that the Christian migration meant their gradual displacement from their ancestral lands (Luga 31). Muslims Moros struggled to identify as Filipinos, and thus were met with social discrimination and marginalization from their Christian counterparts. Against this backdrop of perceived discriminatory policies, ethno-nationalist groups such as Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) emerged as a support group to cater to Islamic interest. The groups
eventually grew to both strengthen Islamic consciousness and became a political voice for the disenfranchised population.

Subnational conflict in Mindanao reached its peak under the Marcos administration. Marcos sought to impose policies that worked towards “assimilation and transformation of multiple ethnic identities into a single national identity” (Buendia 20). This undermined Moro minority rights, and Moros soon saw their Islamic laws being revoked by the Marcos administration.

Centralization under the Marcos administration soon grew militant and violent, exemplified with events such as the Corregidor Massacre incident and the imposition of martial law. The Corregidor Massacre was a military campaign, authorized by Marco that was intended to disarm and weaken Moro Muslims undergoing warfare training in Corregidor Island. The incident resulted in the execution of 28 Muslim soldiers by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Despite Senate and Congressional hearings, no one was arrested or held responsible and the issue was soon swept under the rug (Buendia 3). The incident reignited the revolutionary environment and exacerbated subnational conflict in the region with death tolls reaching their highest point since the Moro Wars.

The conflict further deteriorated when Marcos imposed martial law in 1972. In an attempt to extend centralized control over the region and suppress a Muslim rebellion, Marcos ordered the Armed Forces of the Philippines to occupy the Mindanao region (Buendia 4). It was reported that 80% of the entire armed forces were concentrated in both Mindanao and Sulu (Buendia 4). The effect of martial law in Mindanao was twofold; First, “centralization of the regime left power almost exclusively in the Christian hands, Marcos, his family and associates, technocrats in Manila, and the military” (Noble 411). Second, martial law “restricted the range of legitimate political activity in Mindanao” and forced Muslims to choose between “accept[ing] the regime and its promises” or facing military execution (Noble 411-412). Fighting for autonomy, Muslim Mindanao, under the leadership of the MNLF, took up arms to resist state power. The war between the Moros and the Philippine state was extremely brutal and costly, resulting in an estimated death of 60,000 to 80,000 people, more than one million people made homeless, and the displacement of over 200,000 other Muslims (Buendia 4). State centralism through the use of violent military tactics had fueled a sense of hatred towards the national government in Mindanao and cemented the continuation of subnational conflict. To ease such tensions, President Aquino, formerly Marcos’s main opponent and opposition Senator, turned towards a model of decentralization.
Centralization in the Philippines shares many similarities with its Indonesian counterpart. Both of them were “characterized by a high degree of centralized rule due to the historical political division of the country, the legacy of centralized rule from the Spanish and [the Dutch], and the weak cultural ties across the archipelago” (Hammarlund 13). Both of these European powers created “highly centralized administrative bureaucracies” in an attempt to both “unite fragmented and divided archipelagos” as a means of colonial control, and to pit ethnic and religious groups against one another (Hammarlund 13-14). These policies were then “retained by post-dependence regimes” in both states, persisting the rise of subnational conflict (Hammarlund 14). In an attempt to ease subnational tension caused by the legacy of colonial centralization, both states turned towards decentralization.

C.) Decentralization Under President Sukarno

Indonesia under the Sukarno sought to unify the diverse Indonesian archipelago while respecting ethnic differences. Under the guidance of Sukarno, a national doctrine called Pancasila was soon formed in 1945, and continues to exist as the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state (Intan 40). It is composed of five main principle: The belief in a one and only God, the need to hold just and civilized humanity, the belief in a unified Indonesia, a representative democracy that held no ethnic dominance, and finally social justice for all Indonesian peoples (Intan 40-41). Acehnese were initially hostile towards the doctrine, seeing Pancasila as a form of ethnic assimilation. Soon many Acehnese “joined the Darul Islam rebellion in 1953, which called for an Islamic Indonesian state” free from the modern laws enacted by the Indonesian government (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 10). Under its leader, Kartosuwiryo, Darul Islam “spread to South and Central Sulawesi, Central Java and Kalimantan”, calling for increased power of religion, the rise of the ulama, and the need for Islamic law over secular democracy (Poeloengan 16). To those in Darul Islam, Sukarno’s administration was seen as a threat to Aceh self-government.

Subnational conflict spilled out of Aceh and into nearby regions as the rebellion “consolidat[ed] their control over the outer provinces” (Shaw 4). Seeing decentralization as a way to resolve subnational conflict in Aceh, Sukarno granted Aceh ‘special territory’ status in 1959 with broad powers to manage religion, education and customary law” (Schulze 20). Sukarno’s agreement “allowed for the reestablishment of Islamic courts and permitted the ulama to combine the state educational system with the madrassas (religious schools)” increasing the role of Islam in Aceh education (Shaw 4). Darul Islam rebels soon relinquished control of the provinces, subnational conflict was alleviated, and Aceh region was again at peace.
Sukarno also sought to grant political power to the local governments. Though a unified Indonesia identity was important, Sukarno also believed in local autonomy and the right for provinces to enact laws that they saw fit for their local constituents. Seeing that Indonesia’s diverse archipelagic nature might “create difficulties in communication between different area of the country” Sukarno “experimented with decentralization” (Erb, Faucher, and Sulistiyanto 23). During the years 1949 and 1957 he “promoted decentralization and local democracy” (Erb, Faucher, and Sulistiyanto 23). In a breakthrough piece of local legislation, he enacted the Basic Law on local Administration in 1965, which “devolv[ed] authority and responsibility to regional governments” (De Jong 152). Sukarno was successfully able to balance political freedom with regional unity. Ethnic conflict had become nonexistent in Sukarno’s Indonesia.

Sadly, decentralization under Sukarno was short lived. In 1965, he was overthrown by a military coup led by Mohammad Suharto, who, under his so-called “New Order” overturned Sukarno’s decentralist policies and revoked “Aceh’s special region status, leading to a new conflict based on the tension between central government control and Aceh’s desire for autonomy” (Shaw 4). Suharto’s centralization of the Indonesia state would give rise to the most violent series of subnational conflict the country has ever seen.

D.) Decentralization in the Philippines Under Aquino and Ramos

Decentralization in the Philippines was the main driving force towards alleviating subnational conflict. A strong believer of democratization and antithesis of Marcos’ regime, Aquino encouraged policies that included the separation of power, a competitive political atmosphere, free press, and an active civil society. Under the Aquino administration, the Philippines showcased the hallmarks of a country undergoing democratization and decentralization. To alleviate subnational conflict in Mindanao, Aquino sought “mechanisms and processes” that would grant “Muslim self-governance in Mindanao” (Buendia 4-5).

Between the Aquino years of 1986 to 1992, three major initiatives in decentralization were enacted. The first was the creation of the 1987 constitution. Article 10 of the constitution provides “for the territorial and political subdivision of the Philippines into provinces, cities and municipalities and villages” (“The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article X”). The constitution provided for a “new basis for a Muslim autonomous government in Mindanao” and unlike the administration before, Muslims could now report cases of human rights abuses to the central government (“Mindanao Conflict: In Search of Peace and Human Rights”). With this, the MNLF “dropped its separatist goal” and agree to the offer of regional autonomy (Adriano and Parks 13). The constitution contributed to the emergence of open talks between the central government
and Muslim Moros and for the first time since pre-colonial period, the Mindanao region was peaceful.

Seeing the success of the 1987 constitution, the Aquino administration enacted the Autonomous Region of Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989 which “provided a degree of political decentralization to the Muslim regions of Mindanao in the south” (Balisacan, Hill, and Piza 6). This not only guaranteed democratic elections at all three levels of government (province, city, and municipality) within Mindanao but it allowed for Moro Muslims to draft laws that they saw fit, including the creation of Muslim curriculums in state schools, the reinstallment of the Shariah court systems, and overall, free expression of Muslim culture (Balisacan, Hill, and Piza 8).

The last initiative towards decentralization was the 1991 Local Government Reform Code, which “provided for increased taxation powers to local communities, fiscal decentralization of the budget of major line agencies, and the establishment of municipal development councils at the local level” (Brillantes and Moscare 5). The code concentrated on granting “increased taxation powers” to the local governments, requiring that “40% of all internal revenue collections be allocated to local governments according to a formula based on land area, population and income” (Balisacan, Hill, and Piza 7).

The initiative had a three-fold effect; economic, administrative, and political decentralization in Mindanao. On the economic front, decentralization allowed for increased revenue in Mindanao, which helped close the income gap between Christian and Muslim Filipinos, a major factor in subnational conflict (Balisacan, Hill, and Piza 7). On the administrative front, Muslims were granted the right to control their own “social services, environmental protection agencies, agricultural services, public works, education, tourism and other services” and allocate project resources free from government intervention (Brillantes and Moscare 5). Finally, on the political front, the code had “expanded participation of civil society in local governance” (Brillantes and Moscare 5). Mindanao leaders were now able to adequately address the grievances of their Muslim community. The code was considered “the most radical and far reaching policy” in Filipino history and helped to address “the decades-old problem of a highly centralized politico-administrative system” (Brillantes and Moscare 5). Overall, decentralization in the Philippines contributed to the reduction of subnational conflict; from high intensity centralized violence to low intensity decentralized conflict.

The Ramos administration also continued on policies towards recentralization. During 1992-1998, he encouraged both national and international donors to assist the Mindanao region and it’s conflict areas and “prioritized the reconstruction and development of Mindanao” (Adriano and Parks 31). By “assiduously instituting the policies of decentralization and regional autonomy” Ramos achieved a breakthrough when casualties rates
dropped from 988 per year to 74 per year (Balisacan, Hill, and Piza 8). Both him and Aquino had significantly altered government response to subnational conflict in Mindanao. Instead of enacting counter-insurgency initiatives, they focused on peace building through the process of decentralization.

Unfortunately, decentralization in the Philippines was also short lived. While both the Aquino and Ramos administration “afforded the opportunity for new players to participate in the mitigation of conflict in the Mindanao political theatre” the emergence of recentralization destroyed that pillar of hope (Hammerlund 28). As with the Indonesian case, while decentralization helped pacific separatist movements, the recentralization of state control reignited subnational conflict in the region.

E.) Recentralization Under President Suharto

Suharto’s regime, known as the New Order, sought to recentralize power under the national government. Under the New Order, Suharto “took the idea of centralization to new extremes” affecting all areas of Indonesian life; political, economical, and social (Hammarlund 11). There were very few opportunities for Indonesians to escape the hegemony of Suharto’s New Order. On the political side, Suharto ensured that all political decision-making and policy blueprints were concentrated in central agencies in Jakarta (Antlov and Hidaya 267). Compared to Sukarno’s era of a “deconcentrated government” Indonesia under the New Order “was highly centralized, with the lower levels of government simply implementing directives” for subnational units to follow (Bertrand 175). The state “regulated and centralized systems of plans and program emanating from Jakarta down through provinces to districts, sub-districts, and villages” (Antlov and Hidaya 267). Rather than being accountable to its local constituents, local governments were now forced to become accountable to the national government.

Political recentralization under Suharto was the cause for the rise of subnational conflict and separatist mentality in Aceh. With the creation of Golkar—Suharto’s personal coalition of interest groups and political parties—all parties that represented Muslim interests were forced to fuse into the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (United Development Party) in 1973 (Hellman 10). Not only did this marginalize the Achenese ulama, the leaders of the Aceh region, but it also “sponsored a new group of government elites to fill the leadership void in Aceh” in national leadership positions (Shaw 4). When the ulama did try to reach out the government calling out for local autonomy and self-determination, they were met with harassment, detention, or arrest (Aspinall 52). All of these incidents and mechanisms combined “were used as part of a larger scheme to bring all power groups under the control of the central government” (Shaw 4). Undeniably, both Aceh’s regional and political
autonomy were stripped away and replaced with the centralization of the national government.

The ulama not only saw a reduction of their power on the national level, but their control within Aceh also significantly decreased. The central government had both “removed the group from political positions” in the national government, and also “prohibited them from promoting Islam in the subnational political realm and…over the education system” (Shaw 4). Through the use of electoral manipulations, the central government replaced the ulama with technocratic elites that aligned with Suharto’s political agendas (Shaw 4). The lack of alternative channels for political expression grew into a series of guerilla warfare, which drove Aceh back into subnational conflict for the first time since Dutch colonialism.

Suharto also sought economic consolidation, and centralizing control Aceh’s natural resources became his main priority. Suharto’s decision to enhance economic development in Indonesia resulted in the “usurpation of natural, oil, gas, marine, and timber resources from Aceh” (Perez 22). While the natural resource extraction in Aceh constituted about 11% of the national budget, the region received only 1% in return (Frost 14). Such financial neglect caused the region to become highly underdeveloped. Based on official statistics, 21% of the region lived in poverty, making Aceh the poorest region in Indonesia (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 19). Malnutrition, illness, and infant mortality rates in Aceh also exceeded the national average (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 21). These socio-economic disparities caused by the economic recentralization fostered hatred within the people of Aceh and led to the region’s violent separatist movement.

Economic centralization was also used to maintain Suharto’s power. With the central government’s control over the collection of taxes, Acehnese citizens were desperate for economic support. A massive patronage system developed, in which the local government awarded both government officials and Aceh civilians “budget allocations in exchange for loyalty” (Antlov and Hidaya 267). This rent seeking system was indeed extremely effective in building the Indonesian economy, but was not sustainable and only lead to greater regional disparities and subnational dissatisfactions (Antlov and Hidaya 267). Justifying his economic activities, Suharto claimed that the greatest enemies towards economic development were “Islamism represented in political Islam and jihadism… and separatism principally symbolized in Aceh” (Perez 20). This rhetoric would later contribute to the rise of social discrimination against Acehnese Muslim.

Finally, recentralization had extremely harmful effects on a social level. A community’s perception that their norms, practices, and people are being marginalized, opens up opportunities for conflict. This was the exact case for Aceh. Suharto policies socially alienated Acehnese from feeling as if they belong in the Indone-
sian community. In an attempt to “minimize the resurgence of regional movement” Suharto enacted a series of assimilation policies known as transmigrasi (Antlov and Hidaya 268). Transmigrasi, otherwise known as transmigration, encouraged the migration and settlement of Javanese citizens in the Aceh region. For Suharto, the mixing of Javanese and Aceh citizens allowed him to justify replacement of traditional Muslim intuitions, like Shari’ah court systems, with modern ones. The Aceh people saw this as the central government’s “recognition of the superiority of the Javanese culture to the other cultures of Indonesia” (Higgins 147). Overall, this three-fold process of political, economic, and social centralization would lead to the creation of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

The clash between Suharto’s government forces and GAM would become the country’s largest incident of subnational conflict. Established by Hasan Di Tiro in 1969 as a reaction to Suharto’s dictatorship, GAM declared its independence from Indonesia (“Declaration of Independence of Aceh”). Fearing that the movement might overthrow his power, Suharto categorized the Aceh region as a District of Military Operations (Perez 22). This resulted in a clash between GAM and Indonesian Armed forces which “left hundreds dead and displaced throughout the region” (Perez 23). Suharto’s forces, on the other hand, were left “undisciplined and unaccountable…committing widespread abuses against civilians, including extrajudicial executions, torture, forced disappearances, beatings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and drastic limits on freedom of movement” (“Indonesia: Suharto’s Death a Chance for Victims to Find Justice”). Although military pressures were extremely violent, Suharto’s forces were incapable of crushing GAM and only fueled their need to continue struggling for autonomy and political freedom.

Subnational conflict prolonged and intensified until Suharto’s fall in 1998. Statistics reported that 10,000 lives were lost in Suharto’s military campaign, and another 1.5 million people were either homeless or displaced (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 12). The region’s institutional structures and facilities were also in ruins, and the Acehnese struggled to rebuild their homeland. Fortunately, with the rise of Suharto and successors who sought a “transition towards decentralization and democracy” a period of reform brought change to Aceh (Perez 25).
F.) Recentralization Under President Estrada

Recentralization of national government control reignited subnational conflict in Muslim Mindanao. Unlike Aquino and Ramos, President Joseph Estrada saw decentralization as threatening to his political power. Under President Joseph Estrada, policies were made to “preserve centralized control over fiscal policy” (Mahony and Siegle 42). A significant example of recentralization was when Estrada, along with the national government, infiltrated the ARMM. Since the end of the Ramos administration, the ARMM “have been marred by fraud and violence, financial mismanagement…and bloated and ineffective local bureaucracy” (Balisacan, Hill, and Piza 16). Political elites from Manila were given seats in Mindanao regional centers and when provincial government set out in opposition, the central government denied their legislative authority (Turner 257). ARMM, which was created to give autonomy to the Mindanao region, was now an administrative machine controlled by the central government. With ARMM serving as a mere mechanism to boost central government control in the Mindanao region rather than attend to the needs of the Muslim population, the region was yet again plunged into socio-economic negligence and political marginalization.

Centralization under Estrada also reversed all decentralization policies installed in the 1991 code, leaving Mindanao’s only revenue source to be handled under ARMM. However, since ARMM was dependent on national government funds, the central government used such leverage as clientelistic practices, forcing Muslim Moros to “help ensure votes for the candidates running for national government positions in exchange for money” (Adriano and Parks 29). Corruption in ARMM grew further as it “doubled the number of national structures” on the Mindanao soil, creating 25 new national departments with 19,000 staff members from the central government to serve the now two million Muslims Moros (Mahony and Siegle 42). Decentralized policies on democratically elected Muslim leaders were offset by the rise of central government bureaucracy. And with that, subnational conflict again reemerged, this time lead by Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Seeing the new Islamic movement as a threat, Estrada discontinued policies that were designed to foster peace. Claiming that the Mindanao region and Muslim Moros “undermined the territorial integrity of Philippines” and were a threat to “governed personnel and civilians” Estrada waged an ‘All-Out-War’ policy against the MILF in 2000 (Pobre and Quilop 14). This completely disregarded the General Framework of the Agreement of Intent (GFAI) set up by Ramos years before which sought to promote peace in the Mindanao region (Pobre and Quilop 13). The human and social cost of the war was huge. During the five-month campaign, over three thousand civilians perished, including members of the MILF, members of the Filipino armed forces, and
civilians (Adriano 38). Another 8 percent of the populations in Mindanao, approximately 160,000 families, were also driven from their home (Buendia 8). Estimates have claimed that more than $10 million dollars worth of damage had affected infrastructure, schools, farmland, and public service facilities (Buendia 8). This centralization and military campaign had long-standing consequences that continue to this day.

Compared to its decentralized years, living conditions in Mindanao were horrid. As of the centralization campaigns launched in the early 2000, the region now has the “lowest access to safe drinking water, electricity, toilet, and healthy facilities” (“2001 Human Development Index”). Literacy rates were also the lowest in Mindanao, as Estrada had reinstated Tagalog as the official language to be used in Mindanao, a scenario that many Muslim school children continue to struggled with (Buendia 10). Moro Muslims also struggled to revive their agricultural sector and their public facilities, which took a huge toll during the Estrada’s ‘All-Out-War’ campaign. With no funding or assistance from the central government, the region slowly began to experience a rise in poverty levels, low per capita income and the lack of basic services.

State centralization also contributed to the rise in social discrimination. Jobs in government positions and law enforcement were preferred to be given to Christian Philippines because they were “literate and adept at using the law to their advantage” compared to struggling Muslim Moros (Buendia 17). In a personal account, Ustadz Shariff M. Julabbi, a professor of Islamic studies in Mindanao, shared his experiences in being refused to participate in the political sphere in his own home. He states, “We are second-class citizens. There is no Muslim senator, there is no Muslim cabinet minister, there is no Muslim in the Supreme Court” (“Rescue Mission”). The state’s failure to “conclusively resolve the lingering problem of political powerlessness, economic underdevelopment, social injustice and cultural alienation of the Moros” and its politicization of the Christian identity, has resulted in “increased despair, misery, and frustration…thus fueling secessionist goal, armed uprising, and subnational conflict” (Buendia 15). Mandates on peace such as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) sought to stabilize hostilities between Christian and Moro civilians, but without a proper mechanism to oversee if such signs of reconciliation were actually in effect, the mandate failed to alleviate any form of subnational conflict (Buendia 20). State recentralization of control thus plunged the region back into the deprivation of political decision-making, politico-economic exploitation, and socio-cultural discrimination.

As we have seen from the evidence above, subnational conflict in Mindanao was not simply a result over religious wars, control over economic resources, or regional secessionism as the previous literature seeks to argue. It is instead a result of state centralization that has restricted Muslim self-governance, deprived them of
socio-economic resources needed for their survival, and state-instigated prejudices between Muslims and Christians. Should the Philippines seek to alleviate its ethnic tensions, it needs to first seek decentralization policies that have worked during the 1980s and early 1990s.

G. The Rebirth of Decentralization and the Indonesian Miracle

During the years between 1999 and 2005, Indonesia set in motion, some would say, “the most radical decentralization policies anywhere in the world during the last fifty years” (Antlov and Hidayat 266). These decentralization policies charted a new course to solving the Aceh conflict, including the creation of Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (MoU) in 2005. The agreement sought to “neutralize three major grievances of Acehnese society: economic resources, political autonomy and greater importance of Islam in Acehnese society” (Perez 35). In other words, the agreement incorporated policies on fiscal, political, and administrative decentralization.

The MoU also sought to alleviate Acehnese solidities by reinstating economic control to the region. Seeing that “dissatisfaction over the distribution of oil and gas revenues was one of the reasons for the GAM rebellion” the MoU responded, “allowing Aceh to keep 70% of the revenues from its gas and oil and other natural resources” (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 26). The provision had both a monetary and symbolic value with the Acehnese and helped to rebuild trust between GAM forces and the central government. While years of subnational conflict led to the rise of poverty in Aceh, this has changed with regional peace. Since 2005 conflict-affected areas have seen a substantial drop in poverty levels. During the time of Suharto, Aceh households were 29% to 48% more likely to be poorer than households unaffected by subnational conflict (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 20). However, with the MoU peace accords, poverty and wealth disparities have begun disappearing as of 2006 (Barron, Nugroho and Rahmant 20). Fiscal decentralization had helped to neutralize conflict and return Aceh its regional autonomy.

The MoU also granted political decentralization, reopening the door for democratic local elections and facilitating political participation. Aceh local parties could now be nominated at both the local and legislative level. In a remarkable moment, the region’s first free and fair elections took place in 2006. Facilitating political participation also allowed for GAM members to raise issues through democratic and peaceful methods (Perez 35). The ability to participate in the political realm transformed the militant GAM into the political party that represented its region on a national scale (Joko 3). The party is now formally known as the Indonesian Aceh Party.
Finally, by implementing administrative decentralization, the Aceh region was able to practice cultural traditions without threat of government coercion. The MoU granted the right for Acehnese citizens to integrate Islamic laws in their legal systems, including those related to court rules or property rights (“MoU between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement”). To ensure that tradition Muslim values were being upheld, the MoU also included a Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. The commission served both as a means to address impending and future cases of human rights abuses and to foster social reconciliation between the two parties (Perez 36). The central government now saw the importance of bridging the cultural gap that was formed during the Suharto administration.

The success of Indonesia’s MoU compared to its CAB counterpart was not only in policies on decentralization, but its inclusion of a Monitoring Mission. The mission ensured that there was proactive, continual contact between both the government of Indonesia and GAM on peace projects (Perez 37). The mission was also responsible for verifying and enforcing the peace processes, ensuring the disarmament of both groups, and assisting former GAM members in reintegrating to society (“MoU between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement”). Overall, the Monitoring Mission contributed to the consolidation of peace in Aceh and helped to strengthen ties between GAM and the national government.

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, subnational conflict in Southeast Asia was a result of government centralization and re-centralization. In Indonesia, Dutch colonialism and centralization lead by Suharto each gave rise to separatist movements and the intensification of subnational conflict in Aceh. In the Philippines, subnational conflict was instigated by centrist policies implemented by Spanish colonialism and, later, by President Joseph Estrada. By contrasting the eras of centralization with the era of decentralization, we saw the potential effects that these policies have on regional conflicts. In addition, Indonesia’s ability to end subnational conflict with policies that promote political, fiscal, and administrative decentralization not only furthers our hypothesis but shows that such policies can greatly alleviate ethnic tensions. The Philippines can greatly benefit from the Indonesian model of respecting regional autonomy, embracing peace talks, and prioritizing ethnic reconciliation to alleviate subnational conflict.

There are two main shortcoming of this paper. The lack of comparison between other subnational conflict in Southeast Asia including those in Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma and the absence of significant
intra-session accounts such as the tsunami the Aceh region or current recentralization policies enacted under current Filipino president Duterte. The absence of case studies in the rest of Southeast Asia was due to the abundance of case studies on the Indonesian and Filipino region and the availability of English translated literature. Furthermore, addressing external factors such as the tsunami in Aceh and the Duterte’s actions will require extensive research, including field research in Southeast Asia.

Using the example of Indonesia and the Philippines, this paper thus concludes that when Southeast Asian states centralize or recentralize their state policies, political marginalization, systematic discrimination, and economic degradation give rise to subnational conflict. However, during periods of governmental decentralization, subnational conflict decreases. It is with this study, that we conclude that the level of centralization within a nation determines its level of subnational conflict.


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CHARTS AND GRAPHS

[Figure 1] Map of subnational conflict areas in South and Southeast Asia

[Figure 2] Population of subnational conflict areas (Asia compared to Southeast Asia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subnational Conflict Area</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>% of National Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All conflicts in Asia</td>
<td>131,398,423</td>
<td>6.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aceh</td>
<td>4,494,410</td>
<td>1.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Thailand</td>
<td>1,879,801</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindanao</td>
<td>5,544,719</td>
<td>6.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.7: Battle-related deaths (1999-2008)—cumulative

Asia
- Internal conflict over central government: 29,833
- Subnational conflict: 51,817
- Total: 94,407

Africa
- Internationalized conflict over central government: 80,999
- Subnational conflict: 98,186
- Internal conflict over central government: 25,351
- Total: 208,636

Global
- Internal conflict over central government: 106,334
- Subnational conflict: 180,883
- Internationalized conflict over central government: 337,228
- Interstate: 206,871
- Total: 885,116

Legend:
- Pink: Internal conflict over central government
- Red: Internationalized conflict over central government
- Yellow: Subnational conflict
- Light blue: Interstate
To Bow or not to Bow, that’s not the Question: Prostration and Hierarchy in Myanmar Buddhism

By: Win Htet Kyaw

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on prostration as a prominent and complex Buddhist practice in Myanmar in its own right even though scholarly attention is usually directed at more popular and intellectual practices like Vipassanā meditation. Proceeding from a quasi-controversy discovered on the comment section of a social media platform like Facebook about prostrating before nuns, I attempt at unravelling the puzzlement and hesitation of Myanmar Buddhist laypeople regarding the display of respect and veneration to female renunciants known as precept-keepers. A close look at this rare instance of Myanmar Buddhists being self-conscious as opposed to performing actions unquestionably, out of habits or customs, also allows one to have second thoughts about universalist values such as respect and equality because it sheds light on the less well-known aspects of Myanmar Buddhism like the role of modesty and self-effacement in spiritual development and the cosmological investments in a seemingly innocent act like prostration. In this regard, I identify three hierarchical frameworks that a Myanmar Buddhist has to consider before deciding whether to prostrate or not, and I claim that, because the frameworks are not absolute and one has to make decisions at one’s own discretion, confusions and uncertainties arise in cases with marginal figures like a young precept-keeper. Last but not least, I engage with the ethics of representation by juxtaposing popular sources like Facebook and underprivileged voices like that of a young precept-keeper with more esteemed sources like books and authoritative voices like that of a monk-author respectively.
INTRODUCTION

A particular photo posted on January 9, 2012 by a Myanmar Facebook page called Movie Crazies garners around 8.2k ‘likes’ and 4.7k shares. The comment section is no less remarkable: amounting to about 300, it gives the impression of a public commentary on the the photo. Its content is a group of male adults in uniform simultaneously bowing and displaying the hand gesture of salutation (P. añjalimudrā) to a young, bald girl donning a pink robe. One could imagine positive Facebook comments about being touched by such a display of respect to the precept-keeper (M. sīla rhaṅ’ ) and lauding the universalist premise that respect is a feeling that one human being should extend to another regardless of age or any other factor. To go a bit further, one could predict Facebook comments about being inspired to support precept-keepers or Buddhism in general and about being proud of Myanmar culture and Buddhism for their promotion of humility through practices like filial piety, respect for elders, etc. This is salient, especially in an age when Buddhism is starting to gain an international reputation as a nationalistic religion with its own pincer of intolerance and violence. However, in the comment section, one might not expect to see skeptical comments that question the propriety of prostrating before precept-keepers like the one in the photo, ask for scriptural attestations or similar doctrinal adjudications by learned Buddhists, and conjecture that the men in the photo are of foreign origins.

1. Tzu-Chi volunteers bow to female renunciant. 

1. Movie Crazies’s Facebook page, January 9, 2012 (8:20 p.m.), accessed January 20, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/moviecrazies/photos/a.24004309364778.65265.239911902707352/321406231224585/?type=3&theater. I was not able to locate the photo on the official website of Tzu Chi organization, and the Facebook page did not cite its source.

2. This paper will use ‘Myanmar’ instead of ‘Burma’ in accordance with the recent trend in Anglicization. These are statistics as of January 20th, 2018. Even the author’s friends and family members have ‘liked’ and/or ‘shared’ the post.


4. For Myanmar terms, I’ll use the abbreviation ‘M.’ All transliterations used in this paper are in accordance with the Library of Congress romanization system for Myanmar language. I will discuss reasons why I do not translate ‘sīla rhaṅ’ as ‘nun’.

5. In this paper, unless otherwise noted, I will use the word ‘prostration’ as translation for the Myanmar term ‘rhi khui’”. It is not clear whether the conjecture is a wild intuition or an educated guess induced from the non- traditional uniform (cf. traditional Myanmar clothes like longyi) and the over-the-top bows (e.g. the man on the far left of the photo bowing ridiculously low for someone of his height). For reference: Comment on Movie Crazies’s Facebook page, January 9, 2012 (8:20 p.m.), accessed January 20, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/moviecrazies/photos/a.24004309364778.65265.239911902707352/321406231224585/?type=3&theater.
A reader without prior exposure to Myanmar Buddhism or Buddhism in general will be in need of basic information about various aspects of the practice such as precept-keepers, prostration, and so on. With such a reader in mind, in relevant parts of the paper, I will present the necessary information as excavated from anthropological works in English language by scholars such as Ingrid Jordt, Hiroko Kawanami, Mi Mi Khaing, Manning Nash, and Melford Spiro. First and foremost, I will provide important background information on precept-keepers and the significance of prostration in Myanmar Buddhism. Then, I will turn to a book in Myanmar language by Ra We Tun for the purpose of cross-referencing the question about prostration, which is initiated on Facebook, in the more reliable medium of print media. This is because scholarly sources in the English language are silent about the issue or do not address it directly. The back of the book identifies the author as a monk, given the honorifics ‘Charā to Ū’ before the Pāli name ‘Tilokasāra’. Tun’s book, aptly titled *Religious Problems*, is an omnibus of five volumes that used to be published separately. Each volume compiles the monk-author’s replies as they appeared on a popular Buddhist magazine called “Noble Auspiciousness” in response to the so-called religious problems – hence the book title – raised by magazine readers about certain aspects of Myanmar Buddhism that they are ignorant about or puzzled by.

The merit of Tun’s book is that it accounts for how the discourse on Facebook subtly shifts from bowing and the hand gesture, which are included in the photo, to prostration, which cannot be seen there. It also answers a related question of whether the debate pertains to specific acts like bowing and prostrating or the more general category of deferential acts subsuming the two. Another merit is that it provides scriptural evidence and doctrinal rationale for why one should prostrate before precept-keepers, the desideratum of both skeptical Facebook users and magazine readers. Later, I will show how it even makes sense of the men in the photo and their seemingly out-of-place connection with a remote place like Taiwan. Tun takes a moralist stance on the issue by arguing that the decision to prostrate be made based on the recipient’s superiority or inferiority in terms of ‘moral virtue’ (M. *sīla*; P. *sīla*). The implicit assumption here is that precept-keepers are morally superior to laypeople and the latter should acknowledge their inferiority by prostrating before the former. In this regard, it explains the behaviors of the bowing men in the photo, but the irony is that the monk-author fails to account for two specific features of his fellow Buddhist renunciant from the photo, namely her bent back and shy smile, which I read as signs of ambivalent reception to behaviors that are ‘correct’ according to Tun. Thus, Tun’s solution is seriously flawed in terms of explanatory power.

Putting Tun’s general prescription in check with a particular instance captured in the Facebook photo, I try to reconstruct a more complete explanatory model by considering both sides of the prostration: the doer and the recipient. I locate the weakness of Tun’s account in its treatment of precept-keepers as a homogenous category rather than one diversified by contingent factors like age, education level, family background, etc. This is to underestimate these factors’ potency to hinder, if not entirely resist, Tun’s moralist prescription that one prostrates to one’s moral superior, especially given the reluctance and uncertainty that are already evident in the Facebook comments and elsewhere. Thus, I try to identify the factors that are operating in the issue by paying close attention to the wordings of questions sent by magazine readers and Tun’s replies. I claim that, besides moral standing, age and sex can also give rise to hierarchies that determine who is to commit deferential acts like prostration and who is to receive them, the former being the inferior and the latter being the superior.


7. Author’s translation of titles in Myanmar language ‘Bhāsā re’ *prassanā myâ’* and ‘Mrat Maṅgalā’ respectively. All translations in this paper are done by the author.

8. I acknowledge the difference between sex and gender. In this paper, the word ‘sex’ is used in the sense of being born in the so-called ‘male’ and ‘female’ bodies.
As for the debate about prostrating before precept-keepers, I argue that the uncertainty about prostrating before them – and even receiving the honor! – stems from tensions between the three hierarchies of age, sex, and moral standing, which interconnect with each other in the everyday life. In other words, from the perspective of the laypeople, I attribute their hesitation to fear and anxiety, if not taboo, about potentially violating behavioral norms of respect by extending them to those who might be deemed superior in one aspect like moral standing but inferior or unworthy of the honor in terms of other aspects like age or a sex-specific quality called ‘spiritual potency’ (M. bhunʻPTH; P. puñña). From the perspective of the precept-keeper, who seems to be struggling in her uneasy navigation between multiple frames of hierarchy, her bent back is an unmistakable corrective for the improper over-display of respect by the bowing men because it re-situates her as the lowest in terms of height and spatial language. On the other hand, the precept-keeper’s shy smile is polysemous in the sense that it can have a wide range of meaning from approval to social awkwardness.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: PRECEPT-KEEPERS AND PROSTRATION IN MYANMAR BUDDHISM

Whereas the quasi-controversy of prostrating before precept-keepers appears in sources in Myanmar language (i.e. Facebook and Tun’s book), scholarly attention from the Anglophone world falls elsewhere as the topic of gender in Buddhism is approached through other lenses such as the role of women in the history of Buddhism, their representation and treatment in Buddhist texts and philosophy, and so on.9 Recently, the issue of ‘higher’ ordination (P. upasampadā) has captured the spotlight as Buddhist activists try to reinstate the lineage of fully ordained Buddhist nuns (P. bhikkhuni) that purportedly has gone extinct in the so-called Theravāda traditions of Southeast Asia and other traditions elsewhere.10 Without analyzing the historicity of this widely circulated standard narrative, I will only point out that it is tangentially related to this paper in the sense that it provides what is probably the most crucial background information about Myanmar precept-keepers, namely their lack of official status and recognition as members of a Buddhist monastic order legitimized by the Buddhist texts on monastic structures (P. Vinayas). The translation of the Myanmar term ‘sīla rhai’ have been standardized in scholarly sources as ‘precept-keeper’ or ‘keeper of Buddhist precepts’ (M. sīla; P. sīla).11 The precepts they keep can be either eight or ten and they include abstinence from killing, stealing, drinking, wearing garlands, etc.12 For now, I will only leave a brief caution that the word ‘sīla’ in both Myanmar and Pāli can also be translated into ‘virtue,’ which is a more general quality as opposed to numerical precepts that one keeps. Thus, the so-called precept-keepers in current Myanmar are actually women seeking spiritual advancement by keeping basic Buddhist precepts on a more or less permanent basis and living a renunciant life, without strong legal, institutional standing in the Buddhist monastic system. In other words, from an institutional point of view, neither young nor older precept-keepers are equivalent to female novices (P. sāmaṇerī) or fully ordained nuns (P. bhikkhuni), let alone female counterparts of male novices (P. sāmaṇera) or monks (P. bhikkhu).13 Therefore, unlike female novices (P. sāmaṇerī) who are upwardly mobile


13. There are journal articles that argue for gender equality in Myanmar Buddhism by exposing the plight of precept-keepers and tracing its roots to patriarchal beliefs, double standards, institutionalized discrimination, etc. For example, see Ei Cherry Aung, “Guestview: Why are Myanmar’s Buddhist nuns not granted the same respect as monks?” Reuters, August 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUS3889939520150806. Such a feminist analysis might be an indication of recent positive changes in social values and attitudes toward female spirituality, but its charge of double standards or discrimination on the basis of the precept-keepers’ femininity is seriously flawed due to its unwarranted assumption that precept-keepers and male monastic renunciants are on equal footing.
and could become fully ordained nuns (P. *bhikkhunī*) after a period as probationary nuns (P. *sikkhamānā*), precept-keepers remain in their status as informal renunciants throughout their lives.¹⁴ Precept-keepers’ institutional inferiority is additionally encoded and reinforced by government institutions like the Department of Religious Affairs, which grants precept-keepers the status of ‘affiliates’ (M. *sāsanā ‘a nvay*) as opposed to the status of insiders of the religion (M. *sāsanā vaï*), which is the prerogative of male novices and monks.¹⁵

Without getting caught up or dwelling too much on the intricate technical distinctions and details in Buddhism, two general observations should suffice, the first of which is about the fluidity and diversity of renunciants paths, at least in Myanmar Buddhism.¹⁶ For example, in addition to precept-keepers, Kawanami identifies other categories of informal renunciants like *yogī*, laypeople practicing meditation and observing eight precepts without shaving their heads or completely renouncing their worldly connections such as family or wealth.¹⁷ Kawanami also interestingly notices a recent popular trend of young urban middle-class girls and women becoming nuns temporarily rather than, to use Kawanami’s scheme, ‘vocationally’ or permanently for various reasons ranging from passing exams to gaining merit.¹⁸ In short, in the absence of the order of female novices and fully ordained nuns, there exist alternative practices, one of them being that of precept-keepers, and fluidity of identities as one transitions from being a layperson to being a renunciant and vice versa. The other noteworthy aspect of Buddhism or Myanmar Buddhism at the very least is the existence of young novices and precept-keepers, young people in positions of religious authority, even while people of young age might predominantly be framed as victims of religious indoctrination in the discourse of secularism. It should go without saying how one might become a nun for socioeconomic reasons like poverty and access to free monastic education as opposed to spiritual motivations.¹⁹

In spite of the aforementioned particular aspects of Myanmar Buddhism, there is a decontextualizing tendency stemming from influences of popular Buddhist concepts like non-self (P. *anatta*). This is not to say that such abstract philosophical ideas are not relevant to the everyday life but that one needs to take into consideration different epistemic factors such as education background, knowledge of Buddhist texts, interaction with propagators of Buddhism, etc. For example, in her book on Sri Lankan female renunciants, Nirmala Salgado reports that her subjects understand themselves as “genderless.”²⁰ Such self-identification can be traced to Buddhist texts like the *Abhidhamma*, one of the three primary categories of Buddhist scriptures. As Ingrid Jordt writes in her article “Women’s Practices of Renunciation in the Age of Sāsana Revival,” from an *Abhidhammic* view, concepts like self or gender might be considered “mere concepts” and contingent factors irrelevant to the ultimate soteriological goal like absolute liberation from the cycle of life (P. *nibbāna*).²¹ To put it in another way, monks as asexual celibates might be seen as the “third gender,” a category of gender in its own rights.²²

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¹⁴. Even then, becoming a fully ordained nun does not necessarily mean one is treated on the same level as a fully ordained monk or even a male novice. For example, the first rule from *gurudhamma* or a list of eight special precepts that the Buddha is said to have issued as a condition of creating a female monastic order alongside a male one is that “a nun who had been ordained for even a hundred years must rise and pay respects to a monk ordained for a day.” For more details, see Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 339.


¹⁶. For better or worse, even Buddhist laypeople themselves are oftentimes unaware of the ambiguous institutional standing of precept-keepers. For instance, in popular parlance, they are misleadingly referred to as ‘daughters of the Buddha’ as if they were actual female counterparts of monks, the uncontested ‘sons of the Buddha’. For cross-cultural references, see Wei-Yi Cheng, *Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka: A Critique of the Feminist Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 172.


²². Ibid.
However, one should also simultaneously consider the myriad of ways in which monks and precept-keepers are ‘gendered’ at the level of everyday life. For example, in addition to self-identifying and being identified as ‘daughters of the Buddha’, Myanmar precept-keepers wear robes of the pink color, a color associated cross-culturally with the female sex, as opposed to the saffron robes of monks.

It might be clear by now that one of my preferred ways to counter the various paradigms that are powerful yet could be misleading when considered exclusively is to ground my investigation in various manifestations of embodiment, one of them being clothes (e.g. robes) as mentioned before, the other being communicative gestures like prostration. Prostration is a quintessential gesture of submission and humility found in many religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, etc. In Myanmar culture at large, prostration is one among many acts of veneration, including but not limited to lowering one’s head, refraining from showing the soles of one’s feet, seating oneself at lower places, and bowing. In the context of Buddhism, such reverential acts are to be directed towards the so-called Three Jewels (P. tiratana) of Buddhism, namely the Buddha, the Dharma or his teachings, and the Saṅgha or the Buddhist monastic order. The same body language is used with one’s social superiors like parents, relatives, and teachers. Intuitively, the act of prostration plays on the dual meaning of being high or low at a spatial level or on a social ladder and degrees of purity based on one’s proximity or distance from the ground or dirt. Viewed positively, prostration could be a positive act of modesty or knowing one’s own place, so to speak. Viewed cynically, it could be infantilization in terms of human development (e.g. a baby walking on all fours) or backwardness in terms of evolutionary history, i.e. bipedalism as progress. Coming from an individualist background, one might have a predilection for equality and find it uneasy to come to terms with a concept like voluntary subordination of oneself. But, it should be reminded that self-assertion is not necessarily a universally shared value and one needs to be attentive to such relativism as a scholar.

TO BOW OR NOT TO BOW, THAT’S NOT THE QUESTION: PERSPECTIVE OF MONK-AUTHOR

Having laid out relevant background information, I will now return to the debate about prostrating before precept-keepers initiated on a social media platform like Facebook, but this time, I take the route of examining three more or less similar attestations of the same issue in Tun’s book. According to Tun’s book, the question is not about bowing or the greeting hand gesture as seen in the Facebook photo but instead the two reverential acts under dispute are using honorific language with precept-keepers and prostrating before them. In this paper, I will only consider the latter in this paper because, whereas Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike might use honorific language (e.g. “His Holiness”) out of politeness when talking with someone like the Dalai Lama or another religious authority figure, the act of prostration requires more than speech and concretely portrays certain aspects of Myanmar Buddhism, particularly social dynamics. In fact, even the question asked by someone with a laywoman name ‘Vaṅ Vā Sin’ about the topic of honorific language for nuns shifts to that of prostration at the end: “Should men in old age prostrate to young nuns?”. For the purpose of comparison,


24. Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 704. In this regard, one could consider the question of prostrating before precept-keepers in terms of their being included and/or excluded from the Buddhist monastic order.

25. This insight is borrowed from a novel by Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer about a native elite educated at a Dutch colonial school being abhorred by his native customs like prostration. For more details, see Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*, trans. Max Lane (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 121-122.


this is a different formulation of the question by someone with a monk name ‘Rhaṅ Siddhibala’ found in another volume:

Question: My lord,

(1) What are the pros and cons of laymen prostrating themselves in front of nuns?

(2) What are the pros and cons of laywomen prostrating before them? Please answer by giving examples so that doubts may be dispelled.28

As can be seen in both questions, in addition to laypeople, the issue pertains to precept-keepers as opposed to other potentially contestable recipients like young male novices or even “bogus monks,” people who don robes for financial gains rather than spiritual practices and aspirations.29 What is interesting about fake monks, for example, is that, despite suspicions about their authenticity, laypeople would still prostrate to them because of their robes and what is represented by them, namely the Buddhist monastic order. Spiro also reports beliefs about magical properties of a monk robe such as immunity to ghosts and witches.30 From this perspective, one can say that the institutional weakness of the precept-keeper order is already manifest in the inability of the pink robe to command respect from laypeople, unlike the saffron robe of a male renunciant.

As for the uniqueness of each individual question, the first one is interesting in that it explicitly narrows the focus of the question by coupling two specific demographic groups, namely old men (not old women!) and young precept-keepers. This should remind one of the Facebook photo from the beginning. On the other hand, the second one contains an implicit assumption, namely that there are differences in terms of benefits – and even disadvantages! – for laymen and laywomen doing the reverential act of prostration. To consider how disadvantageous the act of prostrating could be, one can refer to the third and last question asked by someone with a Pāli name ‘Sotujana’ regarding the propriety of a young monk losing control during what seems to be a debate with a laywoman and sarcastically prostrating before her to admit his defeat.31 Two cosmic punishments that would befall the laywoman for receiving the improper prostration according to Tun are various kinds of supposedly physical dangers and economic failure.32 This is a worldview certainly different from that of universal respect. It should be clear by now that people are not invested in the issue for hair-splitting reasons like petty discussions about politeness and manners but for something more pressing and significant like misfortunes in the case of prostrating to the ‘wrong’ people. As for the reward of prostrating to the ‘right’ people, Spiro identifies ‘merit’ (M. kusuil, P. kusala) or cosmic credit for better luck and fortunes in the future. This is an incentive for other acts of piety in Myanmar Buddhism like alms-giving and charity.33 It might not be wrong to apply the attribute of enchantment to the Myanmar Buddhist worldview in the Weberian sense because of its cosmological assumption of a moral world order regulated by karma, a Buddhist and Hindu concept with high currency in Anglophone popular culture, doling out rewards and punishments in accordance with one’s actions.

28. Tun, Religious Problems, Vol. 3, 88. It is interesting that the question raised in Vol. 1 reappeared for the second time in Vol. 3 as if it was undigested by readers of the magazine, if not the Buddhist population at large. This point will be brought up again later.


32. Ibid., 92.

33. Spiro, Buddhism and Society, 410.
Given this background information on the propriety or the lack thereof of an act of prostration, one can now more critically inspect Tun’s answers for the first two questions that remain hitherto unresolved. Because Tun gives essentially the same answer for both the first and the second questions, I will only quote one version of the answer:

In the birth-tale (P. jātaka) of Mahosadha, the Buddha-to-be (P. bodhisattva) bowed and prostrated before a wanderer (P. paribbājika) by the name of Bheri. Taking that story as an example, one should prioritize moral virtue (P. sīla) and show obeisance accordingly. Harbor no doubt about paying homage whether it is to a man or a woman. Keep it in mind.\(^{34}\)

Giving a scriptural attestation and a morality-oriented rationale, Tun only prescribes that one prostrate to one’s moral superior without answering if there are different benefits for laymen and laywomen respectively.\(^{35}\) This prescription should be appreciated along with the fact that the Myanmar term for ‘precept-keeper’ (M. sīla rhaṅ) can be literally translated as ‘possessor of virtue’ (M. sīla; P. sīla).\(^{36}\) But, even if one translates it as ‘precept-keeper,’ a layperson usually keeps five precepts only whereas a precept-keeper keeps eight or more, not to mention that the latter do so permanently or until they disrobe and the former are often fickle with their religious commitments. At this point, one might wonder how to make sense of the suggestion that one prostrates to someone morally superior to oneself. Regarding this, Jordt suggests that there is a “crucial linkage between power and moral authority” in Myanmar Buddhism.\(^{37}\) If one demands a more rational explanation than cosmic retribution for wrongful prostration, one way to think of it might be the edifying function of prostration to remind oneself of one’s inability to renounce the worldly life with its imperfections and the need to advance spiritually and morally in case one is not satisfied with one’s current stage of spiritual cultivation.

In this regard, the bowing men from the Facebook photo can be understood as operating under this paradigm of laypeople’s self-confession of inferiority to renunciants. Their display of respect for the young precept-keeper is intelligible under Tun’s scheme even though it is not clear if they are aware of the negative effects that might ensure a wrongful act of respect or veneration. This is because the suspicions in some Facebook comments about the men’s cultural origins are justified. The uniforms they are wearing in the photo, namely the gray or blue shirts and the white pants, show their affiliation with Tzu Chi, a Buddhist association from Taiwan. Therefore, it is not clear whether the bowing men are a part of like-minded Buddhists like Tun or they just come from completely different cultural backgrounds that do not consider factors like age and biological sex when it comes to prostration. If the latter is true, the Taiwanese men can be understood as being invested in the matter differently from Myanmar Buddhists and their facility with showing respect to the young precept-keeper in the photo should accordingly be weighed differently. On the other hand, one might be surprised to see how the young precept-keeper from the photo bends her back and attempts to put herself lower as if she was refusing the honor done by the bowing men who try to bend and lower themselves to accommodate the young precept-keeper’s puny height. This is surprising since she should not react in such a way if the bowing men are behaving ‘correctly’, i.e. in accordance with Tun’s solution via scriptural attestation and doctrinal rationalization. Yet, what seems like an anxious refusal is balanced by a shy smile.

35. It is an open question as to how the birth-tales stand in relation with the Buddhist scriptural cannon.
36. To go back to the case of fake monks, it might be interesting to see how Tun would solve the tension between a surface signifier like a robe and a less visible but individualized quality like virtue.
Try as one may, weakness of Tun’s account is already apparent in his own book. For this, one just needs to notice that essentially the same issue of prostrating before precept-keeper gets raised to Tun in two different years by different people.\(^{38}\) One could even make an educated guess that the same issue will be raised again in the future and one could safely conclude from this that there is a deeper, structural problem in the system of Myanmar Buddhism that needs to be openly acknowledged. In this regard, Tun’s reductive, moralist language of meritocracy, i.e. prostration based on the recipient’s merit or praiseworthy qualities rather than other potential factors like age and biological sex can be misleading because it merely dismisses rather than critically engages with the social realities that are obviously bothering Myanmar Buddhists in whose minds the decision to prostrate before precept-keepers seems to be forced on the basis of their pink robes and other external features like shaven heads. This is certainly not to say that laypeople could not make a cognitive leap from recognizing external, surface characteristics to appreciating internal or intrinsic ones like virtue. Based on what is mentioned in the first question by a laywoman (old men vs. young precept-keepers) and what is dismissed by Tun in his answer as something irrelevant to the issue of prostration, I identify two additional frames of hierarchy pertaining to age and biological sex.

**PERSPECTIVE OF LAYPEOPLE**

Having reframed the normative question ‘Should one prostrate before a precept-keeper?’ into the more self-conscious and theoretical question as to why one asks so, I can now rationalize the hesitation of the laypeople, both from Facebook and Tun’s book, to prostrate before precept-keepers. Given karmic reward and punishment supposedly included in prostrating but interestingly not in withholding it, one can understand the hesitation as stemming from a genuine concern about violating what looks like a taboo involving hierarchies of age and sex rather than as a subversive self-conscious act that boldly contests the authority imbued in a precept-keeper. However, despite being respected, the age hierarchy is not absolute and can be overridden in certain situations. For example, as far as I am aware, the issue of prostration has never been brought up in terms of old women and young novices, parents and their children in robes, etc.\(^{39}\) This means that some hierarchical structure involving biological sex is at issue here even though one might be puzzled by how the configuration of one’s body could play a role in one’s deliberation about prostrating. For this reason, I will now discuss the concept of spiritual potency (M. *bhun‘") in Myanmar Buddhism, which has counterparts in Buddhisms of other countries like Sri Lanka and Thai and caught the attention of some Anglophone anthropologists.\(^{40}\)

It is interesting that as early as 1965, which was when Nash’s book *The Golden Road to Modernity* was published, the essentialist conception of spiritual potency as sex-specific (i.e. found only in males) was already shaky since Nash’s informants reportedly were unclear about whether women have some of it or totally lack it. Despite a degree of uncertainty, Nash maintained that spiritual potency (M. *bhun‘") “in the sense of a glory, a religious essence, is limited mostly to men” and that, even if women do have it, “it is so little that it does not really count.”\(^{41}\) Likewise, Spiro and Khaing both present the idea as mostly sex-specific. For the former, it is an “ineffable psychospiritual essence, which invests its possessor with superior moral, spiritual, and intellectual attributes.”\(^{42}\) For Khaing, it is a specifically male quality that is “enshrined” in a man, and it is

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\(^{38}\) The dates for the first three volumes are not given in the book. But, according to the dates given for the last two, “June 1997 – December 1999” and “Jan 2000 to Dec 2001” respectively, the best I can do is predict that Vol. 1 and 3, in which the questions are raised, are published in separate years before 1997.


\(^{40}\) Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 97.


a source of “pride” for a woman who takes this biological given of her “brother, husband, father or son” as an indicator for the beloved one’s achievement of “the peak of being born as a human and male.”\textsuperscript{43} It is noteworthy that Khaing writes this as “one who has strong roots in her native community,”\textsuperscript{44} and one with “a certain amount of national pride in the conditions of women in [her] country.”\textsuperscript{45} She gives a Buddhist rationale for this belief by arguing that, because it is as a man that the Buddha attained enlightenment and founded the path for everyone to follow, being born as a man is a minimal pre-requisite for achieving high, if not the highest, spiritual goals.\textsuperscript{46}

I am not interested in determining whether the understanding of the male body and spiritual potency as some spiritual asset or capital is cogent from a Buddhist perspective or widely accepted by Myanmar Buddhists like Tun, who dismisses biological sex as irrelevant to one’s decision about prostration. But, this is strongly supported by reports about women including precept-keepers making resolves (M. \textit{adhīṭṭhānā}; P. \textit{adhīṭṭhāna}) that they be reborn as men in the next lives.\textsuperscript{47} One can also understand the accumulation of merit from pious acts as motivated by ends like this. Here, a distinction should be made between views about the male body. One is the view held by the likes of Khaing that it is essentially valuable whereas the other is the instrumental view that one wants male birth and body because they are the pre-requisites for entering the only existing legitimate monastic order of male novices and monks, a more convenient and effective spiritual path. There is also evidence that points to beliefs about being born in female bodies as cosmic punishments for past misdeeds.\textsuperscript{48} What is more interesting for this paper, however, is the vulnerable nature of spiritual potency, a quintessential male quality.

Regarding this, Khaing writes that it will “be cherished and guarded by her no less than by the man himself.” Nash reports a belief about it being located in the right shoulder of a man and it being diminished upon contact with a woman’s garment like the \textit{longyi}.\textsuperscript{49} Even though such beliefs might be interesting for anthropologists, what suffices for the purpose of this paper is the belief that spiritual potency is not a static given but rather a quality in various modalities of existence like diminishing. Given Khaing and Spiro’s characterization of spiritual potency as an asset for spiritual aspirations, be it some ineffable uniquely male quality or something that endows a man with intelligence and morality, one can now finally understand how Myanmar Buddhist laypeople, especially men, are invested in the issue of prostrating before precept-keepers. They are aware of their spiritual potency being at stake, unlike the Taiwanese men from the Facebook photo who do not seem to be aware of the stakes!

In her book \textit{Renunciation and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar-Burma}, Kawanami tries to undermine the previously established consensus about the overwhelmingly sex-specific nature of the concept by citing the existence of charismatic and influential precept-keepers. She instead tries to propose “context-based” understanding of spiritual potency as charisma or ability to command respect and support from others.\textsuperscript{50} In this regard, people tend to attribute such a quality to famous and influential women like Aung San Suu Kyi. However, I would discourage this view because, even though women can theoretically be attributed with spiritual potency, Kawanami cannot subsume the concept of spiritual potency under that

\textsuperscript{43} Khaing, \textit{The World of Burmese Women}, 16.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., vi.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., v.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{47} Jordt, “Women’s Practices of Renunciation in the Age of Sāsana Revival,” 44-54; Spiro, \textit{Buddhism and Society}, 82-83. For cross-cultural references, see Chang, \textit{Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka}, 62-64; 136-138; 175.

\textsuperscript{48} For example, see Tun, \textit{Religious Problems}, Vol. 5, 114.

\textsuperscript{49} Nash, \textit{The Golden Road to Modernity}, 53.

\textsuperscript{50} Kawanami, \textit{Renunciation and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar-Burma}, 139-40.
of charisma because the former can exist independently from the latter in aforementioned sex-specific inflections like a woman’s garment threatening a man’s spiritual potency. Also, whereas people might attribute spiritual potency to famous precept-keepers or political leaders, they might waver with a figure like the young precept-keeper from the Facebook photo. In this regard, the inclusion of a young precept-keeper in the Facebook photo is crucial in the sense that it concretizes the otherwise broad question about precept-keepers in general and even configures the debate in a more illuminating way by minimizing extraneous but potentially influential factors such as impressive education background and charisma and by forcing one’s decision about prostration on the basis of the pink robe and the sex it is supposed to connote. Regardless of the diversity of opinions held about the hierarchy involving biological sex and spiritual potency, Khaing writes that “as age advances, it takes precedence over sex, so that grown men, for example, will give obeisance to an old aunt.”51 In other words, the two hierarchies that I identify are not absolute and one can override the other, depending on the context. Given that one has to use one’s own discretion to negotiate between different hierarchies, this is why confusions arise for people with different understandings and beliefs grounded in Myanmar Buddhism.

PERPECTIVE OF YOUNG PRECEPT-KEEPER

Having laid out the ways in which laypeople might be hesitant to prostrate before precept-keepers, I can now re-evaluate the behaviors of the young precept-keeper from the Facebook photo. In her navigation between different frames of hierarchy, the precept-keeper seems to have used her own discretion to respect them. Because the precept-keeper tries to correct what seems incorrect to her by positioning herself as the lowest or lower than the men bowing down to her height, it is clear that she does not consider herself superior or worthy of the honor. However, it is not clear whether her decision is influenced by one or both of the hierarchies that I identify previously, namely those of age and spiritual potency. More data is necessary in this regard. For example, it will be clear that she respects the age hierarchy if she displays the same ambivalent reaction with bowing old women. Likewise, it will be the hierarchy of spiritual potency if she displays the same behavior with bowing boys. At any rate, she does not seem to be aware of Tun’s prescription that one prostrates based on the recipient’s virtue.

One could perhaps try to defend Tun by arguing that the young precept-keeper is still in the process of being socialized into the proper manners and self-representation of the precept-keeper order. She might perhaps not have been in robes for a long time and is therefore unaccustomed to receiving honor regardless of whether or not she thinks it is due to her. But, this kind of rationalization requires social processes that go beyond the scope of Tun’s moralistic framework.

One last remark I want to make regarding the Facebook photo is that it presents a different side of the story in parallel with that of the bowing men, who someone like Tun seems to be preoccupied with. Also, I previously took pain to mention the names of the people who asked questions to Tun for one reason, namely to find the participation of precept-keepers in the debate. To reiterate again, in addition to the supposedly lay skeptics from Facebook, questions were asked by a laywoman, a monk, and someone with a Pāli name but without any honorific, in that order. Could the last one be a precept-keeper timidly asking the question even though it revolves around a young monk prostrating to a woman? I do not want to speculate about it just as I do not want to speculate whether the young precept-keeper from the Facebook photo ends up anxiously scurrying past the column of men doing her the honor that she thinks she is unworthy of. Even though I have done my part in excavating the voice of Myanmar precept-keepers via the Facebook photo and tried to account for both the acting and the receiving sides of prostration, I do not claim to speak for precept-keepers. In this regard, the debate about prostrating before precept-keepers is still open-ended and I will leave it as such just like I leave the young precept-keeper’s shy smile unexplained, in its pristine polysemy of meanings ranging from approval to social awkwardness.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I set out to address the debate about the propriety of prostrating before precept-keepers initiated on a social media platform like Facebook by locating attestations of the same issue in a more reliable form of print media. For this, I consult a book in Myanmar language by a monk-author. Because I find faults with the way the book handles the issue, I attempt to build a better explanatory model by doing close readings of the questions people asked the author and the answers he gave. This way, besides the moral hierarchy as referred to by the author of the book, I identify two more hierarchies that one has to consider in one’s deliberation about prostrating, namely those of age and sex. Throughout the paper, I use the Facebook photo as a litmus test for the robustness of any explanation. Given the nature of my data from social media and texts, my research is limited in terms of empirical data that one might get from extensive fieldwork. In this regard, this paper does not consider factors such as locality, education background, etc. In addition, I do not attempt at grand claims about changing attitudes toward Myanmar precept-keepers in recent years even though the Myanmar monk-author’s apologetic attitude toward them seems to suggest so. I only intend this paper to be a preliminary preparation for future explorations in that direction.
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Female Political Empowerment in Bangladesh and Pakistan: The Influence of Economic Participation

By: Marylin Longley, Lauren Glasby, Lorraine Pereira

Special thank you to Professor Crystal Chang, Global Studies Program
The countries of South Asia have made impressive leaps towards the empowerment of women. Looking at government statistics on the number of women who serve in political positions, one might believe that the Bangladesh and Pakistan have similar levels of female political empowerment. However, as this paper will demonstrate, the assumption that the number of women serving in political positions equates to female political empowerment is misleading. Upon closer examination, Bangladesh has in fact afforded women greater political empowerment compared to Pakistan. So, what would be a better indicator of political empowerment? We argue that economic opportunity may be a more accurate proxy for gauging political empowerment in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Whereas Bangladesh opened its doors to international companies, especially garment factories that employed an increasing number of women, Pakistan took the opposite approach and shut itself out of these economic opportunities, thereby reducing job opportunities for women. This paper will analyze the effects that economic opportunity has had on the overall political empowerment of women in each of these countries.
INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh and Pakistan, two major countries in South Asia that are united by a similar religious and common historical background, have taken two vastly different paths in an attempt to achieve women’s political empowerment. On paper, both governments seem to have made great strides. Two of the most prominent politicians in Bangladesh are women—Begum Khaleda Zia, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina, current Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Pakistan also boasts a female former head of state in the form of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. According to the World Economic Forum’s 2016 Gender Global Gap Report, both Bangladesh and Pakistan have parliaments that are composed of roughly 25% women—Pakistan is at 26%, and Bangladesh is at 25%. These two countries also have similar ratios of females to males in terms of legislators, senior officials, and managers. Bangladesh has a female-to-male ratio of 0.06, and Pakistan is right behind it at 0.03. Looking at solely these numbers, it wouldn’t be unreasonable to assume that when ranking their respective rates of female political empowerment they would be similar.

However, the Report ranks Bangladesh 7th in terms of political empowerment and Pakistan 90th. Furthermore, Bangladesh was ranked first in the region overall for women’s wellbeing, while Pakistan was ranked last. The Report uses three indicators to measure political empowerment: ratio of females with seats in parliament over male value, females at ministerial level over male value, and number of years with a female head of state in the last 50 years over the male value. Why then, if these numbers are to be believed, is there such a wide gap in the rankings of the countries? If their ranking is solely based on those three indicators, it would be expected that these two countries would be ranked more closely. This wide discrepancy suggests that accurately assessing female empowerment requires a much more nuanced analysis and has many more facets than the number of women in positions of power.

BACKGROUND

There are several reasons why the proportion of women in government is not necessarily a useful indicator for measuring widespread female political empowerment. The primary reason is that the women in each government, despite being a significant proportion of parliament, do not wield much legislative power. The reason for this lack of power is two-fold. Firstly, women who are in office usually fill reserved seats. In 2001, out of all candidates running for office, only 2.48% of these were women. Additionally, that year only 4.33% of non-reserved seats were filled by women. The process for filling reserved seats is very different from non-reserved seats. Once political parties are voted into power, the reserved seats are split among the parties to fill, and the heads of these political parties then nominate women to these seats. Because of this system, these women, who are retroactively chosen, are not actually voted for by citizens. Thus they do not represent dedicated constituencies as their male counterparts do. Even more problematic, the women who are nominated either have a close relationship with current leadership, are a wife or daughter of a deceased member of Parliament, or have

3 Ibid., 48
4 Ibid., 4
5 Ibid., 4
7 Ibid., 492.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 493.
10 Ibid.
been deeply involved in the political party for many years. Additionally, parties do not want to take risks by voting “ordinary” women into power, as the public does not see women as fit for holding office. Therefore, women candidates become a liability to the party and hurt that party’s chance of claiming more seats in Parliament.

Once placed into power, they face another obstacle to obtaining any sort of tangible power. These female politicians are delegated to minimally influential committees, as directed by the leader of their political party. Whereas a male would be on a committee to combat corruption and smuggling, a female is more likely to be put on a committee for “assistance during natural calamities” or the “provision of birth.” As a result of these inferior placements, women are unable to provide their voices in influential spheres of social change. This may also contribute to a view that they are incapable of making meaningful or lasting change. This further reinforces the belief that women are unfit for political jobs.

The secondary reason as to why numbers in parliament do not directly translate to widespread female political empowerment is that there is still significant societal bias against women. Begum Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina, and Benazir Bhutto seemingly contradict this bias, but, as seen in the United States with the election of Barack Obama, the election of one person does not necessarily eliminate prejudices. Additionally, these women come from prominent political dynasties. Zia is the wife of the former president of Bangladesh, Bhutto was the daughter of a former Prime Minister of Pakistan, and Hasina is the daughter of the first prime minister of Bangladesh. It is doubtful they would have been able to achieve their success without the benefits, such as connections, wealth, prominence, that originate from being part of powerful families. Ultimately, there is still a societal bias against women in both government and the workforce. Zia and Hasina have both surrounded themselves with a close cohort of solely male colleagues. Male commissioners still routinely laugh at their female associates, undermining their decisions and continually doubting their abilities. According to scholar Farhanna Zaman, “women in politics remains a matter of tolerance, not acceptance.”

If the number of women in government is not a great indicator of female political empowerment, what would be a better indicator? The WEF Report contains an important graph that seems to better correlate with their rankings of the two countries. The relationship between economic opportunity and political empowerment has been widely studied, and it is crucial to understanding how globalization and its economic effects have influenced the agency of women in both positive and negative ways. A big source of economic gains in some countries, such as Bangladesh, can be attributed to the fact that women have played an increasingly larger role in the workforce. According to the graph, Pakistan is slightly below the mean for political empowerment, and very below the mean for economic participation and opportunity. Bangladesh, on the other hand, is well-above the mean for both standards. These results would correlate with their supposed rankings (Bangladesh at 7th and Pakistan at 90th) for political empowerment.

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Zaman, 95.
14 Ibid., 94.
15 Ibid., 84.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 96.
18 Ibid., 88.
19 Global Gender Gap Report, 27.
20 Ibid.
Upon further research, we discovered corresponding statistics. Bangladesh opened its doors to international organizations, allowing foreign companies to set up a booming garment industry. Consequently, there was an average growth rate of women in the manufacturing industry in Bangladesh from 2006-2010 of 9.62%, and the overall share of female employment in the non-agricultural industry rose to 35%. On the other hand, Pakistan was not as open to international penetration into its markets. Today in Pakistan, women make up only 21% of the total workforce, with most of these women in the agricultural sector. Unsurprisingly, female labor organization blossomed in Bangladesh, whereas it continued to be stifled in Pakistan.

There is a strong case for linking political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity, and in order to better understand political empowerment in these two countries, the role, or lack thereof, of female labor is a critical influence. Bangladesh and Pakistan, two countries with numbers in government that might suggest female political empowerment, differ greatly in practice. The reasons for divide are largely economic. On the one hand, the two countries have very different religious and cultural norms, despite their shared religion. The second is that the nature of work undertaken by women in Bangladesh, factory and garment work, and Pakistan, agricultural work, differ greatly, leading to several important economic and political consequences.

NATURE OF THE WORK: PAKISTAN

Purdah is a practice of female seclusion and modesty observed in some Islamic societies, particularly in South Asia. Purdah entails limits on female mobility that preclude interactions between non-kin males and females. The practice engenders segregation of social and labor roles on the basis of gender, and has the potential to circumscribe women to their homes and restrict their earning opportunities. In adherence to purdah, women in Pakistan may be employed in sexually segregated workplaces or in jobs that primarily service women, including facilitating female schools, midwifing, nursing, etc., or most commonly, as shown in The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics’ 2008-2009 Labor Force Survey, as unpaid workers in and around the home. This survey also shows that most women in the labor force work in rural areas, often in the agricultural sector. Females make up 21.2% of the Pakistani labor force. Papanak has shown that Pakistani women in urban areas may have looser interpretations of purdah as it relates to the nature of their work. However, 84.5% of women work in rural areas, where purdah and according gender roles is stronger than in urban settings. According to the survey, 13.77% of the total Pakistani labor force, roughly 65% of working Pakistani women, work as unpaid family helpers. Roughly 74% of Pakistan’s working women work in the agricultural sector, corresponding with 15.66% of the population that are both female and working in the agricultural sector.

Table 2: Division of female labor force in Pakistan, Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Labor Force Survey, 2008-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Sub-Division</th>
<th>% of Total Labor Force</th>
<th>% of Female Labor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal Non-Agriculture</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Non-Agriculture</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Unpaid Family Helpers</td>
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<td>1.52</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wholesale, Retail and Repair</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hotels and Restaurants</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Transport and Storage</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<td>Financial Intermediation</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Real Estate, Renting and Business Activity</td>
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<td>Public Administration and Defense</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Technicians and Associate Professionals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Skilled Agriculture</td>
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<td>Sales and Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trade and Craft</td>
<td>2.47</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unskilled Occupations</td>
<td>3.55</td>
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25 Sarwar, 212.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
NATURE OF THE WORK: BANGLADESH

In contrast to women in Pakistan, Bangladeshi women have had more success entering into the urban job sphere. With neoliberalism and globalization came the expansion of the garment industry in Bangladesh along with thousands of factories and upward of four million jobs. Due to environmental degradation and the instability of agricultural work, rural people in Bangladesh began migrating internally to urban areas in search of jobs. Many of these migrants have been women. In fact, more than 90% of workers in garment factories are women. Oftentimes in rural villages, one woman from each family has left to work in the garment industry. Many young Bangladeshi women and their families hold loose interpretations of purdah; the income generated by women’s work in non-segregated settings is financially beneficial for families, and in many other ways beneficial for the women.

Working in the formal sector and away from home provides women with more avenues to empowerment and political participation. The pay is extremely low and the working conditions are unsafe. However, they work in close proximity to and have lunch with other women with the same grievances everyday. Additionally, the women walk home in large groups as the streets in the cities of Bangladesh are not safe at night. This gives Bangladeshi workers ample time to discuss their problems and to organize solutions, whereas women in Pakistan do not receive this opportunity. The women can also easily pinpoint the blame for their poor treatment on factory managers and corporations. As a result, the nature of factory work brings women together and empowers them to organize collectively. Conversely, Pakistani women primarily work in settings that are not conducive to organize. Because most Pakistani women work in and around the home, in the rural agricultural sector, or in both, they are not separated from familial duties and do not tend to interact with other women. Women working in Bangladeshi factories, however, have more autonomy, which increases their self-confidence and life skills. They live away from their families and are not under the control of the man of the household like most women in rural areas. This independence helps to make them braver and teaches the workers important skills, such as how to manage a budget. Ultimately, factory work provides women with empowering confidence and skills that work in rural areas cannot provide.

Unlike women in Pakistan, more and more Bangladeshi women are working in urban settings away from home and are increasingly empowered, as a result. Pakistani women tend to work in rural areas, and the nature of their work does not foster the same collective action, confidence, or education as urban work. It has often been argued that rural work, such as that of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, can greatly empower women, as well. The woman becomes an entrepreneur and controls her own income, which provides her with independence from the patriarchal nature of her home life. However, after looking below the surface it was found that 90% of the loans had been transferred to husbands. Only women who were widowed, divorced, or married to terminally ill husbands maintained control over the loans. In the end, women working in rural areas, even those working with the highly praised Grameen Bank, could not overcome the deeply rooted patriarchal values in their communities.

33 Ibid., 199.
34 Karim, 162.
35 Amin, 191.
36 Karim, 193.
37 Ibid., 159.
38 Ibid.
homes. Women with urban jobs have achieved much greater success.

Globalization has also played a role in this success as it has made room for international actors to enter into policy discussions. Non-state actors have been especially important considering the government has often failed to make progress in this area on its own. Corporations and international NGOs have initiated policy reforms in an attempt to improve the working conditions of factory workers. Private companies and NGOs have also formed a coalition with labor unions and garment federations, which presents the women involved in these organizations a chance to have their voices heard.

While buyers could be blamed for the inadequate wages and unsafe working environments, they have also forced factories to abide by labor standards. Corporations worry about their international image and consumers pressure them to alter their practices. With the rising media coverage of factory exploitation and workplace disasters, these companies aim to improve factory conditions and work standards. These motives might be selfish and certain changes might merely be a facade, but buyers have certainly begun to change their attitudes. Companies increasingly recognize there is more that matters than the price of their goods. As a result, 60% of workers feel that buyers can have an impact on their working conditions. Buyers have even begun talking directly to workers to discover exactly what needs to change.

International NGOs have also contributed to significant improvements in the garment industry. They often provide education and health care to women who cannot afford it or where the government has failed to provide adequate services. Additionally, many NGOs function as a mediator between workers, the private sector, and the government. This mediation enables productive dialogue and fosters improved policies and implementation. Both international buyers and NGOs have increased their roles in policy-making regarding the garment sector. As a result, they have a greater say in the development of the industry and the policy governing it.

Labor has been vital in achieving increased wages and safer working conditions. The Bangladeshi government legalized unions once again in 2013. Initially, unions were often patriarchal and male-dominated, which hindered women’s empowerment. However, as of 2015 about 60% of garment factory unions were led by women. Unions and federations have provided visibility to garment workers and allow these women to publicize their concerns. Federations, which are seen as even more inclusive and friendly to women than unions, had a fundamental position in minimum wage increase negotiations with the government in 2010. These organizations work to mediate between workers, factory owners, international buyers, and the government and have had substantial success improving workers’ rights. Labor has allowed women to articulate their rights effectively and publicly, whereas women working at home in rural areas have no equivalent channel. If buyers, factory owners, and governments refuse to negotiate, factory workers are able to organize and receive media attention, putting extreme pressure on all parties involved. Ultimately, the nature of garment work has provided numerous channels for women’s political empowerment in Bangladesh and has resulted in serious wins for factory workers in recent years.

39 Saxena., 44.
40 Ibid., 94.
41 Ibid., 96.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 111.
45 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 109, 152.
RESULTS

The nature of the work in Bangladesh’s garment industry has fostered increased agency for women and an improvement in factory standards. The coalition of labor, international buyers, and NGOs has successfully put pressure on the government to change policy while amplifying the voices of the workers. A survey found 70% of women working in factories felt their voice had been heard as a result of the coalition’s dialogues, and 90% felt the conversations had been effective in creating change. In 2010, women factory workers in federations were able to negotiate an 80.45% increase in the minimum wage with the Bangladeshi government. Additionally, factory conditions have improved as a result of their work. Many women feel as if their working standards have been bettered and they are now treated properly. Importantly, these women feel directly responsible for the change. 56% of women factory workers surveyed felt they had a say in the improvements they have seen in recent years. The nature of urban factory work has empowered women to make their voices heard and to fight for their rights as workers, as women, and as humans.

Conversely, the majority of Pakistan’s female labor force does not work in settings conducive to labor force organization. In adherence to purdah, women have the option of working in either female-centered space, or in and around the home. The Labor Force Survey shows that women tend to work in and around the home, in rural areas, and in the agricultural sector. The majority of working Pakistani women perhaps adhere more strictly to religious gender norms given their rural setting, and do not necessarily interact with one another or discuss labor issues.

CONCLUSION

The Bangladeshi garment sector has played an important role in empowering women in the country. This example demonstrates that there are other ways to be politically involved other than inheriting power from a political family or through a quota system. The garment industry in Bangladesh paved the way for women-led labor organizations to form a coalition with international buyers and NGOs that is dedicated to improving the working conditions and standards of women. Focusing on the number of women in government provides a skewed image of political empowerment, as positions held by women are often symbolic and do not promote real progress on women’s issues. Thus, it is important to examine non-governmental indicators of political empowerment, such as labor organization and economic participation, in order to fully evaluate women’s empowerment as well as broader gender equity.

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50 Ibid., 105.
51 Ibid., 151.
52 Ibid., 160.
53 Ibid.
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Decades In The Making: Japan’s 2015 Security Revisions

By Rikio Inouye

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ABSTRACT

For decades, strong political opposition, organized around Japan’s post-war, pacifist constitution prevented major security legislation or revisions, yet in 2015, neither the constitution nor public political sentiment proved effective obstacles to the passage of legislation that fundamentally changed Japan’s security posture. Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security (JLPS) codified Japan’s right to exercise collective self-defense, allowing it to defend close allies like the United States. It captured global headlines, sparked mass public demonstrations inside Japan, and precipitated a considerable drop in Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s approval ratings. Why was this legislation possible? Moreover, how was it possible for Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to pass this legislation in 2015 when earlier attempts to circumvent the pacifist constitution had failed? This piece posits a two-part explanation, one of both substance and process. Regarding the former, an analysis of de jure and de facto policies since 1991 reveals a slow, continuous accumulation of substantive precedent on which the 2015 JLPS stands. As for the process, the “bait-and-switch” electoral successes of the LDP, coupled with the simultaneous perception of an inept Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) alternative, explain how the LDP obtained the necessary majorities in both houses to force the JLPS through the Diet and, in spite of old institutional restraints, further expanded Japan’s security operational capabilities.
I. INTRODUCTION

Known as Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security, or JLPS, this legislation allowed the Self Defense Forces (SDF) to exercise collective self-defense - a major break with earlier limitations which had prevented collaboration with other countries, even close allies like the United States of America. Despite a controversial reception of mass domestic protest and regional backlash, JLPS has only become more relevant as tensions in and around the Korean peninsula have flared. Japan’s newly proclaimed ability to defend allies like the United States have made the implications of any American conflict all the more concerning for Japan. At a time when tempers, tensions, and tweets have cast new doubts upon the region’s security, it is well to revisit these 2015 security revisions and examine why – and perhaps more interestingly, how the LDP under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo was able to pass this legislation.

Given that the LDP had just returned to power in 2012 and that security legislation has practically been a third rail of Japanese politics, there are a number of puzzles that make examining the impetus and legislative mechanism intriguing. First, the changes were very unpopular – according to numerous public polls administered while the legislation was debated, the Abe administration’s approval dropped from the mid 40% range to 35% with nearly 60% of respondents opposing the legislation. This adds to the puzzling fact that Japan has historically been shackled on the one hand by its war-renouncing constitution and checked by strong, public, anti-nationalist sentiment on the other. As a result, Japan has rarely considered using force in any situation other than a direct attack on its own territory. Why then, was this legislation even possible, let alone in 2015? Neither the constitution nor the written objections from 225 constitutional scholars who claimed the policy was unconstitutional, were enough to prevent the revisions.

Abe’s administration has made an international relations justification for Japan’s efforts to strengthen its bilateral alliance with the United States. Citing a newly assertive China and a nuclearized and unpredictable North Korea, it argues that the new, more threatening security arena has necessitated deliberate changes in foreign policy. While this justification will be examined, it ultimately falls short for two reasons. First, while it is clear that the security arena has changed, the desire to adjust and expand Japan’s security apparatus precedes these changes in the security environment by decades. Moreover, the changing security environment also fails to account for how the legislation was passed.

What then, about a domestic politics explanation? Ethan Scheiner points to the ineptitude of the opposition parties, which have historically struggled in terms of cohesion and candidate quality, thereby limiting their electoral success in the Diet. However, while poor candidate quality and opposition coordination were compelling insofar as they historically hurt the opposition’s ability to win seats in the Diet, they are currently far less compelling as an explanation in 2015. On both fronts, opposition parties have improved, recruiting better candidates and coordinating across party lines to oppose the LDP.

Ultimately, the security changes in 2015 require another explanation – an explanation which both addresses the substance of the changes and the process that made them possible. I examine the former by analyzing the important legislative predecessors and practical changes in Japan’s defense and security policy since 1991. While recent security changes look dramatic, further analysis reveals a slow, continuous accumulation of de jure and de facto policies that have formed a far more compelling, substantive foundation on which this legislation stands.

As far as the process is concerned, the key rests on how the LDP coalition could muster the votes in both houses to forcibly pass the legislation. This in turn requires a discussion of both the recent electoral successes of the LDP and the simultaneous struggles of the main opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). I posit that because the DPJ was unable to implement much of its proposed reforms during its recent 2009-2012 rule, the party was widely castigated as ineffective. As a result, the DPJ struggled to obtain seats in parliament to oppose the LDP. Meanwhile, the LDP utilized effective “bait-and-switch” campaigns during a series of elections to cement its two-house majority, enabling it to force the JLPS through the Diet.

The outline for this piece is as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of Japan’s security apparatus since World War II and summarizes some of the major changes made by the JLPS. Next, I will explain why the external threat explanation is inadequate by first examining the nature and perception of threat changes, and then turning to the older desires to change Japan’s security, which far predate these shifts. I follow this with a two-part explanation of substance and process to explain why and how the JLPS was passed. Finally, I conclude by summarizing my findings and briefly examining the implications of this policy, especially in the context of an eroding institutionalized pacifism.

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56 Ethan Scheiner, Democracy Without Competition: Opposition Failure in One-Party Dominant Japan (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
II. HISTORY OF JAPANESE PACIFISM AND PACIFIST LEGISLATION

Since the end of World War II, Japan has been both America’s keystone East Asian ally and a pacifist state. Though it is a wealthy country with a highly trained and well-equipped Self-Defense Force (SDF), the use of those forces has been highly restricted. The two formal linchpins to Japanese pacifism have been the domestic inclusion of Article 9 in the Japanese constitution and the strategic alliance with its former enemy, the United States. Article 9 in particular is crucial; it achieved the formal and perpetual demilitarization of Japan and put in place a system that would, as Richard Samuels described, “keep Japan a merchant state, not a samurai one.” Since the 1990s however, fading memories of World War II along with new global crises have rekindled debates about Japan’s role in the international community, and it is from these conversations that the 2015 JLPS evolved.

III. THE 2015 SECURITY REVISIONS

What does it change?

The legislation is composed of new laws and amendments to Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security as well as its International Peace and Support law, but for the sake of simplicity, the terms “security revisions,” “security legislation,” and “JLPS” will be used interchangeably.

The first and perhaps most important change is that under certain conditions, it permits Japan to use force to defend a country with a close security relationship with Japan. Because the US security alliance is uniquely important in ensuring “the Japanese people’s right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,” the most likely country would be the United States. Historically, the alliance stipulated America would defend Japan, but Article 9 prevented the reverse. Now however, both parties can come to the defense of the other, strengthening and raising the stakes of the US-Japan bilateral relationship.

60 61 This is done because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ explanation of the legislation is titled “Legislation for Peace and Security”, and combines the specific use of force outcomes from the amendments from pre-existing laws, with the expansion of logistical and support outcomes under the “International Peace Support law”.

62 According to the new law, the three limiting conditions are:
1. The nation under attack is a close ally of Japan and thus the attack threatens Japan’s survival as well as the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of its citizens.
2. No other appropriate means are available to repel the attack.
3. Force is limited to the minimum extent required.

The second change of the JLPS is the expansion of the SDF’s operational capabilities on peace keeping missions by allowing them the use of their weapons to defend not only themselves but also those whom they are supporting, assisting, and/or transporting. This allows the SDF to protect civilians, local populations, or Japanese nationals and furthers Japan’s efforts to play a more proactive role in international community and peace-keeping efforts. Thus, the intended impact of this second change is not only to open the door to greater Japanese involvement in a larger number of international led-missions, it is also aimed to give those forces greater operational impact - their potential use of weapons serving as a greater deterrent from outside threats.

IV. EXTERNAL SECURITY EXPLANATION - QUESTIONABLY NECESSARY, INSUFFICIENT

Changes in Japan’s External Security

The question of why the LDP was able to pass the security revisions of 2015 can be broken down into two component questions. The first is one of timing and motivation: why did the LDP pursue these changes to Japan’s security apparatus in 2015? The second is one of success: why and how was it successful in passing these revisions at this time?

An intuitive international relations answer to the former is simply that Japan faced greater external threats from China and North Korea and adapted its foreign policy to counteract those threats. China’s increased assertiveness, ranging from its renewed maritime claims with the 9-Dash Line, to the construction of artificial islands on semi-submerged reefs, certainly points to a changing security environment. In fact, the number of Japan’s Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) rapid response takeoffs, or scrambles, have spiked in response to China. The 571 scrambles to perceived Chinese actions in 2015 not only was 107 higher than the responses to China in previous year, they alone exceeded the entirety of all scrambles from 2011. Add North Korea’s six successful nuclear tests, including the strongest from September of 2017, on top of its numerous ballistic missile launches, which have recently flown directly over Japan, and there certainly is a case for a more

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65 The Nine Dash Line refers to China’s claims in the South China Sea, which far exceed the 200 nautical miles guaranteed by UNCLOS. Its claims include the contested Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal, which are both claimed by numerous other countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam.
threatening security arena.69 Public polls reinforce this notion; a spring 2013 Pew Research Global Attitudes survey revealed that 91% of Japanese respondents viewed China as a threat with 74% of them viewing it as a “major,” not just a minor threat. Similarly, 93% of respondents in Japan saw North Korea’s nuclear missile program as a threat, 77% of whom viewed it as a “major” threat.70 All of this makes for a seemingly compelling case of external threats driving the 2015 security revisions.

However, the external threat explanation is ultimately insufficient for two reasons. First, the impetus for more ambitious Japanese security legislation precedes both of these threats. In the face of the truly monumental threats Japan faced during the Cold War, many in the governing LDP sought to expand Japan’s security apparatus and operational capacity for decades only to find themselves hamstrung by a variety of domestic factors. Kishi Nobusuke, one of the first LDP prime ministers and grandfather to Abe Shinzo, wanted to amend the Constitution and remove Article 9 as early as 1954.71 Nakasone Yasuhiro, LDP prime minister during the mid 1980s, pushed for Japan to take greater responsibility for its own defense, trying to remove the strict 1% of GDP cap on defense spending.72 He actually succeeded in this endeavor, managing to increase it to 1.004% of GDP. Thus, the desire to expand Japan’s security capabilities far predate these new security challenges of 2015.

The legacy of opposition to Japan’s formal pacifism in the face of external threats is key to why the external threat explanation is ultimately unsatisfying. While the changes to Japan’s security arena have refocused attention on Japan’s security and foreign policy, external threats and desires to expand Japan’s capabilities beyond its self-imposed limits have existed on the political right since the beginning of Japan’s post-war politics. Moreover, even if external threat is somewhat satisfying as a causal driver, it still leaves unanswered, the important questions of why and how the LDP was successful in passing this legislation. Thus, the external changes to Japan’s security environment are by no means in and of themselves sufficient for why the LDP was able to pass the 2015 security revisions.

71 Samuels, 32.
V. EXPLAINING WHY THE SECURITY REVISIONS PASSED: A TWO-PART ANSWER

Why and how was the LDP successful in passing these revisions? To answer this question, I will analyze the legal precursors from the past two and a half decades, which opened the door to SDF deployment and collective self-defense in practice. These provided a crucial substantive foundation for the JLPS and made the near unthinkable prospect of exercising collective self-defense, possible in 2015. Then, to address the process and success of this legislation, I examine the recent parliamentary elections, which gave the LDP both a public mandate and the necessary majorities in both houses of the Diet to steamroll the legislation over the opposition. Included in this is a discussion of opposition party viability. By combining these two threads, I address both longer term and proximate explanations, while also acknowledging both the substance and process of this legislation.

VI. QUESTION OF SUBSTANCE: PRECURSORS TO JLPS – EXAMINING JAPAN’S EVOLUTION

Critical Junctures and Path Dependency

When examining the substance of JLPS, it is important to consider Japan’s security evolution over the past two and a half decades. According to critical juncture and path dependency theory, particular attention should be paid to the periodic ‘critical junctures’ that punctuate and alter the status quo of an institution, as well as the trajectory-sustaining feedback loops that often follow. 74 Much like a hiker on a particular trail, institutions often maintain a fairly steady course, gradual and generally predictable in their evolution, but occasionally, critical junctures present crossroads on the trail, opening new and alternative policy avenues. Such junctures are often marked by discrete events or crises, 75 and the decisions that follow often create rapid change or expand the realm of politically tenable possibilities. These alterations can then be sustained and reinforced into a new status quo. 76

This practice of examining the process by which a change occurred is particularly useful in the case of the 2015 security legislation. In a 2002 piece in the Global Economic Review, Professor Michishita Narushige observed that since the end of the Cold War, Japan has legally and practically expanded the ability of the SDF

75 Capoccia and Kelemen, 343.
76 Capoccia and Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures.”
to operate and act. With the 2015 revisions, his observations appear prescient. Two critical junctures from the past three decades were especially pivotal in catalyzing important legal and practical expansions of Japan’s security apparatus. They serve as precursors to the recent security revisions.

1990s: Checkbook Diplomacy Humiliation and the PKO Law

The first formative pivotal point was the first Persian Gulf War in 1991 as it catalyzed substantive shifts in Japan’s security system by delegitimizing the historical practice of “checkbook diplomacy.” After Kuwait was invaded, Japan supported the United Nations mission but refused to send any personnel, equipment, or physical support, citing the constraints of Article 9. Instead, it opted only for a financial contribution that eventually totaled close to 13 billion dollars.

While substantial, the lack of physical support invited harsh international criticism. When Kuwait expressed appreciation to the participating countries, acknowledgement of Japan was conspicuously absent. This humiliation repudiated “checkbook diplomacy” and emboldened conservatives, who proposed new legislation to expand Japan’s ability to deploy the SDF abroad. This led to the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992. Better known as the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) law, this legislation had the notable effect of allowing Japan’s SDF to deploy in UN peacekeeping operations as long as such participation did not involve the use or threat of force. Though deployments had to be exclusively peaceful in nature, the 1992 law quickly led to SDF deployment in Cambodia. It also opened the door to numerous other operations in places like Haiti, Timor-Leste, Mozambique, and most recently in South Sudan. These operations were generally well-received by the public and they provided a substantial foundation for the JLPS.

81 “Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations,” June 19, 1992., article 2.2)
Nonetheless, the legislative process of the PKO law is also worth examining. The PKO law, similar to the 2015 JLPS, required a Constitutional reinterpretation, this time regarding the constitutionality of Japanese participation in a UN coalition. LDP leaders like Ozawa Ichiro, claimed both that Japan needed to proactively contribute to international efforts to preserve stability and that the PKO law was justified by the UN charter. Ultimately, their efforts were successful as they used backlash against checkbook diplomacy to pass the PKO law and open new debates about Japanese contributions in international affairs.

The PKO law thus provides a smaller scale illustration of the means by which Japan’s security apparatus had been expanding. Not only did it provide a legal mechanism for boots on the ground in other countries, it was also designed as an expandable piece of legislation. One of its key provisions was the so-called “freezing provision” which prevented Japanese forces from being involved in any “high capacity” military operations until a future piece of legislation specifically overturned or “unfroze” this particular article. Shibata explained this as a political calculation that helped skirt some of the constitutional controversy while also providing a clear, avenue for future expansion after the public had come to terms with this legislation.

9/11 and Further Changes

A second critical juncture in Japanese defense policy came with 9/11. Few crises have so clearly shaped international policy for both Japan and other countries around the world as the September 11th attacks. In many ways, these represent just the kind of critical juncture Capoccia and Kelemen would expect as powerful enough to shift Japan’s defense posture. Ultimately, 2001 and the following few years were important in laying a de facto framework for collective self-defense and further expanding the roles allowed for the SDF when operating abroad. Key components of the JLPS were established during this time.

After the attacks, then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro quickly responded, voicing Japanese solidarity with the United States. Aiming to avoid the mistakes and criticism from the 1991 Gulf War, his words were

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86 Singh combines Samuels terminology of normal nationalists with the military realists from Mochizuki to describe the political factions that strove for military strategic thinking in security policy, closer ties with the US, and the potential revision of Article 9 Singh..
87 George, “Japan’s Participation in U.N. Peacekeeping Operations.”
backed with action; he promised immediate SDF assistance in supplying, transporting, and medically supporting US responses to the terror attacks. Furthermore, he dispatched SDF warships to help in the information and intelligence efforts. It took just three weeks for the LDP to push through the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (ATSML), which allowed the SDF to support and supply foreign forces while also contributing to humanitarian efforts and rescue missions. Not long after, Japan passed the 2004 Law Concerning Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq, which sent more than five hundred Japanese troops to the Samawah region of Iraq to help with infrastructural and engineering projects. Despite some restrictions on the use of arms, it was the first post-war deployment of troops with heavy weapons and provided a distinctive and deliberate show of support for the United States. While the SDF was still legally forbidden from using force and while deployments were small, it established collective self-defense as a “fact on the ground.”

Fenwick argues that the significance of these changes after 9/11 was not just the scaling up of Japanese involvement in international affairs, but rather the eroding normative ability of Article 9 to constrain the SDF and Japanese deployments. It is true that under the new Anti-Terrorism legislation, the SDF could operate without an exclusive UN mandate and in the territories of foreign countries. However, the constitutional finagling that was required to make the ATSML and subsequent laws possible, illustrated both a political will and growing leverage over the bureaucracy to loosen the constraints on the SDF. The government argued that the preamble of the Constitution allowed for the use of force for the sake of international cooperation, and this loophole allowed for actions beyond the historically defense-oriented policy.

**Reinterpreting the Constitution - Ending the Mismatch**

With Koizumi’s ATSML legislation and subsequent actions supporting and refueling American ships around the globe, Japan had established a de facto ability to act in collective self-defense. A formal recognition of this however, was still missing and would be necessary to pass the JLPS. The government still accepted a 1954 interpretation of the constitution, which stated that Japan had, but could not exercise its right to collective
self-defense. Thus, in order to pass the JLPS, Abe and the LDP needed either to amend the constitution and remove Article 9 – a herculean feat requiring two-thirds approval in both houses and public ratification – or instead to reinterpret it in a manner amenable to de facto exercise of collective self-defense.

Unsurprisingly, it opted for the latter and in July of 2014, Abe’s administration announced a cabinet resolution which did exactly that. The new interpretation allowed Japan to exercise collective self-defense, and while it was extremely controversial, it was the final technical hurdle for the LDP to overcome before it could actually draft the legislation.

Analyzing Japan’s behavior since the end of the Cold War reveals accelerating changes to Japan’s security posture. The PKO law allowed the SDF to be sent abroad, while the Anti-Terror legislation and follow up operations in Iraq established the de facto exercise of collective self-defense. The final formal hurdle was the technical constitutional interpretation that had banned that very exercise, and in 2014 the Abe administration’s cabinet decision removed this key obstacle. Thus, going into 2015, the substantive groundwork of the security revisions was set; all that remained was writing, proposing, and passing the legislation in both houses. That parliamentary process is vital to understand.

VII. A QUESTION OF PROCESS - SECURING THE SEATS TO PASS THE LEGISLATION

Party Politics and an “Untwisted Diet”

The second key question concerns why and how the security revision passed when it did. Put simply, how did the LDP get the votes in parliament to overcome the opposition in 2015? Existing explanations on opposition parties and the LDP, while contextually useful, fall short of explaining the timing of these security revisions. However, examining the historic role of the Socialist party in anchoring opposition to security legislation, along with its subsequent decline begins to address the question of why the LDP faced impotent opposition in 2015. As the Socialists wavered, the newer opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), was also unable to prove its political competency, thus struggling to remain a viable alternative to the LDP. Finally, the LDP’s use of bait-and-switch election tactics in 2014 caught the opposition off balance and re-solidified the necessary two-thirds majorities to push through JLPS.

In Japan’s Diet, new legislation is submitted to, and debated within, the houses of parliament and re-

Quire’s a simple majority in both houses to pass. That means 238 votes out of 475 for the lower house and 122 out 242 for the upper. If no party controls an electoral majority in both houses, there is divided governance. Known in Japan as a “Twisted Diet” or Nejire Kokkai, this phenomena was relatively common in the two decades prior to the JLPS, and it presents a major challenge to efficient policy action because an opposition coalition in control of either house can reject, or at the very least stall, the passage of controversial legislation.  

However, the 2015 security revisions passed under LDP majorities in both houses, and explaining this untwisted Diet requires an analysis of the ebb and flow of Japan’s political parties.

_Candidates and Coordination_

One domestic politics explanation considered, which ultimately falls short of explaining why the JLPS was successful in 2015 would be poor candidate quality or opposition coordination against the LDP. Professor Ethan Scheiner found that opposition parties in Japan have historically struggled at the ballot box because they have fielded less qualified candidates than the LDP. Due to the LDP’s near monopoly on government offices and hence state finances, it can take advantage of constituent pleasing, pork pipelines which attract better candidates to the LDP and help those candidates win.  

However, analysis of more recent elections reveals that the DPJ has improved its candidate recruitment strategies, leading to better quality of leaders. By the 2014 election, 70% of the DPJ’s candidates had prior electoral experience, served in local government, or were incumbents. Moreover, Scheiner found that in the recent elections, the opposition parties have actually improved at coordinating across party lines, limiting competition in single-member districts to have a better chance at beating the LDP. Consequently, it is not for lack of candidate quality or opposition coordination that the DPJ was unable to stop the LDP in 2015.

_Post War Politics and the Fall of the Socialists_

The LDP’s nearly sixty years of preponderant political rule made it one of the most successful parties in recent democratic history. The LDP’s odd, yet politically powerful coalition of big and small business and agric...
culture, bound together by economic growth and clientelistic payouts worked for decades. During this time of LDP dominance, the Socialist Party of Japan (JSP) was the main rival and its raison d’être was to oppose any attempts to militarize Japan. Its platform was one of firm pacifism and adherence to the Peace Constitution. The JSP was an outspoken opponent of the SDF from the moment the force was formed in 1954. It opposed the 1960 US security alliance treaty revisions, and it vigorously protested efforts to abolish Article 9 or revise the Constitution. While the JSP tended to have modest support, winning 20-30% of the seats in the upper and lower houses, it rarely challenged the LDP for control of the government. Nonetheless, it still had enough power to put the brakes on radical LDP proposals to expand the SDF or to change the constitution; it set outer limits on the policies that the LDP could pursue and its presence goes a long way in explaining why despite past LDP majorities in parliament, no radical security legislation passed until the early 1990s.

Why then, during the 1990s, did its fortunes reverse? It had only 15 seats in 1996 and by the time of the 2015 security revisions, that had shrunk to two. What happened to this historic anchor of opposition?

While a full discussion regarding why the JSP fell is beyond the scope of this paper, two noticeable declines can be observed: when the party’s inflexibility alienated its moderate supporters, and when political compromises on the party’s core principles fostered disenchantment among even their core voters. These two reasons are related to events already discussed. Hyde argues that the JSP lost a great deal of moderate voters after the 1991 Gulf War Crisis because it opposed the use of the SDF for humanitarian missions. Its ideological intransigence opposing the SDF and any expansion of Japan’s operational ability had been a historic magnet for support, resonating well with a public that remembered World War II and had strong anti-war feelings. But the humiliation of checkbook diplomacy catalyzed substantial shifts in public opinion, leaving the JSP platform increasingly out of touch. Greater numbers of Japanese now supported a more involved and proactive stance in international affairs. A 1995 Yomiuri Shimbun poll revealed 65.8% of respondents thought the SDF should participate in peacekeeping activities while a 1992 Asahi poll found 54% of respondents either agreed or tended to agree that the SDF should make an international contribution. Thus, according to Courtney Purrington, the

104 Hyde, The Transformation of the Japanese Left: From Old Socialists to New Democrats, 89–90.
first Gulf War helped shape an emerging consensus about Japan’s place as an internationally engaged, proactive contributor to the international community.  

Another key reason behind the JSP’s downward spiral was the fact that in 1994, the party alienated its core voters by reversing its stance on a number of key ideological issues. In exchange for obtaining the office of prime minister in a coalition government with the LDP, JSP Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi publically accepted the Japan-US Security treaty, acknowledged the constitutionality of the SDF, and withdrew opposition for the use of the national flag and Japanese national anthem which had previous connotations with Japanese imperialism. These actions fundamentally contradicted nearly four decades of JSP policy, leaving core socialist voters with the sense that their party had betrayed its foundational beliefs.

Thus, the JSP lost some of its power because it lost support from both its moderate and core constituents, and the JSP support ratings illustrate these losses. The JSP’s intransigence on the former accompanied a drop in JSP support from ~33% to ~17% between early 1990 and late 1991. Not long afterwards, the JSP suffered its second drop in public support, this time from the 1994 compromises. Support for the JSP fell from 15% to 5% between February 1994 and February 1996. Consequently, by the mid 1990s, the JSP, the central opponent to any expanded SDF role, had lost much of its strength. Though its pro-pacifist ideology would have been the anchor for major organized political opposition to the security revisions, the party’s inability to garner parliamentary seats precluded its opposition the security revisions in 2015.

The DPJ - Not Quite Ready for Prime Time

As the JSP weakened, some Socialists defected to the newly established Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which eventually went on to interrupt five decades of nearly uninterrupted LDP rule in 2009. With this victory it appeared as if a cohesive and formidable opposition party had emerged, one capable of challenging the LDP and opening the door to greater alternations of power. Worth noting however, is the fact that the DPJ was not the direct ideological offspring of the JSP; its consolidation of a diverse collection of opposition precluded the singularity of purpose and ideological coherence that had defined the JSP’s pro-pacifist platform. Instead it worked to distinguish itself from the LDP by emphasizing a reformist image and reputation: reductions in wasteful spending, cuts on local taxes and highway tolls, and a new focus on regional sovereignty. The

105 Hyde, 84.
106 Hyde, 95.
107 Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Lipscy, eds., “Introduction to Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Y. Lipscy Eds. Japan under the
goal was to attract support from Japan’s ‘floating voters;’ a growing Japanese electoral demographic that does not strongly identify with any one party and which tends to fluctuate in its support for different parties.

Yet within three years, the DPJ had fallen in spectacular fashion, no doubt hurt by the 3/11 Triple Disaster but marred also by its own political divisions. The DPJ had both campaigned on and gathered a great deal of support from, its promises for reform. Unfortunately, its failed reform efforts and general lack of policy-making undermined its public image, creating a reputation of incompetence. Highway tolls and gas taxes remained unrepealed. Efforts to break up the National Telegraph and Telephone company stalled and were abandoned. Even in the realm of foreign policy, the DPJ’s unique focus on better regional relations eventually returned closer to the status quo. It also had major diplomatic mishaps, such as its attempt to renegotiate the Futenma military base relocation in Okinawa, which upended nearly 13 years of US-Japan negotiations and infuriated Washington. The gaffe forced Prime Minister Hatoyama to resign.

While there were many reasons behind the DPJ’s inability to execute its reforms, the ultimate problem was that the DPJ had promised a great deal but had little to show for it after three years of governance. Not only did the total number of legislation proposed decrease after 2009, the percent of those proposed bills which actually passed decreased following the assumption of DPJ control. The passage rate of cabinet-submitted legislation in particular fell from a range of 70-100% under the LDP to a new average of 66%. And this, in spite of the party’s huge majorities in both houses.

All of this is to say that in terms of attempts and outcomes, the DPJ’s reformist agenda fell short, and the party saw substantial drops in its level of public support toward the end of its rule. Forced to contend with the unforeseen Triple Disaster of March 11th, it was no surprise that by mid 2012, approval ratings for the DPJ Noda cabinet were around 28%, with support for the party down to between 18% and 8% depending on the source.

In the lower house election of 2012, the DPJ was swept from power. When it took over governance in 2009, it had over 300 seats in the Lower House. By the end of the 2012 election, it had only 57 and it was, somewhat

108 MacElwain also argues that one of the key factors in the rising importance of these reformist appeals has been the nationalization of Japanese elections. This has shifted focus away from local personalistic campaigns and more toward evaluations of the party at the national level.


110 Kushida and Lipsy, “The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Party of Japan.”

111 Kushida and Lipsy, Japan under the DPJ: The Politics of Transition and Governance.

112 Kushida and Lipsy, “Introduction to Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Y. Lipsy Eds. Japan under the DPJ.”

justifiably, clear in the public mind that the DPJ was not capable of effective governance.\textsuperscript{114}

Getting the Seats - The LDP’s Revival

The DPJ’s fall from power and the general perception of its incompetence helped restore LDP majorities to both houses by 2013. As the opposition faltered, the LDP under Abe actively sought to reestablish its political legitimacy and obtain a public mandate on policy with the snap elections of 2014. In effect, the surprise election was a clear, deliberate move to solidify political strength ahead of the push for controversial security revisions.

The 2014 Snap Election - Obtaining a mandate?

The timing of Abe’s parliament dissolution only two years after coming into power, while surprising, may have been a stroke of political genius. Both the timing and framing of the election was intentional; Pekkanen, Reed, and Scheiner explained that the 2014 election was, on the surface, a rather dull political affair. Historically low turnout coupled with little public buzz illustrated a rather low level of voter excitement around the election, which resulted in relatively few changes in the lower house balance of power. The main coalition of the LDP and Kōmeitō had a net gain of one seat for a total of 326 out of 475, while the DPJ had slight gains increasing to 73 total seats from 57.

Though this election was crucial in that the LDP emerged with a consolidated political position from which it could push through the revisions, it was also notable because it was framed almost entirely around economic policy. “Abenomics”\textsuperscript{115} dominated newspaper headlines; the LDP’s popular plan to revitalize the limp Japanese economy took center stage in any policy discussions. Abe even stated in a press conference, “To advance Abenomics ahead? Or to try and stop it? That is the question of this election.”\textsuperscript{116} He effectively set the

\textsuperscript{115} The term “Abenomics” refers to the LDP response to the multiple “Lost Decades” of economic stagnation, and is Abe’s three-part economic solution to revitalize the economy. It consisted of fiscal stimulus through government spending, a monetary policy of quantitative easing, and structural reforms that would reduce regulation and slash protections for historically protected (and often uncompetitive) sectors of Japan’s economy like agriculture Robert J. Pekkanen, Steven R. Reed, and Ethan Scheiner, “Introduction: Take a Second Look at the 2014 Election, It’s Worth It,” in Japan Decides 2014 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3–8.
terms of debate for the election, using his current position of power to shape social and political discourse. Maeda examined this by analyzing the coverage of political issues in the Yomiuri Shimbun, reviewing over 500 articles that mentioned Prime Minister Abe between November and December of 2014. He discovered the most covered issues were Abenomics and the consumption tax, both of which appeared in 40% of the issues. Since the public generally rated Abe’s economic and monetary policies highest, (46.7% approval ratings compared to only 27.6% on security or nuclear power policies) this frame was logical. Kyodo public polls administered during November and early December revealed the most important issue to voters was economic policy while other polls by the Yomiuri Shimbun revealed similar findings. Seventy percent of those respondents cited the condition of business and unemployment as one of the most important issues in deciding who to vote for. Maeda found that the focus on Abenomics tended to ‘crowd out’ the other more polarizing issues such as security or nuclear policy, helping to divert attention from controversial topics and focus it onto the LDP’s popular policies.

Abe intentionally campaigned on the economy (the bait) because the other issues like security stances were controversial. Yet, the victory from that economic frame afforded the LDP the political flexibility to push any part of its agenda (the switch). Essentially, whether or not the LDP victory in 2014 was truly a public endorsement of its entire platform mattered little. At the end of the day, what mattered was securing the Diet.

Unfortunately, the opposition DPJ lacked clear counterproposals or sharp enough criticisms of Abenomics to convince the public. According to a Waseda study of major party manifestos, the DPJ had the least specific and most unclear alternatives on economic policy. Moreover, the DPJ’s criticisms of Abenomics were lukewarm and unfocused at best due to the fact that its policies of quantitative easing and fiscal stimuli were fairly similar. Voters thus lacked alternatives to the LDP plan.

This general lack of differentiation between party platforms put a greater importance on the perceived

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119 Maeda uses the Butler and Stokes (1974) framework to compare the impact of an issue on voter behavior. There was a positive correlation between voter’s appraisal of Abenomics and support for the LDP but because the number of people who thought Abenomics was working was similar to the number of those who did not, the effect roughly cancels out Yukio Maeda, “The Abe Cabinet and Public Opinion: How Abe Won Re-Election by Narrowing Public Debate,” in Japan Decides 2014, Japan Decides (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 99.

effectiveness of parties. Consequently, many undecided voters who were not particularly supportive of the LDP’s policies, either stayed home or voted for the LDP simply because the DPJ was still not viewed as a competent alternative. Asahi Shimbun polls from December 2014 reflected this with 72% of respondents saying the LDP won because the opposition parties were not appealing.\footnote{Noble, 166.}

Ultimately, the 2014 election was an LDP victory; the party flipped a seat and preserved the two-thirds majority, giving them the votes to push any part of its agenda. Armed with a lower house coalition majority exceeding two-thirds, an upper house majority from the 2013 election, and this ‘public mandate’, the LDP was logistically poised to advance any legislation it proposed.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Japan’s security revisions of 2015 were extraordinarily controversial, and tensions in East Asia have made their implications all the more salient. Everything from the newest missile launches and nuclear tests to loud international threats as well as the the back-to-back Olympic games in Pyeongchang and Tokyo, have focused attention on the evolving political relations in East Asia. In this context, Japan’s JLPS has strengthened the keystone strategic and military partnership in the region by allowing Japan to use force in defense of the United States while simultaneously positioning Japan to offer more proactive international contributions.\footnote{Christopher W. Hughes, “Japan’s Strategic Trajectory and Collective Self-Defense: Essential Continuity or Radical Shift?,” \textit{The Journal of Japanese Studies} 43, no. 1 (2017): 93–126, https://doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2017.0005.} It formalized Japan’s exercise of collective self-defense, opened the door to the SDF’s use of force on certain humanitarian missions, and allowed it to support and assist in a wider array of humanitarian missions both within and outside of the UN.

In this piece I have argued that there were two threads that were key to making the JLPS possible. The first dealt with Japan’s responses to external circumstances; a series of earlier actions laid the substantive foundation for the particular security revisions of 2015. The PKO law allowed SDF deployment abroad for humanitarian missions and each subsequent mission loosened the political and logistical constraints therein. On the other hand, the Anti-Terror legislation and assistance to the United States in the years following 9/11 also established de facto collective self-defense, circumventing the decades old interpretation of Article 9 that had forbade it.
The second thread dealt with the domestic party arena in Japan showing how the LDP managed finally, after decades of failed attempts to pass these substantial security revisions. The opposing DPJ was still recovering from its ineffective stint in government, which helped return the LDP to power in 2012 and 2013. On top of this, Abe skillfully cemented the LDP gains through bait-and-switch tactics during the snap election of 2014, providing the LDP with both a public mandate and the political majorities in both houses to force the passage of the legislation.

Some have argued the revisions create a slippery slope toward militarism in Japan, as they have made military power politically easier to wield. The prime minister’s ability to issue a new constitutional interpretation as was done in July 2014, shows how the new assertiveness of the executive branch can circumvent institutional constraints. Moreover, the widening geographic operational ability of the SDF coupled with its expanding jurisdiction to act, marked a distinct departure from Japan’s pacifist past, in which the SDF was shackled by various logistical, institutional, and practical restraints. While the movement to “normalize” Japan and revise or repeal Article 9 has been present in Japan since the moment Japan’s pacifist constitution was ratified, it appears as though in practice, Japan is moving in this direction. Buoyed by his recent October 2017 victories that reinforced the LDP’s two-thirds majorities, Abe has made constitutional revision a priority for the LDP moving forward.

Whether or not the implications of this security revision are a radical shift or just the next step in Japan’s evolving foreign policy and security trajectory, the process of this legislation has shown cumulative continuity. Thirty years ago, few would have expected to see Japan’s SDF anywhere other than in Japan, and exercising collective self-defense was out of the question. Trying to pass the 2015 security revisions without the prior two and a half decades of legislative groundwork would be similar to attempting to set a weightlifting record with no preparation - near impossible. Yet, by pushing the limits incrementally, Japan set itself up for a breakthrough. These 2015 security revisions stand on the foundation of two and a half decades of legislation and that foundation coupled with a contemporary political arena of firm LDP coalition control, made it possible for the LDP to pass one of the most controversial laws of the last half-century.

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“The world is so vast, but still everyone looks up at the same moon.”
- Shen Fu, Six Records of a Floating Life