

**RASR**

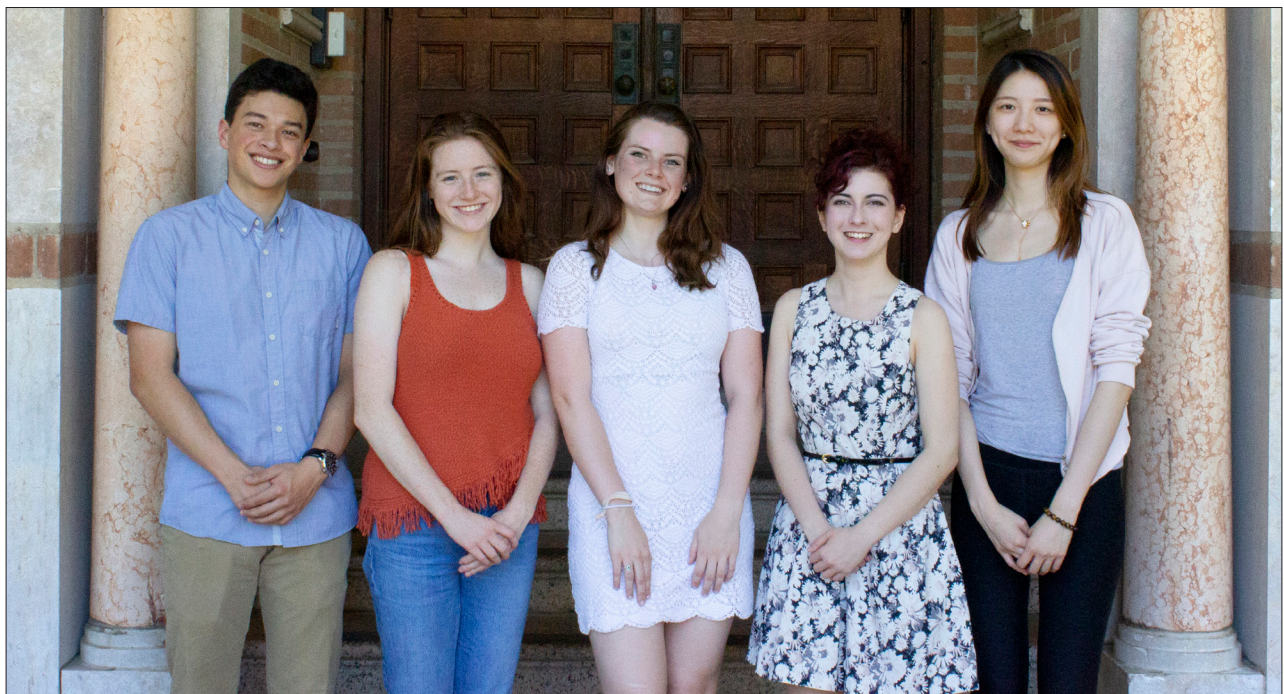
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# ABOUT RICE ASIAN STUDIES REVIEW

Asia in the 21st century is undergoing rapid political, economic, and cultural change. As people, goods, ideas, and cultures reverse colonial flow and begin emanating from Asia across the globe, it is clear that the scholarly lens through which Asia has traditionally been approached by Western-trained academics is sorely in need of revision. The **Rice Asian Studies Review (RASR)**, as an undergraduate Asia-focused academic journal authored, edited, and published by students, situates itself on the front-line of this process by providing a venue for young scholars to exhibit their own ideas and learn from those of their peers. Our goal is produce a compilation of diverse, unconventional, and informed Asian studies perspectives. As authors, editors, and publishers come together in the production of RASR, this fresh cohort of 21st century scholars hopes to promote a dynamic, modern, and interdisciplinary approach to Asian Studies.



From left to right: Coleman Lambo, Flora Naylor, Sophie Lafferty, Gennifer Geer, and Erin Ye.

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**About the cover:** Fifty-one nations and territories defined geographically as “Asia” by the United Nations are represented in decreasing order of population. Designed by Justin Park (McMurtry College, 2017).



The 2018-19 RASR staff would like to offer our sincerest gratitude to everyone in the Chao Center for Asian Studies. This third edition would not be possible without the intellectual, emotional, and financial support of the Center, as well as the generous efforts of Director Dr. Sonia Ryang and Associate Director Dr. Haejin E. Koh. RASR, in publishing its third volume, indicates it is well on its way to becoming a mainstay of Asian Studies at Rice, and this facet of undergraduate research would be impossible without their support.

The RASR Editors also owe unparalleled thanks to Dr. Sonia Ryang, Dr. John Zammito, Dr. Zobaida Nasreen, and PhD student Timothy Quinn. The reviews from these experts contributed to the academic caliber of RASR and helped RASR enter into a tradition of high quality published works. The current editors are forever in debt to the inaugural issue of RASR and the dedicated students who created this academic outlet. Without them, this journal would not exist.

Finally, the RASR Editors would like to thank our contributing authors. We are lucky to be able to draw from a wide range of academic disciplines and geographic areas, and this would not be possible without the diverse talents and interests of Rice undergraduate students. As we hope the articles contained in these pages will inspire both new ideas and new scholars, we also thank you for reading.

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RASR

# Complicating Knowledge Production: HIV Research on Kathoey in Thailand

Sarah Gao

## ABSTRACT

Translation is rife with subjectivity and complexities, especially with concepts full of nuances and meanings. “Transgender” is one such concept, one that risks exclusion and erasure when the Western definition is applied across the world. This article attempts to complicate the translations of “transgender” and “Southeast Asia” in HIV/AIDS research by analyzing the experiences of katoey in Thailand. This work is informed by transgender studies, specifically Don Kulick’s work with travesti in Brazil. The unique experiences of katoey are found to be ignored by folding them into the larger category of “transgender,” despite having different conceptions of gender and sexual behavior. Thus, this article questions how effective is HIV/AIDS prevention is when informed by different understandings of gender. It begs us to ask what other people are being marginalized and excluded in large-scale studies such as global HIV/AIDS research.

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## INTRODUCTION

At its crux, transgender studies serves to question the category of “transgender” and how methods of knowledge production and power construe gender variance as deviant. One specific way to do this is to challenge how transgender as a category is used in cross-cultural contexts, especially those that exist outside of the anglophone West.

In this paper, I will complicate how researchers studying HIV in Southeast Asia define both Southeast Asia and transgender populations. By questioning the region called “Southeast Asia” I will show the ineffectiveness of generalizing health interventions and conclusions on a global scale. By questioning the application of “transgender” to gender-variant bodies, I will demonstrate the epistemological violence done on the katoey of Thailand through exclusion and erasure. I understand epistemological violence here as cruelty against communities of people through knowledge production. When academic pursuits such as categorization and designation fail to include the full lived experiences of these people, the result is a body of knowledge that poses a danger to those it refers to. Others who consume this knowledge understand the community as that represented by this body of knowledge, even if it may be inaccurate. If action is taken based on this knowledge, it is based on exclusion and erasure, and ultimately harms those

it tries to benefit. HIV/AIDS research by Western organizations conducts epistemological violence on katoey through their methods of knowledge production.<sup>1</sup> Translation is fraught with the potential of misinterpretation. Understandings of gender are different in various cultural contexts, and this paper serves to confront the translation of a Western conception of gender on Thai gender non-conforming peoples.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### MEDICAL / BIOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a viral infection that destroys the CD4 cells of the immune system, which attack infections.<sup>2</sup> If left untreated, HIV leads to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), defined by severe immune system damage. AIDS makes one especially susceptible to opportunistic infections or cancers, which significantly reduce life expectancy.<sup>3</sup> HIV is spread through bodily fluids; research identifies unprotected sex and needle sharing as two behaviors that contribute most to HIV incidence.<sup>4</sup>

HIV was first identified in the United States in 1981, when a number of seemingly healthy gay young men in New York and California contracted rare infections and cancers.<sup>5</sup> However, HIV/AIDS

spread unequally across the world, with some areas still suffering from high rates of infection and some countries having rarely seen a diagnosis.

## HIV/AIDS HERE - WHAT MAKES TRANSGENDER WOMEN IN AMERICA SO SUSCEPTIBLE?

Today, antiretroviral therapy (ART), a combination of various medicines, helps people living with HIV to live longer and healthier lives. In addition to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which prevents people from contracting the disease, HIV can be managed in the community and people who are HIV-positive.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS still remains a widespread health concern because of drug resistance and doubt of creating an effective vaccine.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this progress in HIV treatment, many people today are still at risk of contracting HIV. Of these, in the United States, transgender women are disproportionately affected by the disease.<sup>8</sup> Transgender women are 48.8 times as likely to be infected with HIV than other adults. Of these women, trans women of color are even more susceptible to contracting HIV.<sup>9</sup> Many social factors intersect to generate this increased vulnerability, such as socioeconomic exclusion, homophobia and transphobia from law enforcement and judicial systems, stigma, poor mental health, and substance use.<sup>10</sup> Various life stressors contribute to promote risky sexual behaviors, which then increases the risk of HIV incidence. Trans women who experience high life stress and engage in avoidance coping tend to engage in unsafe sex, usually accompanied or brought about by substance abuse.<sup>11</sup> Generally, gender abuse (either/both physical and emotional), depressive symptoms, and substance abuse increase likelihood of engaging in unsafe sex.<sup>12</sup>

These trans women in the U.S. are who global health organizations base their definitions of transgender women upon. They may follow the wrong-body narrative, in which one feels like they

were born in the “wrong body;” for example, a trans woman would feel as if she was born in the incorrect, male-reading body. This dissonance leads to significant amounts of stress and engaging in gender-crossing changes can decrease this anxiety. Examples of such changes may include taking hormones or engaging in various surgeries, such as facial feminization or genital reconstruction.

## GLOBALIZING HIV/AIDS IN TRANSGENDER WOMEN

### GLOBAL HIV RATES

Today, over 36 million people live with HIV/AIDS.<sup>13</sup> However, low- and middle-income countries have significantly higher rates of HIV than highly-technologized, Western nations.<sup>14</sup> A variety of reasons may explain this disparity, such as higher rates of mother-child transmission and lack of access to testing and prevention methods. Baral identifies unprotected sex as the main reason transgender women globally get infected with HIV, but they also note that specific cultural contexts contribute to transmission, such as drug use in Pakistan, Indonesia, and Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, lack of access to ART and other treatments lead to disparities in suppression from population to population.

### DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND METHODOLOGY - TRAVESTI

Exploring different cultural contexts, as Don Kulick does in *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, can provide important nuances to how transgender identity is experienced globally. Kulick explores the travesti of Brazil, (typically) homosexual men who engage in various methods to achieve feminine secondary sex characteristics such as long hair and breasts. Though a Western perspective of gender and sexuality would define travesti as transgender, Kulick makes an important claim that gender is

defined not by genitalia, but sexual positioning.<sup>16</sup> As such, travesti exist alongside women in the category of “not-men,” as they are penetrated during sexual intercourse. However, travesti also reject female bodies and vaginas, claiming a unique position that results in unique health experiences. Part of this rejection materializes through penetration. Travesti then exist in a unique space in which they can both penetrate and be penetrated. Brazil offers gender affirmation surgery as a constitutional right to health, but often only includes genital surgery under this right.<sup>17</sup> As such, travesti are systematically excluded from accessing gender affirming care for not conforming to normative standards of transgender. The application of “transgender” to a non-Western context results in epistemological violence through exclusion and erasure. Defining transgender in a very specific way — the feeling of being “in the wrong body,” desiring different genitalia - invalidates other forms of gender variance, such as that of travesti. Travesti have no desire for female genitalia, for the physical feminization they exhibit and strive for is a form of “perfect homosexuality.”<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, linguistic differences both complicate and enrich perceptions of gender and sexuality in contexts different than anglophone-dominated ones. For example, travesti constantly switch between male and female pronouns and wield these words as power over other travesti. Acknowledging and examining how language and gender interact allows for a deeper understanding in specific cultural contexts.

This paper uses Kulick’s strategies of challenging Western conceptions of gender and sexuality in order to complicate how “transgender” is constructed in HIV/AIDS research. I direct Kulick’s questions of gendered embodiment and translation onto kathoey in Thailand. Doing so allows for a more nuanced understanding of how terms and ways of knowing gender are translated across cultural contexts.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

### KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION OF HIV/AIDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The World Health Organization,<sup>19</sup> whose HIV/AIDS report I critically examine, includes eleven countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People’s Republic (DPR) of Korea, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste — constituting over 1.8 billion people in the South-East Asia Region.<sup>20</sup> Approximately 3.5 million people, or 0.3% of the population, are infected with HIV, though there are regional disparities in infection rates.<sup>21</sup> The dominant mode of transmission is unprotected sexual contact, especially with a bustling sex work economy in which men with HIV purchase sex without disclosing their status. Substantial rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), around 78.5 million cases, in conjunction with HIV indicate the corresponding rates of unprotected sex that occur in the area.<sup>22</sup>

Injection drug use constitutes an increasing portion in specific country contexts as well. Indonesia, in particular, has a higher rate of HIV transmission in drug users than in other countries in the area — nearly 30 percent.<sup>23</sup> People who engage with injection drugs also engage in unprotected sex, which increases infection rates in the community.

Compared to testing, treatment procedures, and resources available in the United States, countries in Southeast Asia have a considerably more difficult time meeting global standards. Stigma against disease and homosexuality, criminalization of sex work, and lack of awareness of positive status all contribute.<sup>24</sup> The main obstacle to adequate HIV care is lack of awareness or access to HIV testing and counseling.<sup>25</sup> However, state institutions in India and Thailand have implemented successful condom distribution programs that contribute to the decrease in the incidence of unsafe sex occurring, particularly among populations of sex workers and men who have sex with men (MSM).<sup>26</sup>



Since the turn of the twenty-first century, countries in Southeast Asia have increased availability of ART, especially for children.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, numbers still lie below the global threshold of ART coverage. There also exist gaps in the types of antiretroviral treatments available on a country-by-country basis, with only one or two regimens in Maldives and Bhutan and any combination of fifteen regimens available in Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand. However, nearly every country in the region is able to provide treatment free of charge.<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult for researchers to generalize data across the entire Southeast Asia region, as each member nation has distinct cultures and practices that may affect exposure to HIV. Even within one country there are regional differences in HIV transmission.<sup>29</sup> Such sweeping generalizations can hide these differences and lead to less effective treatments and interventions, as people behave differently in different state contexts. Particularly, how sex work is regulated differs across countries, which then influences HIV transmission. In Bhutan, prostitution is illegal but people still facilitate an underground economy, centering particularly in rural regions of the country.<sup>30</sup> In India, sex work is legal but governmentally regulated, whereas in Thailand, the sex work industry accounts for a significant portion of the Thai economy while being technically illegal.<sup>31</sup> People who are illegally involved in sex work may face more obstacles, both social and physical, in accessing protection and treatment for HIV and other STIs.

Researchers also must acknowledge the unique history of HIV/AIDS in each specific cultural context they work in. This paper focuses on Thailand, a country with a different HIV/AIDS origin story from the United States.<sup>32</sup> HIV was first diagnosed in Thailand in 1984, three years after the first case was identified in the United States. It quickly spread through IV drug users.<sup>33</sup> From there it spread to female sex workers, heterosexual men, and the rest of the general population.<sup>34</sup> As compared to the

United States, where HIV first emerged among gay men, HIV first spread in Thailand through female sex workers. Consequently, the state responded with the establishment of a well-funded national taskforce and surveillance system that pushed condom usage to the population.

In 2013, UNAIDS, the United Nations taskforce established to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, proposed their 90-90-90 treatment target as a global standard of health. The goal aims for 90 percent of people living with HIV to be aware of their status, 90 percent of those aware of their status to be on antiretroviral therapy, and 90 percent of people on ART to be considered virally suppressed by 2020.<sup>35</sup> This proposal followed an earlier goal of having fifteen million people on treatment for HIV/AIDS by 2015. UNAIDS stresses that the 90-90-90 treatment target encourages a “new evidence based HIV treatment narrative” that includes preventative treatment and equity across a global community.<sup>36</sup> While the target proposal is full of hopeful language, UNAIDS discounts the unique history and current distribution of HIV in individual country contexts. For example, they use Kenya and Uganda as examples of the effectiveness of an HIV testing campaign. But how well do these results translate to another country like Laos? Can the same methods of advertisement work in a space where people gather differently? When countries have different infrastructures, social relations, federal welfare programs, and healthcare systems, it would be very unwise to assume that what works in one state context will be effective in another.

Of the UNAIDS leadership, only one of the three executives, Michel Sidbé, is fluent in languages spoken outside of the United States and Europe.<sup>37</sup> Of the following nine directors, three are women and all are both cisgender and heterosexual.<sup>38</sup> Having such a group of people leading the international response to HIV/AIDS may result in lack of consideration of LGBTQ+ populations suffering from HIV/AIDS. Additionally, this team, headquartered in Belgium

and led by a team of majority white men may imply a neocolonial relationship with the countries they work in.

### COMPLICATING GEOGRAPHY - QUESTIONING "SOUTHEAST ASIA"

Though the WHO regards Southeast Asia to consist of the eleven aforementioned nation-states, other sources may include the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam, while excluding DRP Korea and Nepal.<sup>39</sup> UNAIDS groups the general Southeast Asia area with Australia and Asia as far east as Afghanistan. Southeast Asia was a region created under the Western gaze by colonialists, and the arbitrary nature of this hodgepodge is evident through its uncertain boundaries. How can we generalize across cultures, regions, institutions? Each nation-state in "Southeast Asia" operates both independently and in relation to every other entity in the region, and each case of HIV is unique to its circumstances.

The WHO acknowledges differences in health experiences in various countries, but makes no effort to offer unique interventions or approaches. For example, Indonesia has a much higher rate of HIV transmission through injection drug use than other nation-states in the area, but there is no effort to explain why and how to address it.<sup>40</sup> How can generalized advice, applicable to any nation-state in the region, acknowledge the unique circumstances of Indonesia? Generalization across countries and cultures is a form of epistemological violence to huge swaths of people by ignoring the physical and social contexts they exist in.

### TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES IN THAILAND

Peletz defines gender in Southeast Asia as traditionally "pluralistic," that is, heterogeneous. In the early modern era (sixteenth through eighteenth centuries), Southeast Asian societies legitimized certain forms of gender behavior and fluidity.<sup>41</sup> Religious and economic institutions were balanced

between men and women, with both male and female representation in deities and trade. Additionally, gender roles were relatively fluid and sexual variance tolerated. "Transgendered ritual specialists" and female-bodied ritualists performed sacred duties, which allowed them a special elevated social status among the divine.<sup>42</sup> Gender variance from wo/men was viewed as transcendence or unity of gender, rather than deviance. Various southeastern Asian cultures had some form of a religious interpreter to the cosmos in which the actor was transgender or agender, and some of these roles also included same-sex relations as well.

Through the second half of the modern era, cultures began to enforce hegemonies that allowed only certain types of gender variance, such as religious intermediaries. Though eroticism and sexual relations were also regulated, allowance of activities began to tighten. These impositions were directly influenced by Western colonialism and religion, as nations began to make the fraught shift to centralization and bureaucracy.<sup>43</sup> Introduction of monotheistic religions, in particular, led southeast Asian cultures to devalue women and question gender behavior outside the patriarchal binary. Stringent definitions of gender and religion imposed by these institutions led to the devaluation of spirituality and gender variance, aided by the establishment of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality.<sup>44</sup>

Over the past sixty years, modern queer cultures in Thailand went through various periods of growth to become what they are today, aided by expanding commercialization and digital communication.<sup>45</sup> This shift into the mainstream has also led to a corresponding change from gender variance being associated with religion and spirituality to growing beauty and fashion industries.<sup>46</sup>

Today, many transgender people, women in particular, travel internationally to Thailand to get gender confirming surgery, a experience known as "medical travel".<sup>47</sup> However, by doing so in a cultural

context different from their own, Aizura proposes that these trans women are influenced by Thai femininity in creating their own. Thailand became a hotspot of gender affirmation surgery (Aizura uses the term “gender reassignment surgery,” but I will use the more current descriptor, gender affirmation surgery because “affirmation” a person’s gender identity has existed before and can consist without surgical intervention) after the Asian economic crash in 1997, and Thailand’s lack of regulation and medicalization of transgender experiences allow for cheaper procedures.<sup>48</sup>

Transgender populations in Southeast Asia tend to have significantly higher rates of HIV than the general population. This is due in part to sex work, as many more trans folk engage in sex work than in Western contexts; nearly 40% as compared to 12% in America.<sup>49</sup> Epidemiologic studies recommend condom distribution and increased testing for the transgender community, but they offer very few behavioral interventions.

### **COMPLICATING CATEGORIES - QUESTIONING “TRANSGENDER”**

An important aspect of transgender studies is to question how transgender as a term categorizes and qualifies bodies in different contexts.<sup>50</sup> Especially problematic is the deployment of transgender, a recent anglophone classification, in a cross-cultural context as epistemological violence. By defining bodies as conforming to or deviating from an imposed categorization, Western perceptions of transgender invalidate and erase differently gender-deviant bodies.<sup>51</sup> Science and society have continually performed this violence on gender-deviant bodies by rendering them subjects of study and objects of observation with little concern to the actual needs of the community.

One of the greatest ways in which HIV research performs epistemological violence on gender variant bodies in Southeast Asia is conflating transgender populations with men who have sex with men

(MSM). Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) combines these two groups of people in their primary report on HIV in Southeast Asia and publishes an additional report specifically featuring “men who have sex with men and transgender women.”<sup>52</sup> The WHO decides to combine MSM with transgender women because they regard unsafe anal sex as a common mode of transmission. However, conflating these two populations results in inaccurate results. “Transgender women” encompasses not only an embodied state of being, but also social existence and claims to life. However, MSM are classified by their sexual behavior, and only their sexual behavior. By incorporating trans women with MSM, HIV research erases the unique health experiences of transgender women shaped by their environment and social contexts. Additionally, this grouping does not allow for transgender men, who may not engage in the same sort of sexual relations as MSM or transgender women. As such, the WHO recommends state institutions to provide aid to meet “the needs of MSM and TG populations.” This statement presumes MSM and trans people have the same needs (as well as all MSM having the same needs and all trans people having the same needs), adding another layer to the erasure of trans bodies.

Because of such conflation, the WHO recommends the same interventions for MSM and transgender populations. This may ultimately prove to be ineffective, as assuming the transgender and gay communities live the same lives is a fundamental flaw in the foundation of these recommendations. The WHO’s suggestions are also extremely broad and difficult to achieve. For example, their third recommendation for Southeast Asian countries is to “encourage, support, and build the capacity of organizations to serve the needs of MSM and TG populations”. What needs are being talked about here? Which strategies have been proven to be effective? How can the WHO support these (unnamed) organizations without perpetuating a colonial

narrative? These suggestions by the WHO float untethered to any national or cultural context, and as such run the risk of not having any effect at all.

Additionally, “transgender” itself is a fluid, porous concept.<sup>53</sup> Scholars even within transgender studies define it in a variety of different ways, and though this dynamism allows for different interpretations of experience more closely aligned with lived experience, it can also complicate studying gender-deviant bodies and generalizing across populations. For example, the American medical narrative defines transgender through a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, but scholars and activists put a range of lived experiences and embodiments (such as genderqueer and nonbinary) under an umbrella of “transgender.”

Thailand has an adult HIV prevalence rate of 1.1 percent.<sup>54</sup> It is incredibly difficult to measure HIV prevalence among the trans community because “transgender” as a term does not exist. Rather, it is encompassed in kathoey, a label applying to certain gender non-conforming individuals.<sup>55</sup> In the next section I will more deeply examine how kathoey exist and negotiate their gender identity in a Western scheme of knowledge production.

## THE KATHOEY

### WHO ARE THE KATHOEY?

Unlike the West’s strict gender binary and obsession with heterosexuality, Thailand conceptualizes gender differently. Gender, sexuality, and sex are all described by the term *phet*. Thus, masculinity and femininity are construed along sexual relationships; those who penetrate are masculine, and those who receive (women and kathoey) are feminine.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, three distinct genders exist in Thai society: men, women, and kathoey. Kathoey are Thailand’s commonly accepted third gender — though being born with male-reading genitalia, kathoey embody various forms of femininity to exist as both male and female.<sup>57</sup> This is also reflected in their sexual

behavior; kathoey, like *travesti*, both penetrate and are penetrated. For example, Ocha and Earth documented kathoey speaking of their in-between-ness:

If I consider my body purely in sexual terms, it is great that I can perform both passive and active roles ... this really makes me feel superior to those with a purely female body. I love my breasts. I do need them because I want to look great in female costumes in daily life, but I don’t need a vagina ... really. I do not want to be 100% woman anymore. I want to stay ‘Kathoey tee yang mai dai chaw’. I feel comfortable as half and half. (Mint, 22 years old, artist in Patpong)<sup>58</sup>

Thus, kathoey can exist in an in-between space as simultaneously neither male nor female but also both male and female.

The biomedical definition of “transgender” was adopted by Thailand when expanding their sex-affirming medical procedures. Today, many transgender Americans regard Thailand as a hotspot for gender affirming care and travel there for procedures. In order to qualify for such a procedure, however, one must present a diagnosis of gender dysphoria (GD), the American conceptualization of transgender experience.<sup>59</sup> This narrative describes a transgender person as being born in the wrong body, and surgery and other medical interventions are used to bring a person closer to their identified gender. This way of conceptualizing gender variance enforces the gender binary, and kathoey are often disqualified for gender affirming surgeries because of their non-binary identity. With the rise of these medical procedures, a new category of people within kathoey has arisen: *sao praphet sorng*, which translates to “women of a second kind”. *Sao praphet sorng* are distinct from other kathoey because they desire gender affirming surgery; other kathoey are satisfied by taking hormones and engaging in other feminine practices. These kathoey are also able to take on a unique sexual role of both

the penetrator and the penetrated, which places them more surely into this neither/both space.

Thai kathoey embody gender in a vastly different way than the Western context; I would argue it lies closer to Brazilian travesti than western transgender. Kathoey do not view genital reconstructive surgery as an essential aspect of their gender identity and presentation, though they may take hormones and engage in other gender confirmation surgeries such as facial feminization. However, Western epidemiological studies attempt to translate transgender labels onto these bodies.

## LOST IN TRANSLATION - TRANSGENDER IN THAILAND

Jarrin argues that translating anglophone transgender ontology is not a neutral process; rather, “translating” epistemology from one context to the next involves “power, agency, and exclusion”.<sup>60</sup> By translating “transgender” to a Thai context in HIV research, we subsume the unique identity of kathoey, with its interconnectedness to sex and sexuality, into the category of transgender. By further conflating this transgender category with MSM, HIV research ignores the way in which kathoey enact a feminine, or non-masculine, role sexually.

“Transgender” first came linguistically to Thailand in 2005, when trans scholar Prempreeda Pramoj Na Ayutthaya created term khon kham-phet, an attempt to allude to the gender/sex fluidity encompassed within phet. However, many Western and Thai scholars now associate khon kham-phet as a translation of transgender or transsexual experience.<sup>61</sup> Because phet is used to describe experiences of gender, sex, and sexuality, scholars have struggled with finding adequate Thai translations for Western conceptions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Today, Thai feminist scholars have accepted phet-saphap and phet-withi as translations for English conceptions of gender and sexuality, respectively. However, the general LGBT community still struggles with

vernacular to encompass all experiences, especially when referring to trans men or lesbians.<sup>62</sup>

Thai queer culture’s relationship to its Western counterpart is similarly complicated. Jackson proposes that because Japan and Thailand were not colonized during Western imperialism, their queer cultures arose independently of Western influence and exists outside of anglophone discourse.<sup>63</sup> As such, western conceptions of gender and sexuality provide an alternate, rather than disruptive, way of thinking about embodiment. However, Thai and non-Thai conceptions of gender interact in the realm of gender confirmation surgery. Aizura notes that trans women who travel to Thailand for surgery associate Asian spirituality and femininity with their own surgical results.

Despite this perception of Thailand as a queer paradise where people can easily access gender confirming surgery and kathoey enjoy a great deal of public visibility, transphobia, or more accurately transprejudice, still exists.<sup>64</sup> Winter argues that transprejudice is more descriptive of trans experience than transphobia, as transprejudice encompasses the systemic delegitimization of transpeople’s claims to equal quality of life.<sup>65</sup> Thai people need identification documentation for access to many public spaces, but the Thai government does not allow for changes of gender on these forms of identification. Therefore, khon kham-phet/kathoey’s privacy may be compromised, and this difficulty of attaining official gender-accurate identification leads to difficulty in employment and navigation through legal systems. Additionally, prejudice is closely tied to the assumption of mental illness or pathology, which then leads to increased discrimination. Although the Thai context lacks the history of mental pathology tied to American settings, many Thai people still believe that khon kham-phet are mentally ill.<sup>66</sup>

## VIOLENCE AND ERASURE

Such experiences of transprejudice are unique

to khon kham-phet, and Winter notes that discrimination may lead khon kham-phet to engage in sex work at any level of involvement. By placing khon kham-phet into the same epidemiological category as MSM, researchers assume they have the same social experiences. There is thus no way to account for the differences in lived experiences. Because MSM functions as a category of people joined by similar sexual behavior, it does not account for the social experiences of men who have sex with men. Not all men who have sex with men are gay, after all. But, “transgender” encompasses an entire way of being, which involves much more than sex. Therefore, any suggestions health organization like the WHO may provide to improve the social standing of both transgender and MSM populations will be inefficient. Furthermore, placing gender variant people in the same category as MSM is a demonstration of transprejudice. By ignoring the differences between gay men and khon kham-phet, researchers effectively delegitimize the experience of khon kham-phet through erasure.

Even researchers are not innocent of epistemological violence. They, too, are influenced by the idea of the Thai sex industry as a mecca of exoticized sexuality. It is widely regarded as the home of a bustling sex industry thriving off sex tourism. Much of the academic work done with the kathoey has occurred in the context of sex work, as kathoey serve to embody this exotic sexuality, which is what has informed my research. Kathoey, whose embodiment falls outside of the gender binary, are eroticized both through their nationality and bodily construction as an object of fascination. As a result, kathoey are associated with sex work, and the knowledge created by these researchers carry with it this association as well. The narratives of kathoey who do not engage in erotic labor are disregarded as unimportant to research. However, it is important to realize that not all sex workers are kathoey, not all kathoey are sex workers.

Because of these associations, much of the research done on kathoey in Thailand has been in the context of sex work. Especially in the current age, with people expressing their sexuality and engaging in erotic labor online, “sex work” as an idea has become increasingly complicated. What counts as sex work? What kinds of new power relations are or are not present through online media? By conducting research through this lens, the narratives researchers receive are those of “sex workers,” regardless of what their work entails. Thus, researchers construct categories of “sex work” that include certain activities or exchanges but exclude others. How does this map onto the experiences of people who engage in erotic labor but do not consider themselves sex workers? What about those who consider themselves sex workers but the intimate labor they engage in is not included in a researcher’s category?

### WHERE DO KATHOEY FALL?

In light of these complications of gender and classification, how do kathoey fit into the epidemiological categories of MSM and transgender? Touru Nemoto et al suggest they are transgender women.<sup>67</sup> The titles of their studies “HIV-Related Risk Behaviors among Kathoey (Male-to-Female Transgender) Sex Workers in Bangkok, Thailand” and “Examining the Sociocultural Context of HIV-related Risk Among Kathoey (Male-to-Female Transgender Women) Sex Workers in Bangkok Thailand”<sup>68</sup> explicitly describe kathoey as trans women, though the authors acknowledge the differences in lived experiences of kathoey and trans women in 2016.<sup>69</sup> In their report of MSM in Asia, UNAIDS also places kathoey under the category of transgender. This study is significant because it acknowledges kathoey as a category at all. However, kathoey regard themselves as different from women.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, kathoey have a different claim to legitimacy from trans women, since their existence could be attributed to spirituality.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, although kathoey could broadly fall into the

category of transgender women, they have different experiences that render them unique. Kathoey are also more visible to the general population than transgender women, who exist as a newer, more foreign state of embodiment.<sup>71</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Despite the unique cultural contexts in which gender variance exists, trans activists agree on one thing: involvement in research. Activist research, made unique by its collectivism, offers a potential method to do this. Rather than observe through a detached lens, activist research encourages the populations being studied to contribute to the formulation of questions, data collection, and analysis. This way, what we learn is relevant and interesting to those we are helping. As the Asia Pacific Transgender Network says, “We are not research!” This methodology allows people to have autonomy over information about themselves. How information is disseminated, used, and visualized falls into the hands of those who own it — activist research suggests these people be who it directly impacts. Ensuring that gender variant communities own results of research allows them to disclose — or keep secret — the information that truly matters to them.

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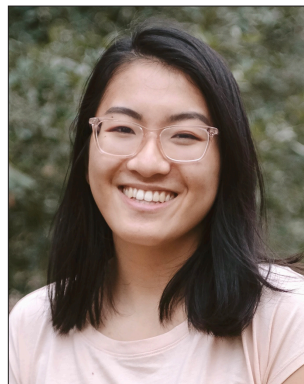
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## SARAH GAO



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# Japan's Labor Challenge

Craig Joiner

## ABSTRACT

After World War II, Japan, influenced by the occupation of the Allied forces from 1945 to 1952 and the introduction of capitalism combined with democratic principles, exhibited unprecedented industrial and financial development from 1945 to 1992. During this era that would come to be known as the Economic Miracle, Japanese businesses implemented radical shifts in management strategies, most notably the implementation of life-long employment and an age-based wage system. These new strategies would inspire domestic competition and drive Japanese firms to dominate international markets, eventually elevating the Japanese economy to the second largest in the world. The 1991 market crash and deflation of the economic bubble, however, led Japan into an era marked by labor shortages, low productivity, and a growing number of irregular workers. In 2016, in order to fix these issues, the current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe introduced a series of changes known as the Realization of Work-style Reform. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the potential and effect of the Work-style Reform.

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## INTRODUCTION

In September of 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed the Work-style Reform (Hataraki Kata Kaikaku), which aims to improve the working conditions—wages, employee benefits, and opportunities—of the rising number of irregular workers in Japan.<sup>1</sup> The Work-style Reform also addresses the challenge of labor shortages caused by the aging of Japan's population and a rise in the number of temporary workers threatening the Japanese labor supply.<sup>2</sup> Through the reform, the government intends to strengthen regulations on overtime, increase employee wages, and promote a healthier work-life balance for irregular workers.<sup>3</sup> This in turn will attract more youth, women, and elderly to the workforce. Will the labor reforms proposed by the Shinzo Abe administration be effective in revitalizing Japan's large corporations and combatting its current economic crisis? This study concerns the implications of this multifaceted reform, and assesses its efficacy in resolving the aforementioned labor obstacles in Japan. In this paper, "irregular" will refer to any worker that is not full-time, for any reason. In order to closely study of the outcomes of this reform in a historical context, the first two sections of the paper will examine the evolution of the postwar Japanese business industry and labor standards of Japanese society during three distinct stages of the 20th

century, beginning with the Economic Miracle of the 1950s to 70s, followed by the emergence of Keiretsu, and more recently, the accumulation and bursting of the Japanese economic bubble in the 1990s. The latter two sections will present the current labor situation in Japan and examine the proposed legislation for addressing the current challenges in Japan's labor force. These sections will analyze each component of the Work-style Reform, assessing its potential to increase productivity and expand Japan's labor force.

## THE ECONOMIC MIRACLE

### ALLIED OCCUPATION

The postwar era of Japan was marked by an unprecedented 40-year economic growth, lasting from the mid-1950s until the end of the 20th century in a period known as the Economic Miracle.<sup>4</sup> With an average annual GDP increase of 9.2% over the course of 20 years referred to as the high growth era, the rapid boom of the producer economic state was driven by the determination of state officials seeking to surpass western nations, particularly the United States, and raise Japan from the ashes of the disastrous WWII.<sup>5</sup> Although many of the economic elements of the Economic Miracle originated before the war as products of wartime preparation, the promotion of Japan to the status of economic powerhouse was

catalyzed by the democratization and modernization of Japan under the occupation of the Allied powers from 1945 to 1952.<sup>6</sup> Efforts of the occupation were primarily pushed by the United States, which feared a bitter Japan would be susceptible to the influence of Soviet communism and thus opted for a conciliatory approach, exonerating Emperor Hirohito from war crimes.<sup>7</sup> Most significant of the reforms brought about during the occupation period, the postwar constitution of 1947 forced Japan to relinquish rights to military power, and instead rely of the protection of the United States, as shown in the Yoshida Doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Along with demilitarization, new antitrust laws forced Japan to disband zaibatsu—large monopolies which had historically exercised great influence on state affairs—and reform its land distribution policy, requiring that all excess land be sold at fixed prices to the government for redistribution.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the establishment of the 1947 Labor Standards Act compelled Japan to redefine national labor standards and better accommodate laborers.<sup>10</sup> Though significant, the Allies' intervention and enforced state reform simply laid the ground work for what was soon to blossom into the Japanese model of business.

Characteristic of this emerging business model were radical shifts in the investment mentality of company executives. Contrary to western philosophy, in Japan, businesses became primarily concerned with gaining market share as opposed to accumulating short-term profits.<sup>11</sup> An in-depth analysis of the occupation reveals that ironically, the ability to sustain this long-term oriented mindset was due in large part to the demilitarization under the allied forces and the reliance on United States military, as the decrease in military-purposed funding provided the government the opportunity to instead invest funds in industrial development. This was strongly reflected in the Yoshida Doctrine, named after contemporary Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru during the Korean War of 1950 to 1953. The doctrine maintained that the lack of military obligation afforded Japan the

opportunity to address more immediate concerns of economic reconstruction, thereby expediting its postwar recovery. It continues that such sentiment was further advanced by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), perhaps the most powerful institution in postwar Japan.<sup>12</sup> The Ministry used government funding and technology imported from the west to encourage the success of private businesses, primarily steel and chemical industries, deemed as having potential for long-term success.<sup>13</sup> The government aid provided select Japanese industries with the financial and technological resources necessary to enter and compete in rapidly growing international markets, accelerating the Japanese economic growth rate, as will be discussed in the section below on keiretsu.

## THE EFFECTS OF WAR

It is important to consider the series of international conflict during the 1950s, particularly the Korean War and the Cold War between the United States and Russia and their effect in East Asia, when analyzing the revolutionary growth of Japan's manufacturing industry. With the beginning of the Cold War, the United States introduced the Dodge Plan of 1948 as an interim method of accelerating Japan's economic independence, while simultaneously repatriating American aid to prepare for potential war with Russia. Though the first two years after the Dodge Plan were ridden with depression and labor unrest, the Korean War of 1950 led to a boom in the Japanese economy. Japanese production increased by 70% within one year, a result of the United States removing the ban on Japanese military production for the sake of procuring material and labor resources during the Korean War. They also removed the ban in light of the rapidly intensifying Cold War tension, especially following the rise of the People's Republic of China in 1949.<sup>14</sup> The total payments Japan received during this period surpassed one billion USD.<sup>15</sup> Though this procurement boom faded within a

year, Japanese manufacturers continued to import technology from the west, modifying and integrating it into non-military industries in order to evolve low-cost mass production systems.<sup>16</sup> While Japan had yet to become the technology hub it is today, the ability of Japanese firms to adapt and apply foreign technology proved essential to the facilitation of growth and competitiveness of Japanese firms in the domestic and international arenas, ultimately setting the stage for the Economic Miracle.

### THE NEW BUSINESS MODEL - THE FORMATION OF KEIRETSU

In addition to evolving capital and financial investment strategies, the Japanese government at the start of the 1950s moved to reform its relationship with domestic companies. It encourages a more democratic relationship compared to the pre-war, close-knit structure between the government and the key industries held by zaibatsu or the large cartels including Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Sumitomo. The antimonopoly act obligated Japanese firms to adopt a new form of management; corporate managers would no longer inherit positions based on ancestry and lineage, but rather be promoted in a merit-based pattern. As expected, with more equal opportunity to rise in the company ranks, employees became more competitive and productive. This elevation of productivity was accompanied by better working conditions within firms compared to the pre-war period.

However, it was not a completely open system. Toward the end of the occupation of Japan, the MITI argued that with its small territorial size and lack of natural resources, Japan could not allow free competition to govern its markets. In order to maximize efficiency in the use of resources while reducing dependency on foreign providers, the MITI maintained that it was essential to limit competition to a small number of large companies. Accordingly, in April of 1952, the Antimonopoly Act was

amended to reduce restraints on certain cartels and relax restrictions on acts that only slightly affected competition between enterprises. The state backed the relaxation of antimonopoly laws and the subsequent establishment of keiretsu—massive business conglomerates with trading companies, industrialists, and banks as primary stock and shareholders. This modified government-industry relation, as compared to a much tighter pre-war connection, thus enabling postwar Japan to move forward in reconstructing the economy without wasting the assets that had been previously built.

Formation of keiretsu inspired extreme market competition, as companies (kaisha) gained financial and networking advantages to undercut both national and international rivals. In order to fulfill potential, the management style underwent two dramatic changes. The first, the 1955 introduction of the Life-long employment system (LLE; the author's acronym), served as a mechanism to enlarge the labor force. The LLE is an agreement between employers and employees to avoid firing or quitting from a company, even during times of economic depression, until the employee has reached retirement age.<sup>17</sup> Under the LLE, recent graduates received training and education to develop skills specific to the firms' needs. The second shift in management was the implementation of the senior-based wage system (nenkō joretsu); to be referred to as "nenkō System") under which employee wages are tied to the number of consecutive years they have worked in a company. The nenkō system and the LLE both embodied the Japanese cultural sense of loyalty and bonds, and employers were able to confidently establish and utilize teams to accomplish long-term goals.

### THE ASSET BUBBLE

#### RECENT HISTORY

The extraordinary development and expansion of the Japanese economy continued until the start of

the 90s, when the bursting of the asset price bubble occurred, severely and rapidly halting Japan's economic growth. The final five years of the 1980s were marked as a period of substantial real estate price inflation and intense economic activity. The bubble was largely the effect of efforts to stimulate the domestic demand of real estate agencies; at the height of the economy, corporations were rich in trade surpluses, incentivizing banks to offer them loans at extremely low interest rates, reaching 2.5% by 1987. High confidence in the Bank's monetary policy promoted aggressive speculation in real estate and domestic stock markets, resulting in a massive 15% annual increase in the value of real estate and financial assets. Responding to the trend of increasing land value, property owners began to use land as collateral when taking out inexpensive and readily available bank loans to buy more land or speculate the markets. This cycle of using overvalued land for stock loan collateral persisted, and the benchmark Nikkei 225 stock average reached a maximum of 39,000 in 1989.

By that time, the Bank of Japan had begun to express concern for the growing of the bubble and tightened its monetary policy.<sup>18</sup> Over the next two years, the Nikkei stock plummeted 61% to 15,000, resulting in the bursting of the real estate bubble and a loss of trillions of yen. Over the next two decades, the Japanese real estate market continued to deflate, reaching values as low as 10% of their 1989 climax by 2004. A close analysis of the Japanese Bubble conducted by economist Shigenori Shiratsuka reveals that although increases in asset price have positive impacts on the economy, with market downturn, these impacts are outweighed by unexpected correction of asset prices such as land. This is observed in the Japanese banks. Furthermore, in financial systems, banks serve as absorbers of short-term financial shocks, which is done via the accumulation of internal reserves. However, during the height of the Economic Miracle, banks had made themselves vulnerable to large financial shock by loaning billions of yen

under the assumption that the high value of land would ensure quick and large returns.<sup>19</sup> With the bursting of the bubble, they were unable to recover the money, and instead encountered a massive amount of loan defaults and plummeted asset values. Unlike the US, where the banks were protected under the pretext of them being too big to fail (as in the 2008 Congressional measures), Japan saw successive bankruptcy files by many banks, including some major ones.

## MANAGEMENT ISSUES

In the manufacturing industry, the increase in average income during the asset bubble invited increases in consumption of domestic goods and services. The rapidly growing economy pressured companies to meet simultaneously soaring demand. Productivity of Japanese workers grew at rates of 4-5% per year during the height of the bubble, and company executives even began to hire surplus of marginal employees under the pretense that the expanding economy would create future demand for them—a phenomenon referred to as in-company unemployment. These marginal employees remained on company payrolls without doing actual work. After the asset bubble began to deflate, citizens incurred significant financial losses. Consumption and, consequentially, the manufacturing of goods also fell. With the decreased role of banks and the decline in company profitability, skeptical investors demanded businesses to alter the LLE management practice and adopt performance-based wage systems. Particularly, the *nenkō* system guaranteed that employees would receive wage increases based on the number of years in the company, independent of if the employee had been promoted or if their performance merited a pay raise. Business executives began seeking methods to minimize labor costs, such as slashing employee wages. Average monthly wages fell from a maximum of 900,000 yen in 1993 to just above 700,000 in 2005.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, employers

dispatched workers to do community service work in exchange for keeping them on the payroll.<sup>21</sup> The most common form of labor cost reduction, though, has been the reluctance to hire new workers. In all cases, Japanese businesses have proven reluctant to reform the employment and wage systems.

## MODERN DAY JAPAN

### LLE AND NENKO SYSTEMS

The LLE and nenkō systems, once responsible for propelling the Japanese economy into the Economic Miracle, have proved to be efficient only under conditions of continued economic growth and expansion, much like the circumstances under which they were incorporated into managerial practices. Without these conditions, they reduce the flexibility of Japanese businesses to replace unproductive and high-waged senior workers, or to adapt in size to fit varying demand for products and labor that emerge in accordance with the introduction of technological advancements. Simply put, after the bursting of the economic bubble, Japanese businesses have entered a period of economic stagnation with a surplus of permanently-hired employees. Businesses' reluctance to reform management and wage systems have further hindered the recuperation of the Japanese economy. Slashing wages in lieu of laying off excess or low-performing workers has only reduced the consumption power of citizens and the demand for Japanese goods and services. Refusal to hire new workers as full-time has shut young Japanese citizens out of the labor force, forcing them to pursue irregular employment where possible. Furthermore, this has resulted in low worker productivity and competitiveness in Japanese firms, as senior workers are unmotivated by the threat of dismissal or being replaced by incoming, younger and more efficient workers.

### JAPAN'S LABOR SHORTAGE

The low labor morale as seen in the above section arrived hand in hand with an acute shortage of Japan's working population. Shortages in Japan's work force have risen primarily as a result of the nation's "super-aging," the phenomenon of long life expectancy coupled with low birthrates leading to a rapidly aging and declining population. The country's population of 127 million, 30% of which is above the age of 65, is predicted to fall by 33% over the next fifty years, and the percentage of elderly citizens is expected to rise to nearly 40%. Furthermore, as the average age of Japan's citizens increases, so does the age of its labor force, reducing overall labor efficiency as well as the total size of the labor force. In 2015, Japan's working-age population shrank to 77.2 million from a peak of 87.2 million in 1995, and is forecasted to fall further to 45.2 million by 2065.<sup>22</sup> With unemployment at 2.8%, the ratio of employment to job seekers at 1.59, and a reluctance to employ foreign workers, Japanese businesses have turned to the growing population of irregular workers in efforts to reduce labor costs while meeting fluctuating product and labor demand. Once at 15% in 1984, the percentage of irregular Japanese laborers has risen to 40%.<sup>23</sup>

Firms focused on long-term profit find value in the relative inexpensiveness by which temp-workers can be hired and fired without the need to provide the expensive benefits given to regular workers, resulting in a disparity between regular and irregular workers worse in Japan than in its peer developed countries. In a survey conducted by the Health Labor and Welfare Ministry regarding the diversification of employment forms, it was revealed that only 67.7% of the irregular workers polled were covered by unemployment insurance compared to 92% of full-time employees, only 54.7% versus 99.3% had public health insurance, and only 52% were in the public pension scheme for corporate workers.



## PROPOSED REFORM POLICY

### OVERVIEW

In September of 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced before the Council of Realization of Work-style Reform his nine facet action plan for the Realization of Work-style Reform—(1) providing equal pay for equal work, (2) increasing wages, (3) setting limits on overtime, (4) promoting reemployment to large capacity industries, (5) increasing flexibility of working styles, (6) facilitating equal gender and age employment opportunity, (7) providing elderly employment, (8) simplifying childcare and work balance, (9) addressing employment of foreign personnel—designed to revitalize the Japanese economy through changes in the country's labor laws.<sup>24</sup> By improving the working conditions, wages, and job security of irregular workers, the reform, Abe contends, will promote labor productivity and increase middle class economic consumption. This proposal, which was approved by the council in March of 2017, came timely as Abe received criticisms for his failure to address the issue of labor stagnation, an intricate pillar of his Abenomics campaign promise. In the remainder of this paper, I will closely examine this policy and assess its effects. ations which policy makers concerned about global security cannot afford to ignore.

### EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

At the crux of the administration's push for labor reform sits the notion of equal pay for equal work — a new wage system by which all employees, regular or irregular, are payed equally based on the quality of service provided.<sup>25</sup> This runs contrary to Japan's current *nenkō* system, under which labor remunerations and working conditions are determined by an employee's status as well as the number of consecutive years worked in a given company.<sup>26</sup> Under this system, temporary workers, which now compose 40% of Japan's labor force, have continued

to receive wages 40% less than those of regular workers performing the same tasks.<sup>27</sup> Proponents of Abe's proposal argue that a merit-based system will incentivize a larger percentage of the elderly to re-enter the labor force, a necessary outcome given the nation's steadily aging population.<sup>28</sup> The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry reported in a survey on diversification of employment forms that people 65 or older accounted for 11.9% of the irregular workers, up from 9.1% five years earlier.<sup>29</sup> A merit-based system, it is argued, will increase productivity through wage incentives, and indirectly increase the participation in the labor system.

The Asia-Pacific Journal reports that draft legislation derived from the 2016 proposal was introduced in 2017. The draft outlines employment equality in two clauses, both of which assume no difference between workers' job description or employment ranking and their quality of work produced. The first clause, "equal treatment," is relatively straightforward, forbidding employers from discriminating against irregular workers when providing benefits such as transportation allowances or condolence and sick leave. The second clause, referred to as "balanced treatment," prohibits any "unreasonable" discrimination in treatment of employees.<sup>30</sup> The journal highlights that the ambiguity of the phrasing has sparked concern, particularly within the National Confederation of Trade Unions, and many have called for its rephrasing to closer resemble that of the European Union directive on non-discrimination, which explicitly forbids any discrimination against workers that cannot be justified via objective means.<sup>31</sup> The implementation of a radically different, merit-based wage system must come along with appropriate methods of employee labor evaluation, a particularly challenging feat for Japan's diverse labor markets. Abe has emphasized employer-employee transparency, demanding that if a regular and irregular worker are treated differently, employers inform workers of all factors considered in

determining the differential treatment.<sup>32</sup>

However, the newly proposed system, expected to become effective in 2019, has received backlash from company executives, particularly in the service and construction industries where irregular workers are most prevalent. They argue that an increase in pay for irregular workers will increase the cost of labor, resulting in product price increases as well as a decrease in sales and profits.<sup>33</sup> In a survey conducted by Reuters Corporate, data revealed that as many as 41% of company executives expected an increase in labor cost while only 11% expected the reform to decrease the costs. Reuters further reported that a few firms have begun to invest in technology such as computer systems, robots, and artificial intelligence in attempts to replace the need for hiring more workers while simultaneously increasing productivity, though such drastic measures will likely prove difficult to implement.<sup>34</sup> This adversity to reformation is a common trend within the Japanese business world; companies view irregular workers as low-cost, easy to hire and fire manpower that they can use to fit their temporary needs.<sup>35</sup>

This is not the Abe administration's first attempt to improve the employment stability of irregular workers. A 2013 revision to Japan's labor contract law requires companies to accept fixed-contract employees who have worked for the same employer for five years (since the law's inception) as permanent employees if requested by the worker.<sup>36</sup> The revision, though it does require companies to convert the temporary workers into full-time employees, does not oblige employers to provide the newly converted employees with equal salaries or working conditions as regular full-time employees.<sup>37</sup> Even so, a survey conducted by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation four years later not only revealed that 80% of the polled fixed-contract workers were unaware of the revision, but also that 17% percent had been denied renewal of their worker contracts after the fourth year or had been subjected to limitations on the number of times

the contract could be renewed.<sup>38</sup> The reform was designed to increase job security, but as a consequence of firms' reluctance to hire new workers, it actually resulted in employment instability for many irregular workers.

## SETTING LIMITS ON OVERTIME

The second and most controversial impact of the Abe work-style reform is the proposed restriction of overtime to 100 hours a month. According to the Japanese Times, the previous revisions to the Labor Standards Act which limited the total overtime to 720 hours a year—60 hours a month—proved ineffective, as restrictions were readily relaxed during busy operation periods, allowing employees to work up to 100 hours.<sup>39</sup> The Japanese Times further explains that under the current Labor Standards Law, employees are limited to 40 work hours a week, with a maximum allowed overtime of 45 hours a month upon written agreement between a company and its labor union. However, if the company and labor union both agree to establish a "special clause," workers are permitted to exceed the 45-hour limits for up to six months per year. As there is no legal maximum beyond the 45, the amount of overtime for these six months technically has no limit.<sup>40</sup> Though Abe proclaims that the new cap will be more strictly enforced than previous attempts, the reform includes a clause for highly professional industries such as financial dealers or researchers, which exempts them from the 100-hour cap.<sup>41</sup>

There are two primary criticisms against the proposed 100-hour cap. The first, as expected, is the skepticism of enforcement. Though the council has maintained that violation of the limits will be punishable by law, opposing members claim that the cap serves only a formality that, like similar past revisions, will remain malleable, granting exceptions to businesses during particularly busy seasons.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, 2017 OECD statistics revealed that Japan ranks among the highest of

developed countries in terms of total annual working hours per worker—1,713 hours—even though the nation's average GDP per capita remains low at only \$42,700.<sup>43</sup> More alarming, GDP per hour worked, at only \$41.60 USD, ranked Japan far below the OECD average, and the worst among G7 countries.<sup>44</sup> This is mostly in the service industry where a combination of employment safety nets and white-collar work culture prevent employees from optimizing time and increasing efficiency.<sup>45</sup> This highlights that a high number of work hours is not indicative of high productivity, nor does it imply high wages. The 100-hour cap on overtime, for which employees are highly underpaid, is not guaranteed to increase productivity nor employee wages.

The second source of criticism, and by far the most pressing, is that the cap limit of 100 hours promotes an unhealthy work-life balance among workers. 100 hours of overtime is 20 hours more than what the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare considers safe for employees. According to the Ministry, any more than 80 hours a month of overtime poses a serious threat to the physical and mental wellbeing of employees, increasing their risk of *karōshi*, or death by overworking.<sup>46</sup> *Karōshi*, which emerged in the Japanese labor industry with the introduction of capitalism and associated competitiveness among employees, has become a national concern as hundreds of reports of suicides, heart attacks, and strokes linked to accumulation of fatigue and sleep deprivation are recorded each year.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, nearly a quarter of Japanese companies have confessed to employees working more than the 80-hour threshold each month. Though public opinion indicates a push for government intervention, several companies have already taken measures to reduce *karōshi* risks among their workers and provide more opportunities for work-life balance.<sup>48</sup> Major companies such as Toyota enforce strict limits on total annual overtime, while others enact more micro-scale policies, such as playing office recordings that urge staff to clock out.<sup>49</sup> Indeed,

government institutions have also introduced policies that encourage employee relaxation, like Premium Friday, which required employees to clock out at 3pm on the last Friday of each month.<sup>50</sup> However, the 2017 reform's call for a 100-hour limit appears counterproductive in that it allows companies to force workers to surpass the 80-hour threshold, increasing the risk of *karōshi*.

## CONCLUSION

The steadfast mentality of business executives who refuse to renounce the traditional management style tailored to a period of economic growth that has long passed has limited the flexibility of firms to adapt to changing international markets. Reluctance to repeal or at least modify the LLE or *nenkō* system has caused many businesses within “dead” industries to remain open in Japan, and restricted the nation's potential for competitive growth that exists in other capitalist countries. Refusal to fire employees stems from the Japanese culture and its value in trust. Socially, it is also reflective of Japan's resistance to change, which also appears in the hesitance to better accommodate irregular workers. The elderly executives and employees of modern day Japan began work during the age of the Economic Miracle. During that time, the actions of the labor force were motivated by a sense of unwavering devotion to one's company and the increasing global competitiveness of Japan. However, the mentality of Japanese youth is one that seeks a healthy work-life balance. In a survey conducted by the Health Labor and Welfare Ministry, roughly 40% of surveyed irregular workers admitted to choosing irregular employment for the flexibility and convenience. Accommodation of irregular workers through higher wages and better benefits is essential to maximizing labor participation of elderly citizens in a nation with an increasingly aged labor force. Businesses that fail to acknowledge and accommodate this growing labor trend will only prolong the economic stagnation and promote the labor shortages

by deterring the Japanese youth and elderly to enter or rejoin the work force.

It is also true that this stubbornness is facilitated by a lack of explicit and assertive enforced government policy. In suggesting the equal pay for equal work system, the government fails to explicitly require the removal and replacement of the current *nenkō* system. The irregular workers, unlike LLE contract employees, are not guaranteed employment. Thus, improving the conditions of irregular workers, ultimately increasing the labor input costs, will deter businesses from hiring them. Without removing the *nenkō* system, the government allows companies to continue relying on the already hired employees that are often sunk costs. The reform then, while it may improve the working conditions for irregular workers, will ultimately reduce the number of irregular workers that are hired, proving more detrimental in the long-run. In addition to its passive nature, characteristic of the Japanese culture, the government's leniency will also prevent the labor reform from effectively resolving the nation's labor issues. It can be seen though the current policy regarding employee overtime that the government's willingness to relax regulation for the sake of potential growth is quite high.

The labor reform's exemption of high professionals from the 100-hour overtime cap is another example of this flexibility. Such readiness to offer exemption reduces the legitimacy and efficacy of the reform. As the cap exceeds the 80-hour threshold, the potential for exemption and leniency from the government could perpetuate current issues of health within the Japanese labor industry. Moreover, the government fails to recognize that participation does not ensure productivity. If the reforms do encourage young, elder, and female workers to rejoin the work force, it does not necessarily follow that the production level, per-capita GDP, will also increase. Japanese men work some of the longest hours in the world, yet the nation's productivity levels still remain the lowest among the OECD and G7 members. The challenge

of low productivity stems from the over protection of Japanese firms by the government, as well as inefficient work culture in the Japanese service sector. Domestic industries, such as the retail and agricultural sectors, are protected from international competition by government policy and subsidizing, ultimately discouraging the need for the intense productivity that is normally driven by competition.

Ultimately, the Abe administration's proposed Work-style Reform, by improving the working conditions of irregular workers and enforcing an explicit limit on overtime for employees, possesses the potential to rectify the labor shortage and low productivity challenges currently diminishing the global competitiveness of Japan's labor industry and the growth of Japan's economy. However, the opportunity to achieve the reform's goals continues to be obstructed by the stubbornness of business executives and government passiveness. This beckons reform on a more fundamental level—cultural and educational reform. Otherwise, if the internalized value of labor ethics by Japanese workers and managers remains the same, a mere introduction of numerical labor regulation will not be effective.

## NOTES

1. (Adelstein 2018)
2. (Kojima, North and Weathers 2017)
3. Ibid.
4. (Otsubo 2007)
5. (Takada 1999)
6. (Otsubo 2007)
7. (Gady 2015)
8. (Takada 1999)
9. (Otsubo 2007)
10. Ibid.
11. (Otsubo 2007)
12. Is now the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)
13. (Takada 1999)
14. (Kanji 2011)
15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.
17. (Koshiro 1984)
18. (Shiratsuka 2005)
19. Ibid.
20. (Trade Economics 2018)
21. (Tabuchi 2009)
22. (Miyamoto 2016)
23. Includes temporary, part-time workers, and ex-retired re-employed workers
24. (Cabinet Public Relations Office 2016)
25. (Kojima, North and Weathers 2017)
26. (Miyamoto 2016)
27. Ibid.
28. (Kojima, North and Weathers 2017)
29. (The Japan Times 2016)
30. (Kojima, North and Weathers 2017)
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. (Kajimoto 2017)
34. Ibid.
35. (The Japan Times 2016)
36. (The Japan Times 2018)
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. (Yoshida 2017)
40. Ibid.
41. (Adelstein 2018)
42. (The Japan Times 2017)
43. (OECD 2018)
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45. (Cox 2017)
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47. (Okunuki 2016)
48. (Hoang 2012)
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50. (Inoue and Specia 2017)
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# The Dynamic Role of Chinese National Oil Companies in Central-Provincial Institutional Relationships

Coleman Lambo

## ABSTRACT

In its maturing economy, the People's Republic of China is restructuring its energy sector to accommodate consumption levels and sustain economic growth. At the heart of this reorganization are the Chinese national oil companies (NOCs) which have traditionally driven economic growth and undergirded both the state's and the Communist Party of China's legitimacy. As a result, NOCs have played a defining role in the institutional relationship between the central government and provincial governments. This paper seeks to assess the implications of the central-provincial relationship through utilizing Douglas North's theory of institutional change. This paper concludes that the central government is the superior actor and the provinces are the subordinate actors in guiding NOC actions. At the theoretical level, the paper also finds that policy stoppage can still occur in spite of the asymmetrical power dynamic in favor of the central government. This implies that there is inefficiency in the central-provincial relationship that could impede future policy implementation in the absence of institutional reforms.

## INTRODUCTION

Now more than ever, the dynamics of Chinese domestic politics are shaped by energy intensive industrialization. At the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid expansion of China's industrial output bolstered the power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its one party control of the national government. However, since the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 a "new normal" of slower economic growth has changed the landscape of domestic politics and forced the national government to reform its economic and political relationships.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of this economic transition is the Chinese energy sector- particularly oil. The Chinese energy industry is increasingly looking to resources abroad and alternatives to hydrocarbons to meet domestic energy consumption in the face of falling domestic oil production. Domestic production of crude oil in China was only able to meet 29.7% of domestic demand in 2018 and was surpassed by foreign assets controlled by Chinese national oil companies (NOCs).<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, in 2018, China was responsible for over half of the world's one million electric car sales and has government backing to reach seven million electric cars in the country by

2025 as one of its green initiatives.<sup>3</sup> Ostensibly, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is preparing to move away from the industry that was integral to its economic climb after the Communist Revolution. For the immediate future, oil is going to continue to be a key societal commodity, but the notion of the end of the hydrocarbon era begs the question of how the oil industry affects the institutions of the society it powers?

When considering the status of China's domestic oil industry, the relevant oil producers and governmental bodies need to be taken into account. Specifically, national oil company is going to be primarily referring to the three largest state-owned oil companies in China: the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Sinopec, and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). For simplicity, the national government which includes the relevant governmental bodies and the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be referred to as the central government. Lastly, the Provincial governments are essential to understanding the development and current implications of Chinese NOCs because this is the level of government charged with implementing policy and managing the economy to a far greater extent than the central government.



The primary point of interest in this paper is crystallizing the institutional relationship between the provincial governments and the central government because it is only in conjunction that energy and economic policies can be fully effective. After establishing the institutional central-provincial relationship, the role of Chinese NOCs relative to this institutional linkage will be assessed.

In order to determine the role of Chinese national oil companies in the context of central-provincial Government relations, this paper will use the theory of institutional change proposed by Douglas C. North. North's theory rests upon the bidirectional relationship between institutions and organizations within a society. An institution is defined in this context as a formal or informal "humanly devised constraint" that "structures human exchange[s]." <sup>4</sup> In turn, an organization is outlined as simply as "groups of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives." <sup>5</sup> The loose parameters for an organization allow political, economic, and social bodies to all fall under the structure of North's theory.

The pith of the institutional change theory lies in the bidirectional capacity for institutions and organizations to alter each other. Institutions make up the framework of a society's operations and control the "rules of the game" by which organizations function under. This denotes that institutional structures also dictate the incentive system through which organizations define their objectives and determine the configuration of their operations. <sup>6</sup> Concurrent with these influences, organizations can gradually change established institutions at the margins through mobilizing and directing resources to nudge the course of the society in a beneficial direction. <sup>7</sup> The expected benefits are a key caveat to the organization's ability to change a society's institutions. Without expected benefits, the organization is better off expending resources in the status quo and reap a return on investment.

To contextualize this idea of the bidirectional

nature of institutions and organizations, institutional theory can be applied to the role of the oil industry during the incipience of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The oil industry was a key economic factor in Maoist China and supported the Communist and state-centric institutions of the time. The industry was one of the main non-agrarian based sources of revenue for the state and also provided domestic energy which enabled the maintenance of autarky in China's closed planned economy to be made more feasible. The epitome of the oil industry's influence was the Daqing oil field which was discovered ten years after the establishment of the PRC. The Daqing field Oilfield Management Bureau alone provided the largest financial payments to the state of any industrial enterprise by the 1960s and provided no less than 3% of total state revenue during the 1980s. <sup>8</sup> Concurrently, the political institutions installed at the beginning of the PRC defined the operations of Chinese oil fields. Chinese oil fields were managed by Oilfield Management Bureaus which were under the supervision of Petroleum Ministers of the Petroleum Ministry (for upstream affairs) and the Petrochemical Ministry (for downstream). <sup>9</sup> As a result of this integration between Chinese oil enterprises and the state, oil was produced with the goal of providing public services which included educational, medical, transportation, research, design services, and other public goods in addition to energy provision. <sup>10</sup> While revenue generation and production efficiency were important considerations, they were not the primary goals of Chinese oil production because of the conditions provided by collectivist institutions. The incentive system was molded to prioritize public welfare and supporting the state above corporate growth and development.

This paper utilizes the institutional change theory because the framework of this model allows for multiple institutions to be analyzed at the same time and also offers the optimal level of analysis for the case study of the influence of Chinese national oil

companies (NOCs) on the institutional relationships between provincial governments and the national government. The institutional relationship between the two government actors simply needs to be established and then the changes or lack thereof caused by NOCs can be analyzed.

Competing theories commonly used for analyzing the relationship between Chinese NOCs and the central government include the corporate governance theory and the principal-agent theory. The corporate governance theory is primarily concerned with the ownership structure of organizations in the context of China is often applied to determine the efficiency of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs).<sup>11</sup> This theory is effective in determining the market efficiency of firms because it assesses the difference in managerial incentives between firm managers and government supervisors.<sup>12</sup> However, the institutional change theory is still preferable because the corporate governance theory lacks the ability to robustly reconcile multiple actors that are not connected in a linear hierarchical structure. Additionally, the theory would need to account for a gradient in the level of corporatization that individual Chinese NOCs have reached. For example, CNCP and Sinopec have struggled to streamline their workforce and social programs which hinder their transition to a more corporatized firm while CNOOC has been more able to resemble a corporation due to their smaller initial workforce and remote drilling locations off-shore.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, the focus on market efficiency ignores the existence of embedded institutional incentives that offer benefits for non-efficient actions.

The principal-agent theory is also primarily an economic theory that emerged during the 1970s and relies on the structure of a principal actor and a subordinate agent. The main relationship in this model is defined by a principal actor delegating limited decision-making powers to the agent with the assumption that the agent will then uphold the specific goals of the principal actor.<sup>14</sup> The goal of this

model is to determine decision making factors and the extent of principal-agent cooperation. However, this theory is not preferable to the institutional change theory because of several key reasons. Similar to the incompatibility of the corporate governance theory with this paper's research question, the principal-agent theory is built to analyze two distinct actors or groups in a hierarchical structure. Moreover, the principal-agent theory is not ideal because of the historical roots of Chinese NOCs. Unlike the typical formation of national oil companies, Chinese NOCs are a product of the separation of industries and the government rather than the nationalization of the industry. Therefore, the divide between the role of the principal actor and the agent is imprecise because of the political capital that Chinese NOC officials possess within the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>15</sup> As a result, oil companies such as CNCP, Sinopec, and CNOOC have remained largely autonomous since their creation preventing Chinese NOCs to be categorized as simply agents of the central government.

Douglas North's institutional change theory is relatively the optimal framework to apply to this analysis of Chinese NOC's influence on central-provincial relations; nonetheless, there are flaws in the model that need to be made lucid before its application. This paper seeks to avoid the threat of institutional determinism and is cognizant to exogenous factors that can influence central-provincial relations as well as the economic and political impacts that derive from the institutions involved.<sup>16</sup>

## DISCUSSION

To begin this analysis, we need to establish the institutional bonds between the provincial governments and the central government before we can qualify the role of Chinese NOCs. China has undergone dynamic political changes nationally since the unification of the Chinese heartland over two thousand years ago under Qin Shihuangdi.<sup>17</sup> However, one of the enduring facets of Chinese society is the

“deep structures of providence and county.”<sup>18</sup> Counties in the People’s Republic of China still resemble the country-level units that were founded during the Qin and their complementary territorial administrations—providences, have also endured since the Yuan Dynasty. This, despite efforts that continue to this day to centralize the expansive country, providences have retained a local identity and political norms within the broader national context.<sup>19</sup>

Despite their historic individuality, provincial governments are constitutionally weak and are subject to direct supervision and political control by the central government. Specifically, provincial leadership is selected by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through its nomenklatura system. The nomenklatura system is a selection mechanism that allows the CCP to maintain its political monopoly in Chinese politics by selecting loyal and competent members to key political positions or dismissing disruptive members.<sup>20</sup> The system was formalized in 1955 by the CCP and mimicked the Soviet Union’s established nomenklatura system.<sup>21</sup> The nomenklatura system is essentially a political institution that the central government utilizes to align the incentive structure of politics with the party’s interests. Admittance to the party is accompanied with a myriad of personal monetary and social benefits which promotes personal conformity to party norms and professionally upholding party interests.<sup>22</sup>

This selection system is critical in the context of maintaining national cohesion because control over the provincial governments is a necessary prerequisite to implementing and meeting national policy objectives.<sup>23</sup> The provincial governments have historically adhered to national directives but have faltered when there is a divergence when a conflict of interest arises. This localism, or the sacrificing of central policies in favor of local interests, can only result in the downward political mobility for provincial officials if not political termination.<sup>24</sup> Despite the incentivized structure created by the

nomenklatura system, the sub-regional pluralism politically and economically still persist at the provincial level.<sup>25</sup>

Henan providence is one clear case example of this deviation from national policy. Henan Providence was considered one of the model providences during the reign of Mao as it fully integrated the nation socialist model of development into its local economy, policies, and institutions.<sup>26</sup> However, soon after when the central government sought to reform the Chinese economy and transition it to be more market-oriented under Deng Xiaoping, the Henan providence continued on its egalitarian trajectory and deviated from the reformists. A lack of political will to purge Maoist loyal officials and implement central policies caused the Chinese Communist Party to replace the Henan leadership in full in 1978.<sup>27</sup> Despite exercising autarchic political action against Henan leadership and assiduously pushing the providence towards structural reform, the providence continued to pursue its own course. Region-specific policies remained prioritized above nationally designated initiatives throughout the reform era.<sup>28</sup>

Henan’s embrace of regionalism is not a singular event. A similar reluctance to market reforms that were initiated by Deng Xiaoping can be witnessed in Heilongjiang providence and Yunnan providence for example.<sup>29</sup> This phenomenon of provincial prioritization is termed as “locally-fragmented authoritarianism” and is only exasperated by centrifugal economic forces within China.<sup>30</sup>

This tendency towards regionally-oriented policy has not gone unnoticed by the central government. While the cited providences of Henan, Heilongjiang, and Yunnan resisted Central initiatives, the implementation of market reformation in fact granted providences a large amount of latitude in terms of the how to meet national goals of privatization and economic performance. The movement towards a market economy came through the decentralization of economic powers during the 11th Central

Committee Third Plenum in 1978.<sup>31</sup> With the relaxation of government control, local governments were allowed to pursue specialized economic policies without pushback or recourse from Beijing. In place of national initiatives, providences embraced the mindset of “local state corporatism” which was an interventionist style of small-scale economic development. Local development oriented toward revenue maximization, supported by the central government reforming its fiscal system to allow marginal revenue to remain in provincial coffers.<sup>32</sup>

The PRC at the national level experienced unprecedented growth in the coming decades as a result of decentralization and subsequently the integration with the world market. However, this economic success was distributed unequally. The combination of decentralization and internationalization of Chinese markets produced provincial winners and losers.<sup>33</sup> Provincial performance varied due to comparative advantages between territories, resource distribution, and the handling of economic policies during the transition an open market, but a clear regional disparity was produced between the coastal, central, and western region.<sup>34</sup>

The coastal providences on balance “won” in terms of economic development and overall wealth, followed by the central, and then lastly the western providences. Between 1978-1990 the average trade-to-GDP ratio for coastal providences was 15.7% and would swell to an average of 46% between 1991-2004. In contrast, the entirety of inland China benefited from an average trade-to-GDP ratio share of 3.6% and then later grew to reach 9.8%.<sup>35</sup> To compound this economic disparity, coastal provinces were the primary target of foreign direct investment due to their accessibility (FDI).<sup>36</sup> Lastly, the ability for the central government to off-set these growth disparities was limited by fiscal decentralization and later fiscal contraction during the 1980s which caused the government budgetary revenue as a total share of GDP to drop from 31.2%

in 1978 to a mere 12.6% in 1993.<sup>37</sup>

The development of these economic divides in China was considered a required stepping stone in the overarching economic ascent towards national prosperity. On his tour of Southern China in 1992, Deng Xiaoping emphasized the need for developing Coastal providences initially to later leverage their wealth to elevate the nation as a whole.<sup>38</sup> This economic strategy was institutionalized through coastal biases in China’s 5-year plans from the fifth plan in 1976 until the seventh 5-year plan.<sup>39</sup>

The macroeconomic growth that the Chinese economy experienced garnered legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party during the reform era, but simultaneously produced a centrifugal force that threatened national integrity. The unbalanced economic development among providences produced under-developed providences which resented the coastal bias institutionalized by the party and high developed providences that utilized their economic weight to assert more autonomy.<sup>40</sup> Currently, allowing for further inequality between the coastal providences and inland China will result negatively on economic growth in the short, middle, and long term.<sup>41</sup> The persistence of negative economic effects as a result of one-sided economic planning policy will only further add pressure on the central government’s relationship with marginalized providences. In the wake of providences becoming relatively weaker, the “winner” from decentralization and international trade have incentivized to have to disassociate from the economic drag of poor performing provincial counterparts. As a result, heighten inequality in the setting of economic liberalization in China could push subnational entities such as providences to disassociate from the PRC in order to maximize their economic potential.<sup>42</sup> In response to these centrifugal forces that threaten the monopoly control of CCP and the national integrity of the country, the central government has notably utilized its financial, fiscal, and political institutions to reconsolidate domestic political power.

Financially, the central government in recent years has been employing its banking resources to facilitate growth and structural development in the periphery of China.<sup>43</sup> Chinese banks, with a mix of western banking practices with Chinese state control, have been directed to redouble investments in rural and underdeveloped areas in China. Specifically, the State Council has institutionalized vertical control of the “Big Four” banks: the Bank of China, (BOC), the China Construction Bank (CCB), the Agricultural Bank of China (ABC) and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).<sup>44</sup> One of the key aspects of this financial investment is in regards to provincially operated SOEs. The financing of provincial start-up SOEs aims to create or stimulate markets in sluggish local economies. Since the fiscal and taxation reforms of 1994 under Premier Zhu Rongji, local governments have been unable to run deficits or sell local bonds. This constricts the available funds that can be used to finance local SOEs; a void that Chinese banks, under the direction of the central government, and the China Developmental Bank have sought to fill.<sup>45</sup> Specifically, Chinese financial institutions are able to buy bad loans off of SOEs and minimize their investment risk. This, in turn, allows them to remain in play in the local economy despite gross inefficiencies or misallocation of resources.<sup>46</sup>

Fiscal institutions are another avenue for the central government to direct resources to the weakest areas of the country and to maintain national control through an interregional distribution of state revenue. As part of the taxation reforms in 1993, there was a dramatic rearrangement of revenue collection causing a significant amount of locality revenue to be redirected to the central government. As a result, locality revenue fell from a share of 78% in 1993 to 45% in 2002.<sup>47</sup> This influx of centralized revenue was not collected solely for the purpose of domestic development but greatly contributed to the budget available for interregional distribution to equalize the provincial economic disparities. This refocusing

on central and western China is not only visible in specific policy actions but also in China’s current 5-year plan. One key focus is holistic coordinated development supported by government initiatives such as “urbanization, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei megaregion, the Yangtze Economic Belt initiative, and the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative.”<sup>48</sup> These initiatives seek to expand economic opportunities in inner China through greater connectivity with have simultaneously given better access to jobs and housing as well as ease the flow of capital and business to more remote areas. This connectivity will have the overall effect of incorporating traditionally isolated markets into the wider domestic demand for goods and investment.<sup>49</sup>

The final reaction by the central government in the face of centrifugal forces is tightening political control over subnational governments which are being empowered by their pecuniary advantage. The most noteworthy shift in maintaining political preeminence is the targeting of new bases of support for the party. For the past two decades, party recruitment has been expanding around the developing educated and urban middle-class Chinese citizen and the rising entrepreneurs.<sup>50</sup> This inclusion of a wider audience into the party runs the risk of possibly disrupting the taut discipline in the party ranks. Therefore, as a precaution, the party has coupled with recruitment effort with favorable salary benefits and deep integration of new members into the nomenklatura system to give the party more power over rising Chinese executives.<sup>51</sup> The nomenklatura system provides the CCP with power over an individual’s career prospects. However, Chinese business leaders possess a significant amount of clout within the party and are not simply puppets of the party. Leaders within large SOEs or strategic industries such as petroleum, electricity production, steel, weaponry, or automobiles, for example, already possess a higher status than many established party members and CEO’s of these companies are even given vice-

minister or minister status.<sup>52</sup> The level of CEO influence can be seen by the obstruction of regulatory agencies that would cut into major SOE profits; a prime example being the defanging of the National Energy Administration (NEA) which was charged with monitoring Chinese NOCs.<sup>53</sup> The implication of this tightening of political ties is to recognize that Chinese NOCs officials would further move towards the central government's agenda not only because of the incentives but also because of the possible repercussions of being pushed out by new recruits.

The institutional relationship between provincial governments and the central government can be distilled into two primary branches before bring in the implications of Chinese NOCs; there is the central government's political control over local politics through the nomenklatura system and there are several economic institutions that facilitate economic development in the context of economic decentralization. These institutions are all currently weathering economic and political centrifugal forces which are causing a fissiparous situation on the subnational scale.

Now that the bilateral relationship between provincial and the central government is established, we can turn to the role of Chinese national oil companies in this institutional bridge between governments. Since their inception, Chinese NOCs have been regarded as largely autonomous organizations despite their connection to the state. The NOCs are subject to government-mandated reorganization such as when CNCP was directed to exchange upstream assets for part of Sinopec's downstream refineries in 1998 to become vertically competitive with one another.<sup>54</sup> However, the Chinese state does not have omnipotent control over the NOCs. Chinese NOCs have been free from direct central government control since the Petroleum Ministry and Petrochemical Ministry was stripped of their regulatory powers. The Ministries were then downgraded to an Energy Bureau to oversee

energy production and the state assumed an indirect management tactic.<sup>55</sup>

Recentralization of the Chinese oil industry has been attempted with the creation of the National Energy Leading Group (NELG) in 2005; however, the group was primarily a research and advisory panel with no direct authority over policy-making or law enforcement. Instead of strengthening the position of the central government, the NELG caused fractionalization in energy regulation and bureaucratic overlap.<sup>56</sup> The ineffective nature of the NELG prompted its replacement which was through promoting the Energy Bureau to the level of vice-ministerial rank and renamed the National Energy Administration (NEA). Pushback from the Chinese NOCs prevented the newly created regulatory organ to possess any actionable power like its predecessor.<sup>57</sup> As a result, the NEA has made a minimal impact on the process of energy policy and the regulation of Chinese oil giants. In the aftermath of the NEA, which is still functioning today, and the hazard of energy security the National Energy Commission (NEC) was created in 2010 to coordinate relevant actors and draft strategic energy security plans such as seeking hydrocarbon and other energy assets abroad. The NEC is not a regulator organ and has no direct control over Chinese NOCs; however, the commission's agenda has been embraced by Chinese NOCs nonetheless.<sup>58</sup> The presence of two high ranking Politburo members in the commission marks the clout that the commission possesses and the represent large potential political repercussions if Chinese NOCs pushback.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, Chinese NOCs are well-poised to create institution change because of their access to high levels of capital, their political ties to the CCP, and their relatively autonomous position within the Chinese political-economic sphere. However, while formal institutional constraints are not been able to direct the actions of Chinese NOCs, the nomenklatura system allows the CCP to retain

informal control over the organizations.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Chinese NOCs are not agents that represent the central government, but rather that Chinese NOCs have no incentive to go directly against CCP's interests. In other words, the objectives of the Chinese NOCs are being defined by the incentive structure that Chinese institutions provide them.

Executives in CNCP, Sinopec, and CNOOC strategically concentrate their resources and political capital on issues that are of the utmost importance. Namely, the prevention of detrimental institutions such as energy regulatory organs.<sup>61</sup> This institution threatens not only the marginal revenue that NOCs earn by possibly raising production standards, but would also open the door for inquiries on undeclared profits in overseas oil and asset sales.<sup>62</sup> This ability to gain profits without making payments to the government is a result of Chinese financial institutions. During the 1994 tax reform, the State Council Ruled that SOEs were no longer required to remit their after-tax profits to the government. Essentially, opening the door for companies to hoard funds through not paying their dividend.<sup>63</sup>

The political institution of the nomenklatura and the ability to generate untaxed revenue both create an incentive structure that neither promotes market efficiency for Chinese NOCs nor fosters for institutional change because there would be no clear return on investment.

When provincial government systems are introduced to this amalgam, conflict as a result of divergence interests arise. Because of their status as a state-owned enterprise, Chinese NOCs are given administrative monopolies over the hydrocarbon and natural gas infrastructure in China.<sup>64</sup> This structural lack of plurality in the oil industry eliminates the provincial government and their local energy supplier from having bargaining power during negotiations or consultations with Chinese NOC representatives.<sup>65</sup> To compound this issue, providences do not have access to a stable and predictable legal framework

to take recourse against national oil companies due to judiciaries being appointed through the nomenklatura system.<sup>66</sup> This causes there to not be an independent mechanism to settle disputes between two CCP entities. Therefore, there is no consistent accountability for negative externalities produced by national oil companies such as environmental or ecological damage because of a lack of political and legal support for the providences.

Chinese NOCs have few if any incentives to take on economic costs in order to benefit provincial territories and to produce institutional change there needs to be an actor investing in change at the margins.<sup>67</sup> In result, there is a tri-lateral conflict of interest and an overall exasperation of already strained relationships. This is an inefficient point of operating for all three actors. Chinese NOCs seek to maximize profits by minimizing costs irrespective of the externality. The central government will support ventures that enhance energy security or regional development but also hope to quell disgruntled citizens. Lastly, the providences will seek legal recourse to be able to cover costs incurred but at the end of the day provide the needed energy. As it stands, "China's decentralization has resulted in increased competition and conflict between local government and central government, and between corporate headquarters and local departments and subsidiaries."<sup>68</sup> The political-institutional provincial-center relationship has evolved to where the central government is dominant with its nomenklatura system while the provincial government can resist and deviate from central government mandates with a limited latitude. Therefore, until the incentive system changes, there is unlikely going to be an institutional change or a successful provincial-led campaign.

Politically, the Chinese national oil companies do not interfere with the political goals of the central government but will be willing to exploit providences with either the support or the absence of objection by the central government as according to the theory

of institutional change. In terms of the nomenklatura system, the Chinese NOCs will not push for institutional reform because they benefit from having high ranking CCP officials in strategic positions and will stand lose substantially if the CCP decides to purge the leadership of the Chinese NOCs.<sup>69</sup>

Ostensibly, Chinese NOCs do not cooperate well with provincial governments but this is in the context of energy infrastructure and negative externality management. Chinese NOCs do promote institutional change in favor of provincial governments when they invest in the local economy. As mentioned before, after the national tax reform of 1994, provincial governments suffered a serious fiscal blow with the central government absorbing a higher percentage of the tax revenue.<sup>70</sup> In the absence of local property taxes, many provincial governments had few streams of revenue. This is where local oil production subsidiaries and oilfield companies were inclined to contribute to the local government and grant the local government some resources to compensate for the loss.<sup>71</sup> While this is not support of localism, it is providing the provincial government with some economic autonomy which is often a prerequisite for political autonomy or locally-fragmented authoritarianism policies.

The central government's strategic investment in developing inner Chinese providences is composed of financial institutional aid, fiscal interregional distribution, and large coordinated government initiatives. The role of Chinese NOCs in these interweaving institutions is to follow the road already carved by these institutions because it offers the least resistance and maximum profitability.

Chinese NOCs have an extensive working history with the PRC's financial and fiscal institutions. In recent year, financial institutions such the China Development Bank have secured massive loans with mineral rich nations with repayment in the form of oil-for-payment energy loans. Between 2009 and 2011 alone, the CDB has extended over \$75 billion worth

of credit with countries ranging from Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela to Russia and Turkmenistan to secure future petroleum sales to CNPC.<sup>72</sup> This result is essentially a feedback loop with a large portion of the loan being used to purchase refinery technology, training, pipelines, or exploratory equipment from Chinese NOCs.<sup>73</sup> A similar incentive is present in the development of inner Chinese providences and their previously inaccessible markets.

The central government has created the conditions to naturally incentivize Chinese NOCs to construct energy infrastructure. Not only does this open the way for monetary gains from government sponsored bank loans but also foreign direct investment (FDI) for Chinese NOCs. At the beginning of 2017, Chinese NOCs including CNCP, Sinopec, and CNOOC have sought to augment private investment through mixed-ownership investment.<sup>74</sup> New investment is critical for NOCs to receive in order to remain competitive with the resource at the disposal of international oil companies.<sup>75</sup> The development of not only the local economies in inner China but also grand scale projects that require heavy construction and energy infrastructure will attract Chinese NOCs as development continues and foreign and domestic investment becomes more available.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Chinese domestic politics is experiencing increasingly disorderly in the contemporary global economic environment. At the heart of this intersection of domestic politics and economics development are the institutions created around Chinese NOCs. Utilizing Douglas North's institutional change theory, it becomes clear that the role of Chinese national oil companies is dependent on the incentive structure that the central-provincial institutions constitutes. Regarding the NOCs' role in the political-economic institutional relationship, the NOCs aligned themselves closely with the central government because the nomenklatura system grants



the central government exclusive power over the Chinese NOCs. In contrast, provincial governments were the subordinate actors due to the institutional constraints and were less desirable to align with. This is not to say that they are not totally subordinate to the central government. Chinese domestic politics has a deep history of provincial identity and localism which is amplified in the context of regional oil production. However, since the 1950s, the institutional central-provincial relationship was slanted in favor of the central government and naturally caused the NOCs to prefer the central government. As for the economic relationship between the provinces and the central government, there was a clear disparity in economic development between provincial territories which is masked by rapid national growth. This led to the rise of centrifugal forces that socially and economically challenged the integrity of the state and the power of the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, the institution relationship between the two levels of governing was based on the premise of stabilization. The tightening of political ties clearly would bring Chinese NOC officials closer to the Communist Party again because of the incentive system. Concurrently, the economic institutions being utilized: financial, fiscal, and the 5-year plans were all aimed at equalizing the relative wealth and power of the provinces in order to maintain the overall structure of government. The result of these different veins was an inevitable convergence of Chinese NOC interests with Party interests due to financial incentives and investment opportunity.

The most revealing finding from this institutional theory analysis was the conflict of interests among the central government, the provincial governments, and the NOCs over the issue of burden shifting. It was an inefficient point with a negative result for all actors involved. No one actor could resolve the issue on their own. This demonstrates the limitation of this mode of analysis. When there is an intersection of competing institutions, even if one is a dominant set of

institutions that primarily guides the organization, an inefficient point can still arise. Therefore, institutional reassessment needs to occur in conjunction with reformations to organizations in order to avoid inefficient points of divergence.

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# Early German Romanticism and Neo-Confucianism: Exploring Parallel Developmental Patterns in Man's Search for Oneness

Laura Li

## ABSTRACT

Scholars often discuss the dichotomy of Eastern and Western intellectual thoughts as two traditions in conflict or under the influence of the other. Although power and influence is an essential part of East-West relations, to assume that all similarities between the two schools of thoughts are results of power imbalances is to miss the wider image, which is that cultures can arrive at analogous beliefs independently. This notion is extremely important because it indicates the universality of the experiences of men. The two intellectual traditions this paper focuses on are the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism and German Romanticism. Although they originate from opposite ends of the world, both schools of thoughts emerged from thinkers' discontent with their contemporaries' fixation on scientific inquiries. As these Chinese and German intellectuals traced the history of men, they observed human beings and nature began as one. Gradually, men become more preoccupied with reason and scientific discoveries, which leads them to break away from nature and enter into a state of confusion and alienation. To overcome this quandary, men must learn to unify their rational and emotional selves and strive to become one with nature again.

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## INTRODUCTION

For most of history, the East and the West have been divided intellectually. They communicated through commercial activities, trading, buying and selling material goods that they fancied, but neither side obtained a thorough understanding of each other beyond their mutual desire for commodities. It was not until the last couple of centuries, as European nations established colonies in Asia, that Easterners and Westerners grew interested in the scholarly pursuits of one another.

Not only did scholars from both sides of the hemisphere closely study translated texts that flooded into their intellectual circles, but they were also profoundly inspired by these imported ideas. The prominent late-Qing reformer and political thinker, Kang Youwei, for example, drew heavily from Social Darwinism as he diagnosed the problems China was facing and developed his grand Utopian plan in One-World Philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, in Europe, Austrian-born Israeli Jewish existentialist philosopher Martin Buber translated and made commentaries on Zhuangzi before publishing *Ich und Du*. His extensive studies of Chinese texts contributed greatly

to his formulation of the dialogical principle.<sup>2</sup>

As modern historians analyze the histories of Eastern and Western thought, they often see the disparities and influences before any other qualities. Thus, literatures on the two frameworks of thoughts become narratives of either two cultures in conflict or one culture under the hegemony of another. Somehow, power, particularly the imbalance of power, remains an indispensable element of the dialogue when people try to make sense of the relations between the East and the West.

However, if scholars solely concentrate on how knowledge is used to establish dominance of one culture over another, they will be missing the broader perception, which is that respective civilizations are capable of developing similar systems of thoughts and arrive at analogous conclusions independently. This is a powerful insight because it suggests that there is something catholic about the experiences of men and that as people try to make sense of their existence on Earth, more often than not, they arrive at the strikingly similar conclusions even when they are completely unaware of the lives of those whom they are alienated from.

At the heart of this discourse, there are two specific schools of thought that deserve special attention: early German Romanticism and the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism.

Early German Romanticism, first emerged in late 18th century Jena, was grounded on men's confusion and unhappiness at their current state of being. As writers and thinkers traced back to the root of their plight, they realized that the ultimate source of their misery was their development from the state of naïveté to the state of objectivity, which resulted in their detachment from nature. To cure the sense of alienation they feel, people must regain that sense of oneness with the world. This call for a return to innocence, this yearning for the transcendental have made profound impacts on the Western school of thought, but is shared by a lesser known, but equally powerful intellectual movement, the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism. Similar to Early German Romanticism, this intellectual movement also stemmed from scholars' concern over the alienation men feels toward the outside world and other men. To resolve this crisis, Chinese intellectuals suggested reinterpretations of the Confucian Classics.

Spotlighting the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism is essential because the German and Chinese traditions could not have emerged from more distinctive origins, yet they both professed the thinkers' discontent with their contemporaries' devotion to scientific inquiries, which they believed engendered the fragmentation of men and their relationship with nature. Moreover, German Romanticism and the Lu-Wang School reflected how men's pursuit of unity is universal. From their common belief in the goodness of mankind and their shared vision of the eventual stage of ideal humanity, the two intellectual movements propel modern scholars to rethink human progress as not simply multicultural exchanges comprised of series of actions and reactions, but also two parallel lines that have similar curves and turns. These curves and turns

illuminate the richness, fluidity, and flexibility of both German and Chinese thought.

## 18TH CENTURY GERMANY

In the late 18th century Germany, there was a group of writers, poets, and philosophers who were in a similar state of crisis that Lu and Wang were in when they recognized how detached the predominant system of thought was from the actual experiences of human beings, and both were similarly concerned about the problems these values engendered when men were forced to conform to these codes of behavior. Centered around the city of Jena, these closely-connected intellectuals engaged in regular correspondences, forming the early German Romanticism movement. In particular, Friedrich Schiller and his admirer Friedrich von Hardenberg, more commonly known as Novalis, concentrated on addressing the history of mankind in order to find the cause of the alienation and detachment their contemporaries felt. Sharing similar views with Lu and Wang, they concluded men have fallen, losing the unity they once had with nature. In order to regain their morality and become happy and content individuals, they must strive to regain that sense of unity, reaching an utopian vision of the ideal stage of the world.

Friedrich Schiller was born in 1759 in the Duchy of Württemberg. His father served as a lieutenant in the Wurttemberg military who valued education.<sup>3</sup> Although the family moved around many times, Schiller was still able to obtain a decent education as a child. After meeting Schiller in theater, Duke Karl Eugen of Württemberg was impressed by the young man and insisted that Schiller become a student at the newly established military school Pflanzschule.<sup>4</sup> Schiller first attended an established military school Pflanzschule, studying military medicine, but he quickly realized that he was not interested in becoming a medical doctor. Instead, he wanted to pursue poetry. So, he deserted the military

and became a freelance writer in the mid-1780s.<sup>5</sup> He traveled to Mannheim and Dresden, writing dramas of rebellion against the social and political order. The works he produced at this time reflected his own personal beliefs as a revolutionary artist. His resistance against established political forms and literary traditions encouraged his contemporaries to profess the same kind of individual self-assertion against any kind of repressions. In fact, after the eruption of the French Revolution, the newly formed French government recognized Schiller for his alignment with their ideology and presented him with honorary citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

In the late 1780s, Schiller became acquainted with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe through common friends.<sup>7</sup> Although Goethe initially regarded Schiller and his radical tendencies with wariness, the two men would grow to be close companions later on. In 1789, on Goethe's recommendation, Schiller became a professor of History in the University of Jena.<sup>8</sup> The next couple years would be crucial for him, for it was precisely during the early 1790s that Schiller moved away from his literary pursuits and shifted his focus toward Kantianism.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, in 1793, the French Revolution reached its most intense stage of mass murder and bloodshed, the Reign of Terror, which truly horrified Schiller. What was once an embodiment of freedom and human expression transformed into a justification of ruthless murders of innocent human beings. Sickened by the backlash of radical rationalism, he devoted his energy and time into his battle against ancient and modern savagery and brutality. His "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man" and "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" articulate exactly his disappointment in mankind.

In the "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," Schiller addresses the question of whether the history of man is a history of progression. Adhering to the Kantian system, Schiller acknowledges that man is indeed progressing. He has moved from his

natural state, a state in which he allows nature to act for him, as he is still incapable of free intelligence, to a state where he has learned to "think for himself."<sup>10</sup> However, Schiller is quick to point out that as human beings become enlightened, finding truth through technical forms becomes their primary concern. They bind "spontaneous nature" into fetters of rule, "tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words."<sup>11</sup> The result is people valuing utility and gratification of their material needs above all else, thus becoming alienated and fragmented.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, art loses its place in people's lives. For Schiller, this development of events is horrendous because people are lacking moral education that art can provide, so in their search for political freedom, they act violently and brutishly, as they have shown in the French Revolution. What people need is not to repress their natural instincts or the pursuit for the sensual, but to shape those desires through refinement of their tastes. The beauty that is found in art plays an essential role because it unites humans' "sphere of empirical knowledge" and "sphere of feeling."<sup>13</sup> As they cultivate their tastes and aesthetics through art, they learn the self-control needed in order to accept moral principles and become ethical and free beings.<sup>14</sup>

In the essay "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry," Schiller, again, retells the history of man, but focuses less on men's path toward morality and more on the ideal state of being. Nature put men in a state of sublime because men appreciate how nature is acting on its own within its own laws.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, people cherish nature's "inner necessity, that eternal oneness with themselves."<sup>16</sup> At the same time, nature put mankind to shame because that state of oneness, or naivety, was what men once were.<sup>17</sup> Schiller directed modern men to find that lost naïveté in poems from ancient Greece. Schiller declares these naive poets from ancient Greece simply imitated nature because they did not find humanity to be completely separated from nature; thus, they found no



need to objectify nature.<sup>18</sup> Somewhere along history, men gained a strong sense of self, thereby causing nature to disappear from humanity.<sup>19</sup> As Schiller discerns, men “reencounter [nature] in its genuine only outside of humanity in the inanimate world.”<sup>20</sup> It is precisely this separation from nature that is causing men to feel alienated and fragmented.

However, no matter how much men long to regain unity with nature, they can never return to that state of happiness and contentment anymore, like how adults cannot revert back to childhood. In the modern age, naive poets, such as Shakespeare and Goethe, though they have produced some of the finest works, can never progress beyond their works, but sentimental poets have the potential of reaching the ideal. This is because the sentimental poet has already passed the stage of naïveté, thus he is not driven by emotions, but instead is able to reflect upon his feelings with rationality. As Schiller states, the supreme goal of human striving is, “To be free of passions, to look around and into oneself always with clarity and composure, to find everywhere more chance than fate and to laugh more about absurdity than rage and whine about maliciousness.”<sup>21</sup> By establishing sentimental poets as the finer poets, Schiller suggests that people should see the divine through a balance of rationality and imagination. Even though mankind will never reach that ideal state, they must strive to attain it.<sup>22</sup>

In 1792, after a year of studying at Jena under guidance of his idol Schiller, Friedrich von Hardenberg arrived at Leipzig and encountered Friedrich Schlegel. The two immediately formed a friendship, which led to their extensive discussion of philosophical ideas of Kant, Schiller, Fichte and poetry of Shakespeare, Goethe, and the ancient Greeks.<sup>23</sup> These intellectual discussions made lasting impressions on Friedrich von Hardenberg and profoundly impacted his later philosophical pursuits. In addition to forming a friendship with Schlegel, in November 1794, Hardenberg fell in love with a girl

named Sophie von Kühn.<sup>24</sup> The two spent two years together in hopes of marrying when von Kühn turns of age. However, in spring of 1797, Sophie passed away, causing Hardenberg to fall into a deep state of depression. Sophie’s death triggered Hardenberg to compose one of the most emblematic poems of the early Romanticism movement, “Hymn to the Night.”<sup>25</sup>

The poem is not only a form of sublimation for Hardenberg or Novalis, after the passing of Sophie, but also a profession of his disagreement with the philosophies of Kant and Fichte. He believes Enlightenment thinkers were too engrossed with developing perfectly logical systems that they undermine the power of human imagination.<sup>26</sup> Even though he concurs with Kant on the fact that objects conform to the structure that the subject imposes, he believes Kant downplays the role of imagination throughout the process.<sup>27</sup> The heart of Fichte’s philosophy is that ego is to uncover the absolute ego, which is “that all-encompassing consciousness in which and for which the empirical ego and the natural world exist.”<sup>28</sup> Challenging Fichte, Novalis argues against the all-encompassing nature of the absolute ego and contends that there is no sharp distinction between the real and the imagination.<sup>29</sup> The fluidity between thought and reality is manifested by “Hymn to the Night.” As the poet reunited with his beloved at the graveside, readers are left wondering whether what is occurring is real or imagined. Their rational side denies the possibility of their union, since the lover is alive and beloved is dead, but the poet’s belief in his conquest over death seems so real that readers want to believe the two united in the real world.

Comparable to Schiller as he retells of the history of the world in “On Naive and Sentimental Poetry,” Novalis also feels a deep longing for the past. In “Christianity and Europe: A Fragment,” Novalis’ rendering of the history of Europe is one of idealization and distortion. He establishes the Middle Ages as the golden age and the Enlightenment as the period of darkness. The reason why men fell from the

“beautiful, magnificent times” and became a clutter of fragmented pieces is due to the rise of commercial culture and men’s increasing devotion to their material needs instead of to God.<sup>30</sup>

With the Protestant Reformation, secularization, and the Enlightenment, people only became more and more self-centered and alienated. What Europeans should strive for is not a return to the old Catholic past, since they can never return to that state of perfection anymore. Instead, they should reinterpret Christianity and form an all-encompassing church. Thus, all nations will come together as one and achieve “genuine freedom.”<sup>31</sup> Novalis’ ideal vision is not just for Europe, but rather for each individual Europeans. In a way, this essay is Novalis’ guide on how people should cultivate themselves to become “perfected human beings.”<sup>32</sup> In order to achieve the ideal state, men must recognize that they live in the larger community and that they are at one with all members of society. Common self-interests will bind a society together only temporarily. True unity happens when members of society forgo their preoccupations with the external world and focus on the Christian faith.

## NEO-CONFUCIANISM AND THE LU-WANG SCHOOL

Neo-Confucianism first emerged during the Tang Dynasty with modest followings. It only rose to prominence after Song (960-1279) philosopher Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) institutionalized its framework, drawing on Daoist metaphysics and Buddhist terminologies.<sup>33</sup> During the Song period, the leading Neo-Confucian scholar was Zhu Xi (1130-1200). Zhu, along with Cheng Yi (1033-1107), wrote extensively and their works together formed the Cheng-Zhu School, or “Learning of the Principle” (Lixue) sect, of Neo-confucianism. Standing in opposition of the Cheng-Zhu School was the Lu-Wang School, or “Learning of the Heart-Mind” (Xinxue). The origins of the Lu-Wang School,

like the name suggests, could be traced back to mainly two scholars, Lu Xiangshan (1139-1192) and Wang Yangming (1472-1529).<sup>34</sup> These two branches, although fundamentally in contradiction with each other, together formed Neo-Confucianism.

Neo-Confucian thinkers based their moral system on a metaphysical comprehension of the world. Confucius argued that in order for people to see the way of a more promising future, they must understand the past, for the past illustrates how men in present times should behave.<sup>35</sup> Neo-Confucianists, inspired by Buddhism, contended rather than emulating history, “a complete and proper understanding of the nature of reality would lead to a confirmation of the Confucian Way.”<sup>36</sup> They see patterns or principles (li)<sup>37</sup> inherently lying under every aspect of reality, making up the fundamental nature of the self.<sup>38</sup> For the Neo-Confucians, some of the core Confucian ideas such as “righteousness”, “rights”, “benevolence”, and “filial piety,” are really expressions of principle.<sup>39</sup> Since it is the underlying order of the world, the principle helps to explain the forms and functions of living and non-things, as well as how they can interact with one another.

Lu Xiangshan, a contemporary of Zhu, was one of the first scholars to challenge and eventually break away from the orthodox Cheng-Zhu School. He began his career as the magistrate of Jingmen County in Hubei after passing the highest civil service exam in 1172.<sup>40</sup> Although a capable and astute administrator, he lost interest in politics and withdrew from public office in 1187.<sup>41</sup> For the remainder of his life, Lu devoted his energy to teaching students and engaging in intellectual conversations with other fellow Neo-Confucian thinkers. Among the most well-known of the discourses he participated in was the extended discussion and exchange he had with Zhu Xi at the Goose Lake Temple in 1175.<sup>42</sup>

As historian Philip J. Ivanhoe suggests, there is a certain amount of truth in describing Lu as an “idealist.”<sup>43</sup> In his short meditation pieces “Assorted

Explanations” Lu expounds his belief that heart-mind embodies all the principles that give structure, shape, and meaning to the phenomenal world as he reconstructed the beginning of the universe. His narrative is as follows, “The universe is my heart-mind; my heart-mind is universe. Tens of thousands of generations ago, sages appeared within this universe and had this same heart-mind and his same principle. Tens of thousands generations to come, sages shall appear within is universe and will have this same heart-mind and this same principle. Anywhere within the four seas, whenever sages appear, they will have this same heart-mind and this same principle.”<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the most strikingly idealistic part of Lu’s account is his declaration, “The universe is my heart-mind; my heart-mind is universe.” If read without fully understanding the wider context, this statement almost seems to imply that Lu sees the world as a grand total of all minds. In fact, some modern scholars have indeed argued that “Lu’s idealism denies the existence of a mind-independent world.”<sup>45</sup> However, as Ivanhoe correctly points out, what Lu means by “universe” is a combination of space and time. Thus, what Lu is really trying to express is his vision of a metaphysically flawless universe. In this perfect universe, the principles of heart-mind and those of the phenomenal world are always in accordance with each other. Moreover, the heart-mind is the only source where principles are realized, known, and understood. To further illustrate how he fully acknowledges the existing material world, Lu in the “Letter to Zisi” states, “This principle fills up and extends throughout the universe! Not even Heaven, earth, ghosts, or spirits can fail to follow this principle — how much less can human beings afford to do so?”<sup>46</sup> To contend that Lu’s idealistic tendencies led him to reduce the world into heart-mind is anything but accurate since Lu identifies the principles to be found both in its concentrated form in the heart-mind and in its extended form throughout the universe.

If the universe is a combination space and time

and where cohere principles are manifested in the material world and heart-mind, how people can achieve a full understanding of these principles becomes a pressing issue. For Lu, understanding principles means taking the principles inherent in the heart-mind and matching them with the phenomena of the natural world.<sup>47</sup> There is the element that an individual should look introspectively and come to see the truth for oneself for “the principles of the Dao (the Way) simply are right in front of [his or her] eyes.”<sup>48</sup> However, people having the full subjectivity in searching for the principles does not signify that each and every one will come to his or her own conclusions. Rather, if the heart-mind is in the proper state, it should reveal the same truth that the sages revealed “tens of thousands of generations ago.”<sup>49</sup>

There is an unmistakable sense of universal oneness in Lu’s exposition of heart-mind. This awareness that the heart-mind is shared by every individual and that the principles remain the same throughout space and time is especially evident in the latter half of the “Assorted Explanation” passage.<sup>50</sup> Tens of thousands generations ago, tens of thousands of generations to come, anywhere within the four seas, the sages have the same heart-mind and the same principle. Extending from the unity of the sages, Lu suggests that the heart-mind is shared by every individual, for it is a common inheritance. In addition, Lu believes people have a natural ability to understand and empathize with one another, for this common inheritance of heart-mind provides people with the ability to connect with others and the rest of the world.<sup>51</sup> However, Lu makes it clear that although everyone has the potential capacity for making connections, an individual must overcome an “excessive concern with oneself” before realizing this potential.<sup>52</sup> Combining the ability of men to sympathize and the personal nature of the process of realizing true principles, Lu implies that the knowledge men seek is actually ethical knowledge, because, for Lu, the ethical is a synthesis of sentiments

and freewill. He further clarifies when he asserts that “moral knowledge involves not only condition but also emotion and volition.”<sup>53</sup> So perceiving and feeling, in addition to will, play instrumental roles in man’s internalization of the principles of the world, or moral truths.

The pivotal split between Lu and the Cheng-Zhu School occurred when the two scholars Zhu and Lu had in-depth exchange at the Goose Lake Temple.<sup>54</sup> Elucidating the essential differences between Zhu and himself, Lu recited a poem he composed named “Written at Goose Lake to Rhyme with My Brother’s Verse”:

“Old graves inspire grief, ancestral temples  
reverence.  
This is the human heart-mind, never effaced  
throughout the ages.  
Water flowing from a brook accumulates into a  
vast sea;  
Fist-sized stones form into the towering peaks of  
Mount Tai and Hua.  
Easy and simple spiritual practices, in the end,  
proves great and long lasting.  
Fragmented and disconnected endeavors leave on  
drifting and bobbing aimlessly.  
You want to know how to rise from the lower to  
the higher realms?  
First you must — this very moment — distinguish  
true from false!”<sup>55</sup>

Lu was particularly critical of Zhu’s belief that the heart-mind exists in two forms, which are pure heart-mind of the Way (daoxin) and impure human heart-mind (renxin).<sup>56</sup>

According to Zhu, daoxin is the ideal state of heart-mind. It is perfect because it originated before actual things came into existence and remains uncontaminated by the affairs of the material world. Contrastingly, renxin is the state of heart-mind that exists within people.<sup>57</sup> What fundamentally makes the heart-mind of the Way different from the heart-

mind of the people is that the former is composed of purely of principle, whereas the latter has vital energy (qi) in addition to the principle.<sup>58</sup> Because vital energy is ever-changing and unstable, it constantly blocks human beings from grasping the true principle and achieving the ideal state. In placing men in a precarious state, renxin limits men from reaching their full potential. Thus, humans are naturally prone to making mistakes, and because of the inherent fallibility of men, Zhu warned men against looking introspectively in search of the true principle.<sup>59</sup> Instead, men should direct their attentions to affairs outside of themselves. For Zhu, self-cultivation meant studying the Classics and participating in rituals, or, as he puts it, “pursuing inquiry and study.”<sup>60</sup>

Lu could not have disagreed more. For him, the first step in gaining pure knowledge is to look within and engage with the heart-mind, for the heart-mind is the only site where true understanding of the world takes place. When people search for understanding outside of the heart-mind, pursuing inquiries and studies in the Classics and the rituals, all they will obtain are pieces of incoherent and nonsensical information. As he eloquently stated when he recited his poem, these “fragmented and disconnected endeavors leave on drifting and bobbing aimlessly.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, people’s preoccupation with searching for the principle in the external world is precisely what is preventing them from gaining true understanding. In “Explaining the Analects,” Lu reiterates his disapproval of Zhu’s method of self-cultivation. According to Lu, when the Master asks, “Who can leave [a room] without going out the door? Who can fail to rely and draw upon the Dao?,” he is suggesting the correct way to follow the Dao is through concentration and commitment in studying the actual teachings of Confucius and internalizing the principles, not reciting the Classics.<sup>62</sup>

Lu spent the majority of his life teaching and writing in the Elephant Mountain.<sup>63</sup> His rejection of Zhu’s teachings and the prevalent Cheng-Zhu

School introduced a permanent split within Neo-Confucianism. Although his vision of the world was sharp and powerful, Lu was never a methodical writer.<sup>64</sup> It would take Wang Yangming hundreds of years later to expand on Lu's original insights and institutionalize the Lu-Wang School.

Wang Yangming was born into a prominent family in the city Yue in Zhejiang during the Ming Dynasty.<sup>65</sup> Like Lu, Wang also passed the highest civil service exam; however, his political career was much more tortuous.<sup>66</sup> He began as a minor official, but in 1506, after he opposed the powerful eunuch Liu Jin in defense of a fellow official, he was punished and banished to Guizhou.<sup>67</sup> While serving his posts in Guizhou, Jiangxi, Beijing, and Nanjing, Wang demonstrated his superb administrative skills, a keen understanding of economics, and exceptional ability to command the military when he led campaigns suppressing bandits and the rebellion of Prince Ning in 1519.<sup>68</sup> His success prompted criticism from higher ranked officials who were not as accomplished as he was. Tired of public life, he retired and returned to Yue in 1529.<sup>69</sup>

Similar to Lu, Wang also began his philosophy with the beginning of the universe. In his essay, "Pulling Up the Root and Stopping Up the Source," he suggests that people are to form one body with Heaven, Earth and all things.<sup>70</sup> More importantly, this is not just an ideal that mankind should strive for, but in actuality this is the true state of the universe, since during the golden ages of the sage-kings, this ideal had been the reality.<sup>71</sup> A similar unified vision of the universe is echoed in "Inquiry on the Great Learning," where Wang asserts that the universe started as one single body and currently continues to be united in this way. People are not separate members of families each with distinctive bonds with other individuals. Instead, they are parts of a single universal body.<sup>72</sup> Wang explicitly explains his understanding of the oneness of the universe and the way the principle organizes the world when a student asks the question,

"Why does the Great Learning say that there is a relative importance among things?" Wang answered, "Because of 'pattern' or 'principle,' there is naturally a relative importance. Take, for example, the body which is one. We use our hands and feet to protect our head and eyes, but does that mean we are prejudiced and regard the hands and feet as less important? We do this because it accords with patterns or principles."<sup>73</sup>

As a follower of Mengzi, Wang above all believed that human nature is inherently good.<sup>74</sup> However, how they arrived at this conclusion is quite dissimilar. According to Mengzi, human beings are born with innate capacities and a set of physical, mental, and emotional tendencies. If men are raised in the proper manner, human nature will develop as it should, with heart and mind as the governor of self.<sup>75</sup> Wang's view of the inherent goodness of human nature is much more metaphysical, in that it is dependent on Wang's understanding of the principle. Unlike the conventional Cheng-Zhu School philosophers, who see the physical and the moral as separate entities, Wang believes the principle is all-encompassing and universal. When he claims "Principle is one and no more," he is suggesting that the heart-mind, its thoughts (yi) and things (wu) are all just different aspects of li.<sup>76</sup> Not only is human nature a single manifestation of li, the form, features, and characters of human beings are all manifestations of li.<sup>77</sup>

In order to support his claim that human nature is essentially good, Wang appropriates the concept of "pure knowing" (liangzhi) from the teachings of Mengzi. However, Wang eliminates people's course of development from infancy to adulthood and dived immediately into the state of pure knowing without ever acknowledging people's pure or innate abilities, which for Mengzi is the tool that helps people develop pure knowing.<sup>78</sup> The reason is Wang is convinced human nature is not developed, but is fully formed since birth. If this were true, an important logical question for Wang to consider is why not everyone in the world is perfect and manifesting "clear

character?”<sup>79</sup> Wang attributed people’s difference in character and behavior to qi. He explains that pure knowing guides men to be ethical, but they need to protect it from the impure qi, a mixture of people’s own selfish desires and thoughts (siyu).<sup>80</sup> What makes people small men (xiaoren) instead of great men (junzi) is that their true nature is obscured by selfishness.<sup>81</sup> The qi of small men is defiled and tainted, whereas the qi of great men is clear and lucid. Furthermore, once the heart-mind has become clouded and the individual has become a small man, he will ignore the connection between himself and other people, living creatures, and non-living objects in the world, and instead see the world as hostile and dark, an enemy one must establish dominance over.<sup>82</sup>

Wang suggests that whether people can purify their qi and reach the state of pure knowing relies entirely on their extension of knowledge and interpretation of gewu. The phrase gewu first appeared in the Great Learning, “[The utmost] extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things (zhizhi zai gewu).”<sup>83</sup> The fact that Wang’s struggle with Zhu Xi’s teaching pivoted around the interpretation of gewu and that Wang expanded his argument based on his own definition of gewu spotlighted the Great Learning as a text that is just as essential as the Analects in the Neo-Confucian tradition.<sup>84</sup> Zhu interpreted the term as the investigation (ge) of things (wu), and translation was widely accepted by scholars.<sup>85</sup> Yet, Wang found it difficult to accept the definition Zhu had formulated, because Zhu’s model of extending knowledge requires one to build up the collection of principles he knows and decipher the principles’ connection to things and events in the outside world.<sup>86</sup> In other words, the process only allows people to examine the external.

When Wang Yangming complains that earlier generations “grope for [the highest good] outside their minds, believe that every event and every object has its own peculiar definite principle,” he is objecting the Cheng-Zhu School’s obsession with

accumulating external knowledge and pursuing the principles in the external world.<sup>87</sup> He interprets ge as “to rectify” and wu as “heart-mind.”<sup>88</sup> People must rectify their own thoughts internally and in doing so extend their pure knowing. Expanding upon this idea, Wang reinterprets the purpose of self-cultivation as a process of eradicating selfish desires that are blocking men from their pure knowledge, rather than as an exercise of gaining new knowledge or extending their capabilities. Instead of thinking about ethics, people are to think ethically about what they do. As people internalize the principle, pure knowing will clarify their qi and remove the selfish desires that cover people’s true nature. Eventually, they will achieve their original state of pure knowing and proper ethical judgement when they are able to act ethically and properly intuitively, and Wang identified this ideal stage to be “the unity of knowing and acting” (zhi xing he yi).<sup>89</sup> However, even when an individual does achieve the unity of knowing and acting, his quest is not over. Wang’s ultimate aim is the heaven, earth and the myriad creature forming one body (tian di wan wu wei yi ti).<sup>90</sup> In their journey toward this eventual goal, Wang hopes men will abandon the self-centered view of their relationship to the world and overcome the sense of isolation and alienation induced by following the Cheng-Zhu School teachings. More importantly, he hopes they will realize that the principles of heart-mind are the principles of the world.

## THE UNIVERSAL SEARCH FOR ONENESS

Emulating categories of varying forms of Romantic imagination proposed by M.H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, this paper seeks to focus on the form “unity lost and unity regained” as it compares the thoughts of Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism with that of the early German Romanticism. “Unity lost and unity regained” is the plot line of a story, in which man started as a whole. As he gains consciousness and reflects, he set himself

against the natural world, thereby causing a split between “ego and non-ego,” “subject and object,” “spirit and other,” and “nature and mind.”<sup>91</sup> This split causes men to feel alienated and fragmented, longing to be one again; thus, in order to feel whole and happy again, modern men must strive to regain unity.

Within the Lu-Wang tradition, this idea of initial unity is vital. In his “Assorted Explanations,” Lu affirms that thousands of generations ago, the universe began as a unity of space and time, and principles of heart-mind and the world cohered. Similarly, for Wang, the universe also began as one single body with people, Heaven, Earth, and all things. Both philosophers agree the split, or the Fall, occurred when the Cheng-Zhu School initiated the formal division between the pure heart-mind of the Way and the impure human heart-way. When Zhuxi made this distinction, he inadvertently separated men from nature because men are to direct their attention to the external physical world to investigate things (*gewu*) and find the true and pure principle. In doing so, men became subjects and nature objects. For Lu and Wang, Zhu’s scientific method inquiry and self-cultivation caused men to become “fragmented and disconnected”, “drifting and bobbing aimlessly” in a wealth of irrelevant information. Furthermore, when men separated themselves from nature, they absorbed themselves in their own endeavors and stressed their own individuality. The result is their loss of ability to empathize with one another. They not only see nature as a separate entity that they must establish dominance over, they also see one another as enemies they must defeat in order to protect their own wellbeing.

Within the works of Schiller and Novalis, unity is also present at the beginning of the history of mankind. In “On Naive and Sentimental Poetry,” Schiller suggests that men began with being at one with nature, or a state of *naïveté*. The ancient Greeks, in particular, found themselves within nature. However, as people philosophized and gained more

self-conscious, they began to separate from the natural world, triggering feelings of detachment and alienation. Alluding to the biblical story, this is the moment of men’s Fall from the Garden of Eden. After the Fall, the primary concern of men becomes pursuit of material needs. Even when they fight for political freedom, their lack of morality engenders them to commit atrocities like the Reign of Terror. Novalis’ Christian Europe has a similar plot. Europe initially started as one single body in complete religious and political unity. The Fall transpired with the rise of commercial culture. As Europeans sought after individualism and secularization, Europe split into little fragments. The Enlightenment and the age of reason further pushed Europe into the age of darkness for people no longer cared about their faith and their love ones and concerned themselves with gaining knowledge and possessing new material goods.

Thinkers from both the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism and early German Romanticism emphasized the essentiality of striving toward unity and oneness in order to reach the ideal state of humanity. Furthermore, becoming moral beings is what both Eastern and Western philosophers hope men will ultimately achieve. Within the Lu-Wang tradition, the eventual goal is to purify the vital energy, or *qi*, through extending knowledge. Pure knowing will guide people to the ethical path, and when people can make proper and ethical judgments intuitively, they will have achieved the unity of knowing and acting, which is a unification of thoughts and actions. What everyone should further strive for is becoming one with Heaven, earth, and the myriad of things.

Once men reach this stage, they will realize that the principals of heart-mind are really the principles of the world; thus, they are no different from things found within the universe. However, it is important to note that while Wang stressed the inherent goodness in human nature, he also placed great emphasis on the path toward the ideal. Men are born in the

state of pure knowing, but possessing pure knowing and clear qi does not make them exemplary beings. Men must pursue after external knowledge first, and separate themselves from the natural world. While in the process of purifying qi and striving toward unity with Heaven, earth, and myriad of things, they gain true understanding of the principle. Only with the experience of the fall and struggle to regain unity can man prevail over passivity, gain full agency, and thus become junzi. Wang's interpretation of junzi is comparable to Schiller's sublime character, who does not contain every sort of greatness like the beautiful character does, but is "able to discipline and elevate himself to any level of greatness." It is precisely this will to overcome any sort of limitations that makes ideal beings.

A similar idea is communicated through Schiller's understanding of the evolution of states. In "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," he argues that the highest state is the aesthetic state, because it is the only state in which men are whole, but, like Wang, Schiller presents the restrictive and passive dynamic state and ethical state as necessary stages. Only after citizens have already experienced the ethical state and have learned to act morally intuitively, can they governed by aesthetics instead of abstract laws, balance their rational and sensual sides, and live as harmonious and free beings. The ultimate utopian state for Novalis is also unification under the single faith of Christianity after fragmentation. Novalis, although looks back at the Middle Ages with nostalgia, recognizes that Europe can never return to the golden age. As the new Christian religion is established throughout Europe, boundaries will disappear because communities will let go of their common material interests and instead focus on their common faith. As they internalize the Christian faith, they will be able to realize the love they share for one another.

By comparing the writings of the Lu and Wang with that of Schiller and Novalis, people can

notice the perceptible similarities between the two systems of thought. Even though before the 19th century, the East and the West had few intellectual dialogues, Chinese and German intellectuals came to similar conclusions about history of mankind and the direction where men are progressing toward. Particularly interesting is their common recognition that men's separation from nature is the source of their unhappiness. This shared anxiety communicates universality of the experience of men: as men become more rational, more logical, more concerned with empirical evidence and technological advancements, they become less in touch with their feelings and less concerned with their internal wellbeing. When both the Romantics and Neo-Confucian scholars emphasized striving toward oneness, they convey to people today that we are not full beings without our rational or sensual capacities. Our desires and reasons come natural to us, so it would be unwise to repress either one of these tendencies. More importantly, the philosophers imparted to us that the journey toward unity is more important than ultimately reaching the ideal state. We might never reach that ideal state of perfect humanity, but we should never stop trying. It is through the striving process that we realize that to be human is to be imperfect.

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## LAURA LI



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HISTORY

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# British and Japanese War Brides in Post-World War II Sydney

Susanna Yau

## ABSTRACT

In the wake of World War II, British and Japanese war brides immigrated to Sydney through their connections to Australian soldiers. Through analysis of personal accounts, newspaper articles, and government records, it becomes evident that although women from both countries had similar stories at the beginning of their journeys, their lives in Sydney were drastically different. This article argues that these differences largely stemmed from the way white Sydneysiders reacted to new immigrants. While the British were considered the ideal immigrant group, most white Australians held deep-set prejudices against people of color, especially against Japanese migrants. The experiences of war brides provide a unique lens through which to view issues of race, gender, and immigration in post-war Australia.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of World War II, countries across the globe experienced mass migration as people left tragedy behind to seek new beginnings. Among these migrants were thousands of war brides, women who married foreign military personnel and subsequently returned with them to their home countries. Although Australia was geographically closer to the Asian front of the war, she sent servicemen to both Europe and Pacific in continued support of Great Britain, and thus the war brides came from both theatres. Of the more than 5,000 women who emigrated from Western Europe between 1942 and 1951, the largest group migrated from the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Brides also came from South Africa, Palestine, Canada, and many other countries. In addition, approximately 650 Japanese women moved to Australia, having met their husbands during the Allied occupation of Japan from 1946 to 1956.<sup>2</sup> Their presence is particularly significant given Australia's longstanding immigration policies barring the entrance of non-white people.

This paper aims to answer the question, 'How did the experiences of British and Japanese war brides immigrating to Sydney differ, and what was the main cause of these differences?' Currently, few scholars examine the experiences of Western war brides, and no source analytically compares brides of different cultural backgrounds. Though it is impossible to fully encompass the experiences of

every war bride, observations will be made based on multiple primary accounts. The experiences of British and Japanese women have been chosen because of the relative abundance of information and the clear contrasts between them. Women settling or travelling through metropolitan Sydney will be used as a case study to represent larger trends in Australia, and memoirs, newspaper articles, government records, and photographs will be used to describe the brides' relationships and daily lives with their Australian husbands.

Through these sources, it is clear that British and Japanese war brides shared many of the same experiences, including the ways they met their husbands and their initial reception in Sydney. The major difference between them was the degree of isolation the Japanese women felt, which profoundly affected the rest of their lives in Sydney. This isolation can be attributed to the attitudes Sydney natives had towards Japanese women. To show this, primary source material, pre-migration relationships and daily lives of British and Japanese war brides moving to Sydney will be compared. These aspects of the women's experience will be contextualised by the attitudes towards immigration in Australia and the evolving role of women in Australian society.

## OVERVIEW OF SOURCES

The dearth of primary sources coming from the war brides themselves in the mid-twentieth century aligns with the idealised view of women as housewives and mothers. Personal accounts published before 1990 of both British and Japanese brides are extremely rare. In the last thirty years, multiple collections of accounts by European women have been published.<sup>3</sup> The lack of sources published when the women first arrived can perhaps be explained in light of post-war gender roles. Although women experienced greater independence as a result of their work during the war, many were forced to give it up in favour of having a family. In the *Cambridge History of Australia*, historians Katie Holmes and Sarah Pinto state, “The everyday life of the Australian woman [in the 1950s] was to be framed around her husband and children, who were to be prioritised in all but the most unusual of circumstances.”<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on domesticity over a woman’s individual experience helps explain why there were not sources about or by British war brides; they, and society, were focused on their families first.

While the perspectives of Japanese war brides were also overlooked, newspaper articles detailing their arrivals in Australia were more common; both these trends are tangible manifestations of the impact Australian perceptions had on Japanese women’s experiences. Like the British war brides, personal accounts of the Japanese women were not published until recently. In some cases, the women refused to discuss their experiences and ‘remained insistent that their lives were private’, according to Amy Bentley, who interviewed multiple Japanese women and their husbands in 2002 for her master’s thesis.<sup>5</sup> Bentley connects the brides’ willingness to discuss their experiences with the welcome the women received when they first arrived. Women in Melbourne and Brisbane, where crowds had met the ships carrying Japanese brides with enthusiasm, more readily agreed to interviews than women in Sydney, where they were less eagerly welcomed.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the perceived

exoticism of the Japanese women by the public surely contributed to the increased media coverage, again showing how Australian perception of the brides affected the women themselves.

## PRE-AUSTRALIA RELATIONSHIPS

Before arriving in Sydney, British and Japanese women had similar experiences in their interactions with Australian men and the reactions of their families to marriage. The principal difference between them was their ability to marry their husbands and migrate to Australia, which can be attributed to the Australian belief that people of colour were racially inferior. By the time World War II was over, the White Australia Policy, which barred non-white people from immigrating to Australia, had been in place for over thirty years, with the goal of maintaining a European population and identity rather than an Asian one.<sup>7</sup>

During the war, British war brides frequently met foreign soldiers through work or informal socialisation. As in World War I, women were heavily involved in the war effort and frequently worked in auxiliary units in the armed forces. Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) sergeant Vera Baker first saw her husband at Royal Air Force (RAF) station where she was working, later meeting him at a local pub.<sup>8</sup> Other couples were introduced at dances, on blind dates, or through their jobs. While it was fairly common to meet Australian men in this way, marrying them was another matter. WAAF nurse Estelle Mydat recalls that when she informed her father of her intentions to marry an Australian, he “hit the roof and said I was mad because I knew nothing about him... and proceeded to tell me all about the Aussies in World War I who married English girls and then went home to their wives and children.”<sup>9</sup> This statement reveals a general distrust of Australians held by many British parents. Despite initial familial misgivings, most couples married in England, often before the war ended. The majority of the brides travelled to

Australia after 1945; the Australian government provided free passage to them and their children aboard so-called 'bride ships' until 1952.<sup>10</sup> For some, the six week journey was a 'wonderful cruise' full of sightseeing and better food and amenities than were available during the war.<sup>11</sup> For others, especially those with young children, the voyage was much less comfortable, with one wife cabling her husband to tell him that her ship was 'appalling'.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of the conditions, British women faced few governmental and logistical obstacles in migrating to Australia, no doubt helped by the fact that the British were the preferred immigrant group in a country committed to maintaining its white population.<sup>13</sup>

In post-war Japan, Australian troops made up a large contingent of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) stationed at Kure, a naval port near Hiroshima, from 1946 to 1956.<sup>14</sup> During the occupation, BCOF employed a large population of Japanese women, incentivizing them with relatively high wages. Women commonly served as house girls, nurses, and interpreters; the lack of Japanese men meant that they were frequently the primary earners for their families and sent money away while living on their own.<sup>15</sup> Like the British, these Japanese families also opposed their daughters' marriages to Australians. A bride known only as Michi, who met her husband Gus while working for a local newspaper, states that her parents "opposed it strongly when I said that I wanted to marry Gus... they talked as if I should be disowned as my association with the Australian soldiers would spoil marriage chances for my younger sisters and brothers."<sup>16</sup> Michi's parents' reaction demonstrates both the depth of disapproval of interracial marriages and the effects it would have on her entire family. The Australian government also disapproved of marriages between soldiers and Japanese women, attempting to enforce an anti-fraternisation policy and, when that failed, making immigration difficult for the wives.<sup>17</sup> Couples were required to undergo extensive evaluations by the soldier's commanding

officer and fill out many pages of paperwork.<sup>18</sup> The eventual admission of the war brides into Australia was influenced by 'an intrinsically gendered concept of Japanese', as Amy Bentley describes it, whereby women and men were seen as 'pretty girls and bastards', respectively.<sup>19</sup> That Japanese women were seen as harmless and innocent of the war would have made the government more inclined to permit them in the country, further showing how Australian conceptualisation of the war brides influenced their experiences.

## RECEPTION IN SYDNEY

Upon arrival in Sydney, British women were warmly welcomed by the community, aligning with the governmental and public desire for Anglo-Saxon immigrants. Most were met off the ships by their husbands and in-laws, while others disembarked in intermediate cities and were received by organisations such as the Red Cross or the YWCA. These groups, usually run by middle-class women, provided food and overnight accommodation to the brides before they continued travelling to meet their husbands.<sup>20</sup> Vera Baker remembers that she 'corresponded with [the family she stayed with] for some time after I reached Sydney, and they sent a lovely silk christening gown for [my daughter]', demonstrating the longevity of the bond between wives and hosts and the positivity of the relationship.<sup>21</sup> That Australian women, who may have resented the foreign war brides for 'stealing' their men and sons, would immediately welcome the British wives implies that Australia was open and welcoming to the British women from the start. Like the British families, however, some women found that their in-laws were less accepting. Olive Johnson remembers that her husband Johnny's family was quite cold upon her arrival in Kings Cross, saying, "Neither Johnny's sisters nor his mother spoke to me... I think it boiled down to having the wrong religion and the wrong nationality."<sup>22</sup> The rejection by her in-laws, potentially as a result of her differences, is similar to the British



families' reactions and less a reflection on opinions of immigration.

While Japanese women were also welcomed positively in Australia, as reported by multiple newspapers across the country, these articles simultaneously convey patronising attitudes consistent with previously stated prejudices towards people of colour. The Australian government began permitting Japanese brides into the country in 1952 on temporary visas, by which the government maintained the power to deport them if desired. Only in 1956 were women allowed to apply for citizenship.<sup>23</sup> Like the British war brides, Japanese wives were typically met their husbands and in-laws upon arrival in Sydney. There are no records of organized hosts for the women, and when one husband failed to meet his wife at the airport after his car broke down, another Japanese bride was called to take care of her.<sup>24</sup> While this may have been because there were significantly fewer Japanese brides, and thus less of a need for accommodation, it demonstrates a difference in the hospitality Australians were willing to offer to the non-white women. Newspapers covering the arrivals were more positive than might be expected, but still expressed subtle prejudice. In an article on Japanese war brides in America, which reported the women 'gradually being accepted by their neighbours as "good American wives"', the author refers to interracial marriages as "one of the problems of the Allied occupation of Japan."<sup>25</sup> Rather than celebrating the happy marriage, the paper deigns it a 'problem' based solely on the fact that the bride was not white. In the same article, the Minister for the Australian Army describes Japanese women as 'liv[ing] in frugal, even feudal, atmospheres, and if they were brought here they would be alone in very strange surroundings, knowing nothing of our customs, and amid people who might even be hostile.' This statement showcases many of the negative opinions Australians held about the Japanese, including having a backwards society and an inability to adjust to Australian culture. That

this Australian hostility is deemed acceptable is even more telling of attitudes towards the Japanese.

## DAILY LIFE

When reflecting on the most impactful changes between England and Sydney, most women focused on material aspects rather than ideological or cultural ones, showing the acceptance they received in those areas. Molly Ellis, who moved to Woolloomooloo in 1946, writes that she immediately noticed "the heat, too many flies, no trees that I knew — everything was so different."<sup>26</sup> That material observations, rather than treatment by Sydneysiders, stood out to her shows a lack of concern over her ability to assimilate into Australian culture. Beyond relatively shallow lifestyle differences such as slang and the lack of modern conveniences, the women seemed to adjust quickly to their new country and easily identified as Australians.<sup>27</sup> Most did not report working outside the home in the first years, and almost all proudly mention their 'true blue dinky-di Aussies'.<sup>28</sup> This family focus again aligns with general trends in post-war Sydney of the home being the most important aspect of women's lives. This is not to say that the wives never felt homesick; many cite their local War Brides Clubs made of other British women, often hosted by the YWCA, as places of comfort and community.<sup>29</sup> However, when reflecting on their decisions to move to Sydney, most women emphasise their allegiance to their adopted nation. Mabel Mann, whose husband died in 1958, says that 'though I still love the gentleness of the English countryside... that is in the past; Australia is in the present', eloquently summarising her identity as an Australian despite the absence of the reason she had come in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, the defining characteristics of the lives of Japanese women in Sydney were the feelings of isolation and loneliness and the externally-imposed desire to become authentic Australian housewives. Both can be directly attributed to Australian attitudes towards the brides. Because white neighbors were

not always friendly, and 1950s Sydney lacked a Japanese community, it could be difficult for women to make connections outside the home. Of her interviewees, Amy Bentley writes, “the women I talked to all seemed to have had difficult and lonely times, feeling isolated and unsure of themselves.”<sup>31</sup> Anyone moving to a new country would have ‘difficult and lonely times’, but Bentley’s description implies a widespread epidemic of these feelings that profoundly impacted the women. Multiple brides, including Michi, remember ‘thinking about suicide sometimes’ because they had no one to turn to, but were ultimately deterred by the thought of their children being motherless.<sup>32</sup> This shows the depth of the women’s despair as well as their commitment to their families, which can be tied to the government’s emphasis on war brides assimilating into society and becoming ‘respectable Australian housewives’. As Australia accepted over 180,000 immigrants after the war, the government and the public pushed them to adapt Australia’s customs. The pressure to assimilate was so high that war bride Sadako Morris ‘chose to stay with her husband’s family for six months so she could learn Australian ways’ rather than move into a new home with him immediately.<sup>33</sup> In another instance, an Australian husband instructs his Japanese wife to ‘Always speak English, doesn’t matter if it is broken English it’s still English’ to their son.<sup>34</sup> Both of these situations exemplify the ‘denial of a migrant’s past’ by Australians, as Joy Damousi describes it, demonstrating an eagerness to completely eliminate the women’s Japanese heritage.<sup>35</sup> The loneliness and pressure to assimilate as caused by Australian treatment of the war brides were major aspects of their experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Post-World War II war brides were a unique population of women often overlooked in the study of the war and its effects. The role of Australian perceptions of and reactions to these women in their

experiences should not be understated, as I have attempted to show. At the centre of their stories was the pursuit of love in the face of devastating war. I have focused on women who lived in Sydney for a significant amount of time, many of whom experienced happy marriages and genuinely grew to see Australia as their home. However, the stories of the women who were abandoned, cheated on, and returned home should not be discounted. War brides are still being created today and provide an important lens that reflects society at its vulnerable points.

## NOTES

1. Overseas War Brides Association, *Overseas War Brides: Stories from the Women Who Followed Their Hearts to Australia* (East Roseville: Simon & Schuster, 2001), x.
2. Keiko Tamura, *Michi’s Memories: The Story of a Japanese War Bride* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2011), 12.
3. The three main sources used for research on British war brides were Carol Fallows’ *Love & War: Stories of War Brides from the Great War to Vietnam*; *Overseas War Brides*, a collection of short personal accounts compiled by the Overseas War Brides Club, which was based in Sydney and hosted yearly reunions in Kirribilli; and Rebecca Britt’s *Stories of Love & War: From the Collection of the Australian War Memorial*.
4. Katie Holmes and Sarah Pinto, ‘Gender and Sexuality’ in *The Cambridge History of Australia*, ed. Alison Bashford and Stuart MacIntyre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 321.
5. Amy Bentley, ‘Japanese Women in Australia from 1890s–1950s: Positioning Japanese War Brides in the Australian National Imaginary’ (master’s thesis, University of Sydney, 2003), 1.
6. Bentley, 2.
7. Mark Peel and Christina Twomey, *A History of Australia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 142.
8. *Overseas War Brides*, 24.
9. Carol Fallows, *Love & War: Stories of War Brides from the Great War to Vietnam* (Sydney: Bantam Books, 2002), 125.
10. ‘Bride Ship Conditions Criticised’, *The Argus*, 6 August 1946.
11. Fallows, *Love & War*, 157.
12. ‘Bride Ship Conditions Criticised’, *The Argus*, 6 August 1946.
13. Peel and Twomey, *A History of Australia*, 210–211.

14. Tamura, Michi's Memories, 3.
15. Fallows, Love & War, 206.
16. Tamura, Michi's Memories, 24.
17. Bentley, 'Japanese Women in Australia', 20.
18. Fallows, Love & War, 211.
19. Bentley, 'Japanese Women in Australia', 54.
20. Fallows, Love & War, 163.
21. Overseas War Brides, 26.
22. Fallows, Love & War, 168.
23. Tamura, Michi's Memories, 30.
24. 'War Bride', Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 1953.
25. 'Madame Butterfly In U.S.A.', Sydney Morning Herald, 2 March 1952.
26. Overseas War Brides, 49.
27. Overseas War Brides, 15.
28. Overseas War Brides, 27.
29. Overseas War Brides, 134.
30. Overseas War Brides, 24.
31. Bentley, 'Japanese Women in Australia', 136.
32. Tamura, Michi's Memories, 66.
33. Fallows, Love & War, 208.
34. Fallows, 209.
35. Joy Damousi, "We are Human Beings, and have a Past": The "Adjustment" of Migrants and the Australian
36. Assimilation Policies of the 1950s', Australian Journal of Politics and History (2013): 501.

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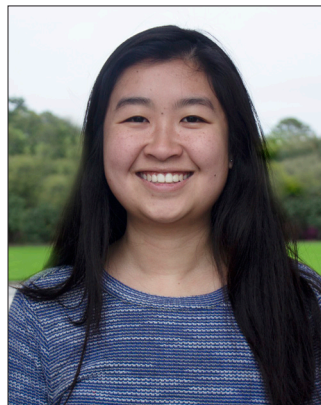
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