

RASR

Rice
Asian Studies
Review

Volume 6
2022-23 Issue
rasr.rice.edu



RASR

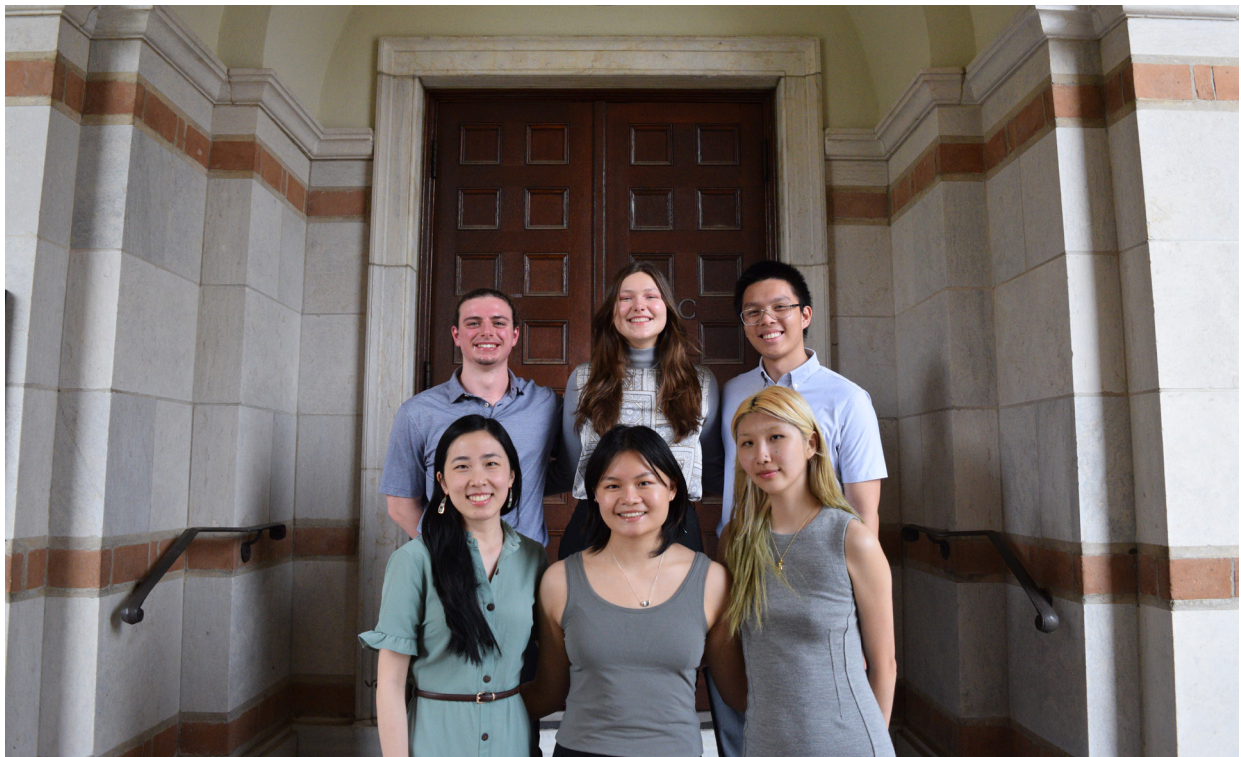
Rice
Asian Studies
Review

Volume 6
2022-23 Issue
ras.rice.edu



ABOUT RICE ASIAN STUDIES REVIEW

Rice Asian Studies Review (RASR) is a peer-reviewed academic journal promoting Asian, Asian American, and Asian Diasporic Studies research by undergraduate students at Rice University. As 21st-century Asia is in the midst of rapid political, economic, and cultural change, it is clear that the scholarly lens through which Asia has traditionally been approached by Western-trained academics is sorely in need of revision. RASR situates itself on the front line of this process by providing a venue for scholars at Rice to exhibit their own ideas and learn from those of their peers. Our goal is to produce an inter- and multi-disciplinary compilation of fresh, diverse, and informed approaches to Asian Studies research.



From left to right, top to bottom:
Matt Banschbach, Maya Habraken, Hoang Nguyen, Karen Siu, Danika Li, Hannah Son
Photo taken by Rijuta Vallishayee

VOLUME 6

PUBLISHED ON APRIL 2023

Website: rasr.rice.edu

Email: rasr@rice.edu

About the cover: 51 nations and territories defined geographically as Asia by the United Nations in decreasing order of population. Designed by Justin Park '17, Asian Studies & Biological Sciences.

The sixth volume of RASR would not have been possible without the generous support of Rice's Department of Transnational Asian Studies (DoTAS). We are profoundly indebted to Dr. Haejin E. Koh and Dr. Sonia Ryang, our faculty advisors. Through multiple cycles of editors, Dr. Koh and Dr. Ryang continue to help RASR maintain its standards for high-quality academic publishing. Without their tireless support, advice, and encouragement throughout this entire process, from recruiting our team of editors to delivering the final copy to authors, RASR would not have been possible.

We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to Dr. Lisa Balabanlilar, Dr. Tani Barlow, Dr. Robert Englebretson, Dr. Eric Huntington, Dr. Jaymin Kim, and Edward Kenneth Lazaro Nadurata (UC Irvine) for serving as reviewers for RASR. They generously took the time to provide valuable insights and suggestions for the editorial board and the authors, and in doing so, helped ensure the journal's academic caliber. We are extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from the immense body of expertise on Rice's campus and beyond.

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

The sixth volume of *Rice Asian Studies Review* (RASR) is published in a rather exciting set of circumstances. The 2022-2023 academic year marks the first year since the start of the pandemic that students wholly returned to the classroom. The Department of Transnational Asian Studies had hired three new full-time faculty members, and more students enrolled in Asian Studies classes than ever before. At RASR, we felt the same rush of excitement as we looked ahead towards restoration as well as new beginnings. As we returned to in-person meetings, we were ready to carry the torch and build upon the legacy of previous editorial boards, as well as make our own marks on the journal and continue improving it with fresh ideas.

In this issue, we bring forth a diverse selection of articles that span time, space, and theme. In “After Bringing New Life,” Sara Koh provides a comparative analysis of postpartum practices in South Korea and South Korean communities in the U.S., through which she reveals how healthcare systems and societal values have evolved with time and with the transnational flow of people. Next, in “Potter as Author in Medieval Fine Persian Ceramics,” Nicole Lhuillier elegantly demonstrates how the artisan became an artist through the use of signatures and poetry. Meanwhile, in “Understanding Buddhist Nationalism in South and Southeast Asia,” Shalin Mehta traces the colonial origins of anti-Islam Buddhist nationalism, highlighting how Buddhist nationalists have manipulated certain aspects of Buddhism to advance their agenda. Finally, with an intriguing case study of television censorship in China, Rijuta Vallishayee examines the interplay among history, media, and state power in “Censorship through the Eyes of the Censors.”

As a whole, these articles demonstrate the stunning breadth of interests that Rice undergraduate students hold, as well as that of “Asia” itself. As Asian Studies expands as a program at Rice and as a discipline in academia more generally, we hope that this volume shows how Asia and Asian Diasporic communities, with their immense heterogeneity, can and should be studied with fresh pairs of eyes. It is with this in mind that we at *Rice Asian Studies Review* look towards the future and present to you this exciting volume of our journal.

Hoang Nguyen
Editor-in-Chief

After Bringing New Life: Comparing Postpartum Practices among South Koreans in the United States and South Korea Sara Koh	1
Potter as Author in Medieval Fine Persian Ceramics Nicole Lhuillier	13
Understanding Buddhist Nationalism in South and Southeast Asia Shalin Mehta	25
Censorship through the Eyes of the Censors: The Cases of <i>Story of Yanxi Palace</i> and <i>Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace</i> Rijuta Vallishayee	33

RASR

After Bringing New Life: Comparing Postpartum Practices among South Koreans in the United States and South Korea

Sara Koh

ABSTRACT

Many cultural practices have become increasingly globalized through media and human migration. As these practices spread to new regions, they interact with the pre-existing societal infrastructures and values of those regions, often resulting in their modification or evolution. Gaining a better understanding of various cultural practices and how they may relate to healthcare is of particular importance for improving patient-specific responses, increasing the efficacy of the clinical experience with the patient. This comparative analysis focuses on the cultural practices of postpartum care among South Koreans in South Korea and South Korean immigrants in the United States. In both populations, postpartum practices center on three pillars: support, rest, and diet, all of which stem from historical Korean traditions. However, these practices diverge in how they have evolved over time due to differences in the United States and South Korean healthcare systems and societal values. As global migration continues to increase the cultural diversity of the United States, the U.S. healthcare system must demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for various cultural practices, including postpartum care, to improve patient-provider relationships and patient outcomes. In addition, South Korean postpartum traditions may serve as a useful tool in addressing gaps in postpartum care in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Childbirth is often perceived as a universal event, as every human's life begins with their physiological birth, yet the traditions and practices regarding this event vary significantly between different cultures and eras for both the mother and the newborn. According to the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, childbirth is the process of "labor" and "delivery," and the weeks following childbirth is the mother's postpartum period.¹ Postpartum practices refer to the set of rituals that a mother performs or engages in during the weeks immediately after she has given birth. These practices usually focus on the mother's recovery from the physically and psychologically traumatic event of childbirth and often involve culturally-influenced behavioral adjustments for the new mother and her family members as she steps into her new role.²

With the increasing globalization of culture through media and human migration, various cultural traditions and experiences, including postpartum practices, have spread and evolved across the globe. They interact with pre-existing traditions in foreign regions and engage with modernization as a result of technological and medical advancements. Previous studies have performed comparative analyses to explore the similarities and differences of postpartum practices between different cultures, including those in East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, and have found various trends in familial support, rest and hygiene, and diet with the same goals of improving the mother's recovery and facilitating her transition to motherhood.³ In this paper, I explore a new angle: rather than focusing on intercultural comparisons, I perform a comparative analysis between South Koreans in South Korea and South Korean immigrants in the United States with respect to postpartum practices to explore factors

that influence the maintenance of postpartum cultural traditions for Korean mothers.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, South Korean immigrants represent the tenth-largest immigration population in the United States and are the fifth-largest group from Asia.⁴ Many South Koreans immigrate for educational and professional opportunities, with a majority residing in California, New York, and New Jersey.⁵ The large populations of Korean immigrants in these areas have helped the development of Koreatowns, or neighborhoods in which Korean culture thrives and interacts with the wide range of cultures present in the United States, facilitating the globalization of Korean culture outside of Asia. However, even with these Korean-dominated enclaves, many South Korean immigrants are often forced or pressured to reshape their cultural practices to fit the available resources that they have in their new setting, especially with regard to medical care.

To compare postpartum practices among South Koreans in South Korea and South Korean immigrants in the United States, I will first explore the historical traditions surrounding postpartum care in South Korea to develop a baseline set of practices from which both communities started their traditions. Here, I discuss the influence of shamanism in ancient Korea on the development of postpartum traditions and practices. Secondly, I will examine current postpartum practices and customs among South Korean mothers in South Korea, analyzing how historical traditions and new technologies and resources intersect to create the set of postpartum practices that are used today. Next, I will examine current postpartum practices and customs of South Korean immigrants in the United States and how they differ from historical traditions and those practiced in South Korea today to analyze how postpartum practices are maintained or modified in a foreign setting. Lastly, I will discuss the United States and South Korean healthcare systems and societal values as possible explanations for why current practices have changed from historical traditions, as well as why there are

diverging practices and customs between South Korean mothers in South Korea and those in the United States.

HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

First, to compare postpartum practices among South Koreans in South Korea and South Korean immigrants in the United States, an analysis of historical postpartum traditions and beliefs in South Korea is required to determine how influences, such as healthcare systems and changes in societal values, have impacted the development and evolution of these practices in today's world. Historically, most Koreans lived under the influences of various religions and ideologies, such as shamanism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.⁶ Among these religions and ideologies, shamanism is the belief system that had the largest influence in shaping postpartum traditions in Korea. Shamanism has been widely practiced in Korea since 1,000 B.C. and was centered on a spirit world with good and evil entities that could influence human affairs. Korean shamanism also practiced elements of animism, in which natural elements, such as trees, mountains, rocks, and rivers, possessed their own spirits. Many historical postpartum traditions in South Korea included prayers and rituals to these various spirits that began during the woman's pregnancy and continued throughout her postpartum period.⁷ For example, women typically prayed and gave offerings to the *samshin halmoni*, or grandmother spirit, as well as mountain spirits and various rocks and trees that were considered to be sacred.⁸ The *samshin halmoni* was most closely associated with childbirth and the growth of children, and women continued to offer rice and *miyeok guk*, a Korean seaweed soup, to the *samshin halmoni* for seven days after childbirth. Then, the women would eat the rice and *miyeok guk* themselves to facilitate their recovery with the soup's believed detoxification abilities. Ancient records dating back to the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) and Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) provide reports of this tradition of women eating *miyeok guk* after childbirth.⁹ Some folktales from these periods also say that this custom originated after

people observed whales eating seaweed after giving birth.¹⁰

The seven days of offering *miyeok guk* to the *samshin halmoni* made up a longer twenty-one-day lying-in period, referred to as *saam-chil-il*, translated into “three-seven-days.”¹¹ During this honored period of concentrated focus on the mother’s well-being and recovery after giving birth, mothers typically stayed in their homes or their mother’s homes. Here, their only responsibilities were to eat, sleep, and nurse while their relatives, mostly their mothers or mothers-in-law, attended to all other responsibilities, providing both a sense of freedom and confinement for the new mothers. Additionally, women were protected from feeling cold and forbidden from touching water, such as bathing or brushing their teeth, inspired by the yin-yang theory of disease.¹² Aligning with Daoist and Confucian beliefs, women were believed to lose heat (*yang*) during childbirth. As a result, they were prohibited from becoming colder by physically interacting with cold (*yin*) substances, such as cold water.¹³ Thus, a harmonious balance of *yin* and *yang* was carefully maintained in the mother’s postpartum period.

These traditions culminated in a set of practices referred to as *sanhujori*, which facilitated the successful recovery of the mother, her long-term well-being, and her child’s health. The failure to adhere to these practices was historically believed to put the mother at risk for *sanhubyung*, or postpartum ills, characterized as a group of acute and chronic symptoms or sequelae, including sensitive teeth, knee and back pain, and gastrointestinal irritation.¹⁴

CURRENT PRACTICES IN SOUTH KOREA

To understand postpartum traditions in South Korea today, I have utilized South Korean public health studies and informal blog articles from South Korean mothers regarding postpartum practices and experiences. The maintenance of traditional postpartum practices has stemmed from a variety of factors, such as the prevalence of Confucian values and scientific studies

investigating their efficacy. However, technological advancements and changes in South Korean society have also encouraged these traditions to change or evolve from what they historically were.

Confucianism, imported to Korea from China approximately 2,000 years ago, demonstrates an enduring influence on South Korean values, especially concerning family.¹⁵ Under the influence of Confucianism, parents and elderly relatives are treated with the utmost respect, which has facilitated the continuation of several traditions including postpartum rituals, through many generations, as young adults, especially women, are expected to follow even the most bothersome traditional rituals and taboos if family elders insist.¹⁶ Recent studies have explored the medical benefits of Korean traditional non-professional postpartum care on the mother’s physical and psychological healing after childbirth, and its positive results also encourage the continuation of many of these traditions into today’s culture in South Korea.¹⁷ Thus, many mothers still adhere to *saam-chil-il*, although many of its components have shifted from what they traditionally were. Due to new advancements and changes in Korean societal values, many postpartum traditions have evolved to accommodate the new technological and societal scene of South Korea and promote the mother’s comfort and recovery, but these current postpartum practices in South Korea still center around the pillars of support, rest, and diet.

Social support for the mother after childbirth is prevalent in many cultures, due to its impact on the mother’s mental and physical health, and is seen in both emotional support and practical help, such as housework and childcare activities.¹⁸ In South Korea, social support is typically provided by the mother’s maternal figures, such as her mother or her mother-in-law, especially because most adult children maintain strong bonds with their parents even after they establish their own families, another phenomenon that aligns with Confucian values.¹⁹ Mothers typically care for their grandchild for about one month after their children

have a baby, although this childcare is often extended to three to four years if their daughter or daughter-in-law returns to her occupation outside the home. This supportive familial network from mothers and mothers-in-law eases the postpartum recovery and transition to motherhood, especially for working mothers.

With respect to rest, temperature is still regarded as one of the most important factors in South Korea for a mother to consider during her postpartum period to avoid *saan-hoo-poong*, or post-delivery body aches and joint pain.²⁰ Mothers typically remain in heated rooms after giving birth during her *saam-chil-il* and do not wear short-sleeved clothing or walk around barefoot. One shift from historical traditions is that mothers are no longer discouraged from touching water or taking a bath. This historical tradition most likely stemmed from the absence of shower systems that could provide hot water. Now, mothers can easily take a shower or bath without judgment or disapproval from their family, on the conditions that the water temperature is warm and they completely dry their hair afterward.

Mothers also take great care to only consume warm drinks and food. Many mothers continue to eat *miyeok guk* for up to three meals a day during *saam-chil-il* due to continued societal beliefs that the seaweed cleanses and detoxifies the body and increases breast milk.²¹ Scientific studies exploring *miyeok guk*'s nutrients also contribute to the preservation of this tradition, as many mothers seek the benefits that this soup brings. This dish is high in calcium, fiber, and iron, which prevents bone loss associated with pregnancy and childbirth, constipation, and anemia, respectively. Additionally, the soup is hydrating, which is especially important for breastfeeding mothers. However, prayers and offerings of *miyeok guk* to the *samshin halmoni* are no longer practiced, especially following the rise of Christianity in South Korea, which discouraged prayers and offerings to nature spirits.²²

Starting in 1996, South Korea began to see a growing popularity of postpartum care centers, referred to as *sanhujoriwon*, where mothers could enjoy luxurious

services, sometimes under medical supervision, such as healthy meals prepared by trained postpartum chefs and guided practices to restore their energy and health after giving birth.²³ In 2018, a total of 584 *sanhujoriwon* were reported to be in operation, and 75% of delivering women reported staying at one of these facilities. These mother-centric facilities allow mothers to recover physically and psychologically from childbirth through a stay that typically lasts approximately fourteen days and has been described as an all-inclusive spa break with meals, skincare, and massages.²⁴ The newborn babies are cared for by nurses 24/7, and mothers are only responsible for feeding the babies. Visitor access is also typically restricted at these postpartum care centers.

While *sanhujoriwon* have risen in popularity and become widely used in larger urban cities in South Korea, such as Seoul, public health studies have shown that postpartum traditions in rural South Korea have not changed as drastically from historical traditions. This has resulted in a divergence of postpartum practices between regions in South Korea. As a member of the Yonsei University Kanghwa Community Health Project, Dorothea Sich observed thirty families from the rural district of Kanghwa and found a wealth of information on traditional concepts, customs, and attitudes regarding childbirth and postpartum care that was practiced in this region.²⁵ Based on Sich's findings, elaborate considerations and attention for the mother are still followed to restore her health after pregnancy. Additionally, rest and warmth are still considered the highest priorities for mothers due to the traditional belief that during childbirth, the mother's pelvic bones become loose, and rest and warmth are required to restore them to their pre-childbirth state. Rural South Korean mothers seem to adhere to historical postpartum beliefs and customs more strictly than urban South Korean mothers, especially concerning temperature. While South Korean urban mothers typically reported maintaining warmth by only using hot water to shower and keeping the air conditioning off in their homes or *sanhujoriwon* rooms during their *saam-*

chil-il periods, rural mothers reported keeping their nursery hot and sticky by keeping windows and doors closed to prevent any exposure to wind and covering themselves in thick blankets, even in the hottest summer months.²⁶ These mothers reported that they followed these traditions diligently because of the benefits that historical and societal beliefs promised these practices would bring, as well as a fear of upsetting their mothers-in-law and husbands. However, these women differed from preceding generations and urban South Korean mothers in the number of days that they reserved for postpartum care. These rural mothers believed that the appropriate time for rest after birth was seven days, rather than the twenty-one-day *saam-chil-il* period previously outlined by historical postpartum traditions. This phenomenon may be influenced by a stronger need for these rural mothers to quickly return to household chores or agricultural work. Additionally, rather than relying on nurses at a *sanhujoriwon* facility or a professional Korean postpartum specialist, rural mothers more strongly adhere to historical traditions of relying on family for the majority of their physical and social support during their postpartum recovery.²⁷ Rural mothers, like their preceding and modern urban counterparts, also diligently eat *miyeok guk* during their postpartum period due to beliefs that it promotes regeneration of blood and milk flow.²⁸

CURRENT PRACTICES AMONG SOUTH KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

To understand current postpartum traditions among South Korean immigrants in the United States, I have also utilized public health studies and informal blog articles from South Korean immigrant mothers regarding postpartum practices and experiences.

During her position as an assistant professor at Texas Woman's University, where she taught maternal and child nursing, Kyoung-Eun Lee interviewed sixteen Korean immigrant couples from the Greater Seattle area in Washington to understand Korean immigrant couples'

perinatal beliefs and practices in a U.S. sociocultural context, as well as the challenges and benefits of their out-of-culture childbirth and postpartum experience in the United States.²⁹ Ethnographic studies, including those of Lee, have provided valuable insight into current practices among South Korean immigrants in the United States, with regard to postpartum care in the same focal points of support, rest, and diet. Generally, the postpartum practices of women of Korean descent in the United States reflect a compromise between South Korean traditional care and Western modern medicine and values.³⁰

Whereas many South Korean mothers in South Korea report their mother-in-law, mother, *sanhujoriwon* nurses, or a professional Korean postpartum specialist as their main caretaker after giving birth, South Korean immigrant mothers in the United States often report their husbands as the ultimate source of support during their out-of-culture childbirth and postpartum experience.³¹ In their new social environment, many Korean immigrant postpartum women have limited social networks and relatives from whom to seek opportunities for help, especially if they do not immigrate with their parents or in-laws.³² Korean husbands traditionally held a very limited role in labor and childcare, but Korean women reported that U.S. culture and the absence of other family members seemed to encourage their husbands to take a more active role in assisting their wives during childbirth and their postpartum period.³³ Many Korean women also reported an appreciation of experiencing this important milestone with their spouse in a foreign setting because it strengthened their marital bond as they were forced to heavily rely on each other with no other surrounding family members.³⁴ Outside of familial relations, many Korean immigrant mothers have found support systems in a network of other Korean immigrant postpartum mothers through social media and chat rooms.³⁵ However, with respect to receiving advice about postpartum care, several public health studies report that many unassimilated Korean mothers still have a tendency to defer to their mothers-in-law

rather than ask nurses at their U.S healthcare facilities for advice.³⁶

The historical restriction of touching water is also no longer followed by Korean immigrant mothers in the U.S., as these mothers now often use specialized soaks and steam baths with herbs, such as mugwort, to reduce swelling, boost circulation, and relax.³⁷ However, the tradition of keeping the temperature warm is still adhered to, even in the hot summer months. Most mothers will not use air conditioning or consume any cold foods or drinks for the first twenty-one days after giving birth. However, one tradition that is not adhered to as strictly in the United States is the isolation aspect of *saam-chil-il*. While South Korean mothers traditionally remain indoors for the duration of their recovery, South Korean immigrant mothers in the United States do not report following this tradition due to a stronger social pressure to quickly return to work. Additionally, without the surrounding support from their mother or other female relatives, many South Korean immigrant mothers do not have the luxury of being free from housework and childcare, thus cannot adhere to the rest and isolation requirements of *saam-chil-il*.

With respect to diet, many postpartum practices continue to mirror those practiced in South Korea, both historically and currently. *Miyeok guk* is still consumed by most South Korean mothers in the United States. However, several South Korean immigrant women reported that this was a difficult tradition to follow after birth but before discharge from their hospitals, as nurses would immediately bring ice water and cold sandwiches and salads to eat for their first meal after they had given birth.³⁸ Thus, this tradition typically does not begin until the mother is discharged from the hospital and returns home.

Hence, South Korean immigrant mothers experience several challenges throughout their out-of-culture childbirth experiences, such as limited support systems, husbands' non-traditional gender roles, and difficulties obtaining particular Korean foods. All of these factors lead to a divergence in postpartum practices between

South Korean mothers in South Korea and the United States.³⁹

Although *sanhujoriwon* are not prevalent in the United States, many South Korean immigrants in the United States have found another effective alternative: hiring a *sanhujoerisa* or *sanhudoumi*, an in-home postpartum care provider.⁴⁰ These providers, often middle-aged Korean women trained in postpartum maternal and infant care who stay for about two weeks, provide many of the benefits of a *sanhujoriwon* but in the comfort of the mother's home. Her responsibilities typically include performing light household chores, cooking meals for the mother, and taking care of the baby.⁴¹

COMPARISON OF HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS AND SOCIETAL VALUES IN SOUTH KOREA AND THE UNITED STATES

Through an analysis of public health studies, published surveys of postpartum mothers, and healthcare policies, comparisons between the United States and South Korean healthcare systems and societal values are required to understand why current practices have changed from historical traditions. It may also provide insight into why there are diverging practices and customs between South Korean mothers in South Korea and those in the United States.

The United States healthcare system places a heavy emphasis on prenatal care, but postpartum care is often overlooked.⁴² Additionally, after birth, U.S. society places a much heavier focus on the newborn than on the mother's recovery after childbirth, demonstrated by common negative workplace attitudes toward maternity leave.⁴³ According to Leah Albers, of the entire maternity care cycle, a mother's postpartum period is regarded with the lowest priority with respect to both practice and research.⁴⁴ This lack of attention manifests in the high prevalence of health problems in mothers after they give birth, as well as the under-recognition of these health problems by healthcare providers. A survey of women's childbearing experiences in 2002 revealed

that one in five women experienced postpartum depression, and the prevalence of fatigue in mothers two months postpartum was 76% in the United States.⁴⁵ Additionally, many postpartum mothers in the United States report pain in their cesarean-section incisions, back, and head, and these symptoms, along with fatigue, negatively impact their overall physical and social health.

In the U.S., mothers are encouraged to return to their pre-childbirth responsibilities as soon as possible, and their first post-childbirth OB/GYN appointments are typically not held until six weeks after they give birth.⁴⁶ This attitude toward postpartum care significantly differs from that of many Eastern cultures, including that of South Korea. To elaborate, South Korea emphasizes the importance of postpartum care so that mothers can fully recover after childbirth to prevent future chronic medical issues and regain strength before stepping into their role as the mother of a newborn. South Korean society strongly believes that if a mother is allowed complete healing after childbirth, she will be better equipped to help her newborn thrive. This belief is demonstrated by South Korea's Mother and Child Health Act, last amended in January 2015, in which several articles outline measures to protect the life and health of mothers to contribute to the improvement of national health.⁴⁷

The role of physicians also differs greatly between South Korea and the United States. Physicians in South Korea are typically considered authority figures due to their expertise and health knowledge; thus, South Korean mothers are often very trusting of their healthcare providers, expecting them to make health-related decisions for themselves and their newborns. Contrastingly, healthcare providers in the United States help their patients make their own informed healthcare decisions for themselves and their children and typically refrain from telling their patients what choices to make.⁴⁸ While some South Korean immigrant mothers reported an appreciation for the friendliness of their healthcare providers in the United States compared

to their authoritarian physicians in Korea, others stated that they missed their authoritarian healthcare providers who would tell them what decisions to make and reported increased feelings of anxiety when having to make healthcare decisions for themselves.⁴⁹

Additionally, navigating a foreign healthcare system, communicating with U.S. healthcare providers in an unfamiliar language, and concurrently using traditional health remedies that could conflict with Western medicine serve as more challenges that these mothers face during both their childbirth and postpartum experiences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a close examination of public health studies and informal blog articles reveals similar and diverging postpartum traditions among South Korean mothers in South Korea and South Korean immigrant mothers in the United States. Many of these traditions still hold a strong resemblance to what they historically were since the Goryeo Dynasty. However, various factors, such as technological advancements, contrasting healthcare systems, and differences in societal values, have contributed to an evolution and divergence of these postpartum traditions between these two populations.

Exploring and understanding cultural practices, including postpartum care, serves as a useful tool in improving patient-provider relationships and patient outcomes. Physicians and healthcare systems must be respectful of the cultural traditions of each family that they serve because these practices can help relieve stress and increase comfort, which decreases the risk of health issues and improves recovery outcomes. Studies have reported that disregard for cultural traditions on the part of medical staff increases stress for the families that they treat, thus, the healthcare field is placing a stronger emphasis on the importance of cultural competency and respecting the sociocultural identities of patients.⁵⁰ As the trend of global migration continues to increase the cultural diversity that we see in the United States,

our healthcare system and medical providers must be prepared to provide culturally congruent care to their patients from a wide range of sociocultural backgrounds and experiences. Nursing theorist Madeleine Leininger defines culturally congruent care as “cognitively based assistive, supportive, facilitative, or enabling acts or decisions that are tailor-made to fit with individual, group, or institutional cultural values, beliefs, and life-ways to provide or support meaningful, beneficial, and satisfying health care or well-being services.”⁵¹ An example of culturally congruent postpartum care for South Korean immigrant mothers could be a medical provider’s understanding of the importance of *miyeok guk* for South Korean women and a provision of means by which to heat this soup in order to consume it before their hospital discharge, which would eliminate one of the most prevalent negative hospitalization experiences shared by Korean immigrant mothers.⁵²

Additionally, the ability to practice cultural postpartum traditions and find a support system in the United States has been shown to help prevent or mitigate postpartum depression in this population. Postpartum depression (PPD) affects one in seven women in the United States, but its prevalence among women of Asian descent is not extensively researched, despite their rapidly growing population.⁵³ Professor at the San José State University School of Social Work, Meekyung Han, argues that the Confucian-based value of “saving face” has negatively influenced the mental health of South Korean immigrant mothers, as many Korean immigrant women minimize their PPD symptoms as “not severe enough” to warrant seeking help from their U.S. doctors.⁵⁴ However, recognition and respect of cultural traditions have been shown to reduce the risk of PPD in this population, further emphasizing the importance of culturally congruent care. Many researchers have proposed possible solutions or recommendations for bridging the gap between Korean immigrant families and the United States healthcare system. For example, many Korean immigrants reported difficulties communicating with

their medical providers due to the language barrier, such as not knowing the vocabulary to describe their pain or symptoms. Additionally, while the use of translators in hospitals has become an effective and prevalent means of overcoming this language barrier for many vulnerable populations, the Confucian-based value of “saving face” can pose another obstacle for Korean postpartum mothers to comfortably share their symptoms with someone other than their medical provider.⁵⁵ To address this, hospitals could develop a bilingual pamphlet about medical terms and the U.S healthcare system to address language barriers between Korean mothers and their medical providers.⁵⁶

While culturally congruent care brings many benefits to immigrant populations in the United States, an understanding of cultural traditions and their benefits could potentially bring many improvements to the health and medical care of populations outside of immigrants from that culture as well. For example, due to the benefits of Korean postpartum care and the dire need for improvements in postpartum care in the United States, the United States healthcare system should consider adopting features of the mother-centric postpartum care seen in East Asian cultures, such as South Korea. This is especially critical because many scientific and public health studies have proven their medical benefits for women recovering from childbirth. Widespread adoption of *saam-chil-il* in the United States would be extremely difficult, as it would require many changes in societal values and legal policies. Nevertheless, smaller measures, such as earlier postpartum check-ups or dietary recommendations of increased calcium, fiber, and iron, which are the nutrients found in *miyeok guk*, could help address the prevalence of health issues in women who have recently given birth.

Furthermore, cultural globalization has initiated *sanhujoriwon*’s expansion into the United States, providing South Korean immigrant mothers with a highly valued resource that was previously only available in South Korea. These *sanhujoriwon* are mostly located

in areas with large Korean immigrant and Korean American communities, such as Los Angeles and New York City. However, these *sanhujoriwon* vary greatly in their adherence to South Korean traditions, as many choose to cater to non-Korean populations as well. Boram Nam, the co-founder of Boram Postnatal Retreat in New York, launched one of the first *sanhujoriwon*-like experiences in the United States.⁵⁷ She reports that her retreat does not exactly replicate the practices of *sanhujoriwon* in South Korea, but has modified the comprehensive and full postpartum recovery service for the American market. Instead of the traditional *miyeok guk*, her retreat works with postpartum chefs to create a seasonal menu that covers three meals a day, using ingredients that are low in sodium and high in fiber. Mothers also have access to Q&A sessions, lactation workshops, and infant CPR classes to prepare them for motherhood. However, one limitation of this solution to the lack of postpartum care in the United States is that it is not accessible to mothers of all socioeconomic levels, as these postnatal retreats typically cost approximately \$700-800 per night. Thus, a simpler and more accessible alternative would be increased patient education about postpartum care regarding the physical and psychological changes of the postpartum period. In addition, recommendations for preventing health issues during this recovery could provide some of the benefits of a *sanhujoriwon* stay without the substantial financial costs.

Another potential alternative that is already gaining popularity in the United States is midwives, who are trained birth workers who provide care during the prenatal, birth, and postpartum periods. These individuals are similar to the South Korean *sanhujoerisa* or *sanhudoumi* described earlier in this paper. However, more work needs to be done on the comparison of *sanhujoerisa* and midwives in South Korea and the United States with regard to their practices and outcomes to further explore the efficacy of South Korean postpartum traditions.

Nonetheless, it can be concluded that South Korean

postpartum traditions may serve as a useful tool in addressing gaps in postpartum care in the United States, both among Korean and non-Korean populations. Beyond postpartum care, evaluating other cultural health traditions and their evolution in Asian diasporic communities could help address gaps in healthcare in these populations. Additionally, these evaluations serve as a useful tool in improving the general health of the domestic communities with which these diasporic populations interact.

NOTES

1. "Labor and Delivery," Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/labor-delivery>.
2. Cecilia Chou, "The Embryo Project Encyclopedia," "Traditional postpartum practices and rituals: a qualitative systematic review" (2007), by Cindy-Lee Dennis, Kenneth Fung, Sophie Grigoriadis, Gail Erlick Robinson, Sarah Romans and Lori Ross | The Embryo Project Encyclopedia, August 17, 2017. <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/traditional-postpartum-practices-and-rituals-qualitative-systematic-review-2007-cindy-lee>.
3. Cindy-Lee Dennis et al., "Traditional Postpartum Practices and Rituals: A Qualitative Systematic Review." *Women's Health* 3, no. 4 (2007): 487–502.
4. Cecilia Esterline and Jeanne Batalova, "Korean Immigrants in the United States," *The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, 2022. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/korean-immigrants-united-states-2017>.
5. Esterline and Batalova, "Korean Immigrants in the United States."
6. "Historical and Modern Religions of Korea," *Asia Society*, 2001, <https://asiasociety.org/education/historical-and-modern-religions-korea>.
7. Mark Cartwright, "Shamanism in Ancient Korea," *World History Encyclopedia*, March 31, 2023, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/968/shamanism-in-ancient-korea/>.
8. Lisa S Davis, "Birth and Maternal Health around the World," *Parenting*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.parenting.com/pregnancy/birth-maternal-health/>.
9. Do-Kyung Lee et al., "Nationwide Representative Survey of Dietary Iodine Intake and Urinary Excretion in Postpartum Korean Women," *Nutrients* 13, no. 11 (2021): 3955–65.
10. Kaori O'Connor, *Seaweed: A Global History*, London: Reaktion Books, 2017.
11. Kelly Lee, "The Tried and True Korean Secrets to a Smooth(Er) Postpartum Recovery," *The Everymom*, 2020, <https://theeverymom.com/postpartum-recovery-korean-secrets/>.
12. Eun Kwang Yoo, "An Ethnographic Study of *Sanhubyung* Experienced by Women in Korean Postpartal Culture," *The Journal of Nurses Academic Society* 25, no. 4 (1995): 825–36.
13. Davis, "Birth and Maternal Health around the World"; Lee, "The Tried and True Korean Secrets to a Smooth(Er) Postpartum Recovery."
14. Yoo, "An Ethnographic Study of *Sanhubyung* Experienced by Women in Korean Postpartal Culture"; Eun-Kwang Yoo, "[Health Promotion. Health Promoting Behavior for Women's Health: an Analysis on Meanings of *Sanhujori*, Korea, Postpartum Care]," *Kanhohak Tamgu* 2, no. 2 (1993): 37–65.
15. Anthony Kuhn, "A Woman Takes a Lead Role in Confucian Ceremonies, Breaking a New Path in South Korea," *NPR*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/19/1045999366/women-equality-south-korea-confucian-ceremony-confucianism>.
16. Kyoung-Eun Lee, "The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-Time Mothers in the United States," *International Journal of Childbirth* 3, no. 1 (2013): 39–51.
17. KY Eun, "[A Study on the Relationship between Women's Health Status and the Experience of *Sanhujori*, the Korean Traditional Non-Professional Postpartal Care]," *Taehan Kanho* 36, no. 5 (1997): 74–90.
18. DK Gjerdingen et al., "The Effects of Social Support on Women's Health during Pregnancy, Labor and Delivery, and the Postpartum Period," *Fam Med* 23, no. 5 (1991): 370–75.
19. Sookhyun C. Lee and Pat M. Keith, "The Transition to Motherhood of Korean Women," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 30, no. 3 (1999): 453–70.
20. Hye-jun Lee, "Korean Postpartum Care Is Special," *The Korea Times*, January 25, 2013, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2013/01/319_129458.html.
21. Lee, "Korean Postpartum Care Is Special."
22. Andrew E. Kim, "Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 2 (2000): 117–33.
23. Ju-Eun Song et al., "Effects of a Maternal Role Adjustment Program for First Time Mothers Who Use Postpartum Care Centers (*Sanhujoriwon*) in South Korea: A Quasi-Experimental Study," *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 20, no. 1 (2020).
24. Jeyup S. Kwaak, "Next Korean Wave: Post-Pregnancy Care Centers?" *The Wall Street Journal*, 2013, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-KRTB-3614>.
25. Dorothea Sich, "Traditional Concepts and Customs on Pregnancy, Birth and Post Partum Period in Rural Korea," *Social Science & Medicine, Part B: Medical Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1981): 65–69.
26. Sich, "Traditional Concepts and Customs on Pregnancy, Birth and Post Partum Period in Rural Korea."
27. Sich, "Traditional Concepts and Customs on Pregnancy, Birth and Post Partum Period in Rural Korea."
28. Sich, "Traditional Concepts and Customs on Pregnancy, Birth and Post Partum Period in Rural Korea."
29. Kyoung-Eun Lee, *Korean Immigrant Couples' out-of-Culture Childbirth Experience in the United States*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011.
30. Sangkwon Woo and Mark V. Flinn, "Traditional Postpartum Care among Women of Korean Descent in the United States," *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 26, no. 9 (2022): 1871–80.
31. Lee, *Korean Immigrant Couples' out-of-Culture Childbirth Experience in the United States*.
32. Woo and Flinn, "Traditional Postpartum Care among Women of Korean Descent in the United States."
33. Lee, "The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-Time Mothers in the United States."
34. Lee, "The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-Time Mothers in the United States."
35. Meekyung Han et al., "Korean Immigrant Women's Postpartum Experiences in the United States," *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 45, no. 1 (2020): 42–48.
36. Janet U. Schneiderman, "Postpartum Nursing for Korean Mothers," *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 21, no. 3 (1996): 155–58.
37. Lee, Kelly. "The Tried and True Korean Secrets to a Smooth(Er) Postpartum Recovery."
38. Lee, "The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-Time Mothers in the United States."
39. Lee, *Korean Immigrant Couples' out-of-Culture Childbirth Experience in the United States*.
40. Lee, Kelly. "The Tried and True Korean Secrets to a Smooth(Er) Postpartum Recovery."
41. Yaeri Song, "These Korean Postpartum Services Make Giving

Birth Totally Worth It,” *The Klog*, June 2, 2016, <https://theklog.co/korean-postpartum-services/>.

42. Ching-Yu Cheng et al., “Continuing Education Module: Postpartum Maternal Health Care in the United States: A Critical Review,” *Journal of Perinatal Education* 15, no. 3 (2006): 34–42.

43. “Korean Post-Partum Traditions,” ZenKimchi, November 12, 2018, <https://zenkimchi.com/top-posts/korena-post-partum-traditions/>.

44. Leah L. Albers, “Health Problems after Childbirth,” *Journal of Midwifery & Women’s Health* 45, no. 1 (2000): 55–57.

45. Cheng et al., “Continuing Education Module: Postpartum Maternal Health Care in the United States: A Critical Review”; Judith A. Lothian, “Listening to Mothers—the First National U.S. Survey of Women’s Childbearing Experiences,” *The Journal of Perinatal Education* 12, no. 1 (2003): vi–viii.

46. Andrea Park, “20 Minutes with: Boram Nam on Bringing the South Korean Tradition of Postnatal Care to America,” *Barrons*, October 3, 2022, <https://www.barrons.com/articles/20-minutes-with-boram-nam-on-bringing-the-south-korean-tradition-of-postnatal-care-to-america-01664811670>.

47. “Mother and Child Health Act,” Korea Legislation Research Institute: Korea Law Translation Center, n.d., https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=33648&type=part&key=38.

48. Lee, *Korean Immigrant Couples’ out-of-Culture Childbirth Experience in the United States*.

49. Lee, “The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-Time Mothers in the United States.”

50. Schneiderman, “Postpartum Nursing for Korean Mothers.”

51. Madeleine Leininger, “Transcultural Care Principles, Human Rights, and Ethical Considerations,” *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 3, no. 1 (1991): 21–23.

52. Kee-Joung Yoo Park and Leona M. Peterson, “Beliefs, Practices, and Experiences of Korean Women in Relation to Childbirth,” *Health Care for Women International* 12, no. 2 (1991): 261–69.

53. Han et al., “Korean Immigrant Women’s Postpartum Experiences in the United States.”

54. Han et al., “Korean Immigrant Women’s Postpartum Experiences in the United States.”

55. Han et al., “Korean Immigrant Women’s Postpartum Experiences in the United States.”

56. Park and Peterson, “Beliefs, Practices, and Experiences of Korean Women in Relation to Childbirth.”

57. Park, “20 Minutes With: Boram Nam on Bringing the South Korean Tradition of Postnatal Care to America.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albers, Leah L. “Health Problems after Childbirth.” *Journal of Midwifery & Women’s Health* 45, no. 1 (2000): 55–57. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1526-9523\(99\)00003-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1526-9523(99)00003-3).

Cartwright, Mark. “Shamanism in Ancient Korea.” *World History Encyclopedia*. March 31, 2023. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/968/shamanism-in-ancient-korea/>.

Cheng, Ching-Yu, Eileen R. Fowles, and Lorraine O. Walker. “Continuing Education Module: Postpartum Maternal Health Care in the United States: A Critical Review.” *Journal of Perinatal Education* 15, no. 3 (2006): 34–42. <https://doi.org/10.1624/105812406x119002>.

Chou, Cecilia. “The Embryo Project Encyclopedia.” “Traditional postpartum practices and rituals: a qualitative systematic

review” (2007), by Cindy-Lee Dennis, Kenneth Fung, Sophie Grigoriadis, Gail Erlick Robinson, Sarah Romans and Lori Ross | *The Embryo Project Encyclopedia*, August 17, 2017. <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/traditional-postpartum-practices-and-rituals-qualitative-systematic-review-2007-cindy-lee>.

Davis, Lisa S. “Birth and Maternal Health around the World.” *Parenting*, June 25, 2019. <https://www.parenting.com/pregnancy/birth-maternal-health/>.

Dennis, Cindy-Lee, Kenneth Fung, Sophie Grigoriadis, Gail Erlick Robinson, Sarah Romans, and Lori Ross. “Traditional Postpartum Practices and Rituals: A Qualitative Systematic Review.” *Women’s Health* 3, no. 4 (2007): 487–502. <https://doi.org/10.2217/17455057.3.4.487>.

Esterline, Cecilia, and Jeanne Batalova. “Korean Immigrants in the United States.” *The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, 2022. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/korean-immigrants-united-states-2017>.

Eun, KY. “[A Study on the Relationship between Women’s Health Status and the Experience of Sanhujori, the Korean Traditional Non-Professional Postpartal Care].” *Taehan Kanho* 36, no. 5 (1997): 74–90.

Gjerdingen, DK, DG Froberg, and P Fontaine. “The Effects of Social Support on Women’s Health during Pregnancy, Labor and Delivery, and the Postpartum Period.” *Fam Med* 23, no. 5 (1991): 370–75.

Han, Meekyung, Deepika Goyal, Jiyoung Lee, Hyang Cho, and Amber Kim. “Korean Immigrant Women’s Postpartum Experiences in the United States.” *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 45, no. 1 (2020): 42–48. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nmc.0000000000000585>.

“Historical and Modern Religions of Korea.” *Asia Society*, 2001. <https://asiasociety.org/education/historical-and-modern-religions-korea>.

Kim, Andrew E. “Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea.” *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 2 (2000): 117–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712281>.

“Korean Post-Partum Traditions.” ZenKimchi, November 12, 2018. <https://zenkimchi.com/top-posts/korena-post-partum-traditions/>.

Kuhn, Anthony. “A Woman Takes a Lead Role in Confucian Ceremonies, Breaking a New Path in South Korea.” *NPR*, October 19, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/19/1045999366/women-equality-south-korea-confucian-ceremony-confucianism>.

Kwaak, Jeyup S. “Next Korean Wave: Post-Pregnancy Care Centers?” *The Wall Street Journal*, 2013. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-KRTB-3614>.

“Labor and Delivery.” Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/labor-delivery>.

Lee, Do-Kyung, Hunjoo Lee, Hyeyoung Lee, Taehyung Yoon, Seon-Joo Park, and Hae-Jeung Lee. “Nationwide Representative Survey of Dietary Iodine Intake and Urinary Excretion in Postpartum Korean Women.” *Nutrients* 13, no. 11 (2021): 3955–65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13113955>.

Lee, Hye-jun. “Korean Postpartum Care Is Special.” *The Korea Times*, January 25, 2013. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2013/01/319_129458.html.

- Lee, Kelly. "The Tried and True Korean Secrets to a Smooth(Er) Postpartum Recovery." *The Everymom*, 2020. <https://theeverymom.com/postpartum-recovery-korean-secrets/>.
- Lee, Kyoung-Eun. *Korean Immigrant Couples' out-of-Culture Childbirth Experience in the United States*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011.
- . "The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-Time Mothers in the United States." *International Journal of Childbirth* 3, no. 1 (2013): 39–51. <https://doi.org/10.1891/2156-5287.3.1.39>.
- Lee, Sookhyun C., and Pat M. Keith. "The Transition to Motherhood of Korean Women." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 30, no. 3 (1999): 453–70. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.30.3.453>.
- Leininger, Madeleine. "Transcultural Care Principles, Human Rights, and Ethical Considerations." *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 3, no. 1 (1991): 21–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104365969100300105>.
- Lothian, Judith A. "Listening to Mothers—the First National U.S. Survey of Women's Childbearing Experiences." *The Journal of Perinatal Education* 12, no. 1 (2003): vi–viii. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1058-1243.12.1.vi>.
- "Mother and Child Health Act." Korea Legislation Research Institute: Korea Law Translation Center, n.d. https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=33648&type=part&key=38.
- O'Connor, Kaori. *Seaweed: A Global History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2017.
- Park, Andrea. "20 Minutes with: Boram Nam on Bringing the South Korean Tradition of Postnatal Care to America." *Barron's*. Barron's, October 3, 2022. <https://www.barrons.com/articles/20-minutes-with-boram-nam-on-bringing-the-south-korean-tradition-of-postnatal-care-to-america-01664811670>.
- Park, Kee-Joung Yoo, and Leona M. Peterson. "Beliefs, Practices, and Experiences of Korean Women in Relation to Childbirth." *Health Care for Women International* 12, no. 2 (1991): 261–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339109515946>.
- Schneiderman, Janet U. "Postpartum Nursing for Korean Mothers." *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 21, no. 3 (1996): 155–58. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005721-199605000-00017>.
- Sich, Dorothea. "Traditional Concepts and Customs on Pregnancy, Birth and Post Partum Period in Rural Korea." *Social Science & Medicine, Part B: Medical Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1981): 65–69. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7987\(81\)90010-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7987(81)90010-7).
- Song, Yaeri. "These Korean Postpartum Services Make Giving Birth Totally Worth It." *The Klog*, June 2, 2016. <https://theklog.co/korean-postpartum-services/>.
- Woo, Sangkwon, and Mark V. Flinn. "Traditional Postpartum Care among Women of Korean Descent in the United States." *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 26, no. 9 (2022): 1871–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-022-03378-6>.
- Yoo, Eun-Kwang. "[Health Promotion. Health Promoting Behavior for Women's Health: an Analysis on Meanings of Sanhujori, Korea, Postpartum Care]." *Kanhohak Tamgu* 2, no. 2 (1993): 37–65.
- . "An Ethnographic Study of Sanhubyung Experienced by Women in Korean Postpartal Culture." *The Journal of Nurses Academic Society* 25, no. 4 (1995): 825–36. <https://doi.org/10.4040/jnas.1995.25.4.825>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SARA KOH

SENIOR, SID RICHARDSON COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES & BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Sara wrote this manuscript in Fall 2022 for ASIA 495: Asian Studies Research Seminar. She has been interested in understanding how sociocultural identities impact health and medical care. She hopes to use this knowledge to promote cultural competence in healthcare and to better serve a diverse patient population as a physician in the future. She would like to thank Dr. Steven Lewis for his generous assistance with her research and manuscript.

Potter as Author in Medieval Fine Persian Ceramics

Nicole Lhuillier

ABSTRACT

The reign of the Seljuks and other minor dynasties in late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century Persia saw the proliferation of poetic and documentary inscriptions on portable objects, such as luxury ceramics made from stonepaste (frit) and painted in luster or *mina'i*, a polychrome overglaze technique. The flourishing of an open market allowed artisans greater freedom of expression; without a patron, they could indulge their own preferences in their work. In light of the cultural and socioeconomic context of late Seljuk Persia, this paper examines epigraphic fine ceramics to illuminate the agency and literary leanings of potters. Employing the prestigious form of poetry and other literary references, potters evoked literati culture in their epigraphy and imagery and thus elevated their social status. Their signatures emphasize the talents, including literacy and composition, on display in their creations. These innovative uses of inscriptions were means for the potters to establish and broaden their claims of authorship.

Throughout Persia's deep heritage of pottery making, serving vessels are a constant presence. The wide range of this object includes plain Neolithic containers and colorful, embellished bowls from ninth-century Nishapur. Amid the decline of the Great Seljuk Empire (ca. 1040-1157), potters made fine ceramics much more than beautiful tableware.¹ They applied writing to their work in new ways. Benedictory inscriptions are traditional adornments on crafted objects of the medieval Islamic world. Bestowing compliments such as glory, wealth, and longevity, these expressions are normally formulaic.² When tailored to the object, however, they betray the hand of the artisan. On several self-referencing Seljuk-era wares that share a quatrain wishing good fortune to the owner, the name of the item changes accordingly, from *qadah* (bowl) to *kasa* (bowl) to *tabaq* (plate).³ But the most transformative—and revealing—inscriptions are poetry and signatures, which became notably more common in luxury ceramics in the late twelfth century. These inscriptions, unrelated to vessels' practical purposes, provided another arena for artistic activity and invention. A free market enabled makers of fine ceramics to pursue their creative desires and

expand their roles as artists. Inscribed lyric poems from various sources present a striking contrast to customary good wishes. The signatures make known the potters and their achievements. They engaged with literary culture in the imagery and epigraphy of their wares, which they elevated into platforms of multimedia authorship.

SIGNS OF THE ARTIST IN AN OPEN MARKET

The second half of the twelfth century and the early part of the thirteenth comprise a remarkable period in the art history of Persia—a time of artistic innovations and increased production, especially in metalwork and ceramics.⁴ “Explosion” is a word scholars associate with this period, particularly in regard to the art of the object, developments in the aesthetics of figural representation, and the appearance of signatures and dates on wares.⁵ The invention of stonepaste (also known as frit) as a substitute for porcelain, a secret of the Chinese, revolutionized pottery in the Islamic world. Yielding a white surface unlike natural clay, the new material gave rise to a class of objects markedly different from eleventh-century Samanid wares, such

as the minimalist dishes decorated with blessings or moralisms.⁶ Although artifacts have been found in multiple Iranian cities, Kashan in the Isfahan province seems to have been the center of production for luxury ceramics. Potters painted these stonepaste wares in luster and/or *mina'i* (translated as “enameled” and originally known as *haft rang*, meaning “seven-color”). They indulged their creativity in detailed figural illustrations and lengthy inscriptions facilitated by these two costly techniques.⁷ More space on objects liberated the decorator; the tangible aspects of pottery were likewise avenues for novelty.⁸ Wares increased in size and became more complex in shape.⁹ Meanwhile, the recurrence of serving vessel forms is suggestive of production standards, which correspond to a wider clientele.¹⁰

Following the premise of Oleg Grabar, scholars generally turn to the emergence of a middle-class market to explain the artistic vitality of the pre-Mongol period.¹¹ While seeking nuance in the idea of a homogeneous urban bourgeoisie that emulated courtly ideals, Anna Contadini finds support for the open-market economic model in extant objects and literature.¹² Fine goods were not limited to the commissions of royals at the palace atelier, as wealthy city-dwellers collected them as well. The craftspersons, then, were experts with “the competence and equipment to produce across the quality range, and the confidence in the market to anticipate demand, so as not to have to rely solely on commissions.”¹³ Even though princely norms, to which the *nouveau-riche* aspired, had visible influence on handcrafted objects, Grabar credits the prospering of these arts to the urban merchant and craftsperson.¹⁴ Artistic agency did not rest solely with patrons, whether they were royal or rich. Contadini contends that a teacher, who imparts the craft, is bound to surpass a client in influence on an artist.¹⁵ Craftspersons must have been active decision-makers in the aesthetics of commercial production. Indeed, an open market would have allowed medieval artisans greater artistic freedom. If they did not have to follow the specifications of royal

or rich patrons, their choices for their pieces could be driven by their own stylistic background, personal preference, or prevailing trends.

In “The de Jure ‘Artist’ of the Bobrinski Bucket,” Ruba Kana’an utilizes medieval Islamic legal writing on trade to elucidate the roles of the persons, including craftsmen, mentioned in inscriptions on eleventh- to twelfth-century Iranian metalwork. Two categories of transactions (commission and advanced sale) granted the patron authority over the decoration of a metalware; he was legally responsible for the design.¹⁶ On the other hand, in direct sale, the customer had no input in manufacture and simply selected between preexisting products, priced according to market value.¹⁷ The craftsman, then, could fully exercise his originality in his designs—the singularity of which are what made him an artist.¹⁸ With free rein over their creations for the market, individuals could develop their ideas, express themselves, and make their work uniquely their own. The epigraphy of Kashani potters makes such authorship exceptionally palpable.

Many inscriptions on medieval Persian ceramics have not been deciphered, transcribed, or translated. Due to poor legibility, some readings cannot be verified. Scholars may also offer different interpretations. Nonetheless, the ample number of inscriptions—signatures and poetry in particular—that have been read are among the few sources illuminating the lives of artisans in medieval Persia.¹⁹ It is no surprise that the learned class usually neglected this ordinary sector of society in their chronicles.²⁰ Amid the deficiency of historical records, the involvement of the artisan and customer are difficult to discern in detail, and it is easy to credit artistic choices to the consumer, in the vein of the royal workshop model. Individuals of high rank and education, like *amirs* (rulers or commanders), did commission fine pottery.²¹ Inscriptions on two bowls attributed to master potter Abu Zayd mention vizier Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah, for instance.²² However, inscriptions naming patrons are rare on stonepaste wares overall, while makers’ signatures abound. Oliver

Watson sees the lack of personal dedications as well as the repetition of designs and epigraphy on luxury ceramics as signs that the majority of them were products made for the market instead of aristocrats' commissions.²³ When there is no evidence of a patron—and there is instead representation of the artisan—the force of the artist must be considered.

The conspicuous signatures on stonepaste ceramics made their makers more visible. By placing his name on his creation, an artist asserts his authorship of it; a signature is expected on a “work of art” but not on an ordinary product. The location of a signature can signal the stature of the maker: the low-profile placement on the outside of a bowl or under the foot of an illustrated figure, a fairly common practice, shows “the humility of the artist, particularly in contrast to the lofty patron or recipient, whose name is usually inscribed earlier or in a more prominent place and often written in a different script.”²⁴ But the creators of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Persian stonepaste wares (especially those painted in luster) were not so modest, for their dated autographic statements tend to mirror the size and style of the neighboring literary text.²⁵ The effect of such documentation is greater attention to an object's provenance and a notion of high social standing attached to the named artisan.²⁶ Likewise, Robert Hillenbrand declares that a marked date indicates the satisfaction of the craftsperson, who “regarded such work as something special.”²⁷ The date functions as a commemoration of a piece's completion. Hence documentary information serves to distinguish an object and suggests its exquisiteness. The most deluxe Persian wares are those on which signatures and dates most frequently appear.²⁸ Signatures on items available for purchase may display the pride of the producer and “market mechanisms of increasing the demand and thus value of an object by distinguishing it from other commodities.”²⁹ Therefore the singularity of signed and dated ceramic wares does not immediately designate them as commissioned work as Blair suggests, but does illustrate the luxury of distinctiveness.³⁰

Additional information in the signature may accentuate the accomplishment of the artisan. A few medieval inscriptions praise the maker instead of or in addition to the owner. A number of signatures identify one or more roles in the production process (e.g. decorator, writer, author). The separate tasks of forming and painting could be performed by the same person, as indicated by some signatures specifying that the potter both “made” and “decorated” the respective object.³¹ The typical use of the verb *kataba* (literally meaning “wrote,” but interpreted as “decorated”) in signatures likens ceramics to the arts of the book, which flowered in Persia beginning in the fourteenth century, as a vehicle for painting.³² “Wrote” reflects the literary leanings of Kashani potters, who may have wanted to emphasize the epigraphic quality of their work. Writing is revered in Islamic culture, and calligraphy is its highest form of art. It follows that inscriptions add value to objects while demonstrating the literacy of both the maker and user. The occasional use of pseudo-inscriptions, which do not convey any semantic meaning, signifies the ornamental nature of writing. On Seljuk ceramics, nevertheless, the epigraphy is more remarkable for content than decorative quality, as the penmanship is casual, not calligraphic.³³ Evidently, these potters were not trained calligraphers.

THE LITERARY MILIEU OF EPIGRAPHIC STONEPASTE CERAMICS

Literature flourished concurrently with art in the Seljuk period.³⁴ Poetry, the highest form of literary expression and a genre associated with royalty in Persia, further augmented the prestige of the objects. Patronage of poetry was one of the courtly traditions continued by the Turkish rulers, and royal sponsorship increased even as the Seljuk Empire disintegrated and regional powers rose.³⁵ Persian was also revived under the Seljuks: its adoption as the official language and its usage at court validated it as a medium for literary expression alongside Arabic.³⁶ Since the vernacular was acceptable in elite spheres, artisans could employ

both languages to decorate their wares. A significant number of ceramic vessels have inscriptions in Persian and Arabic, with more verses appearing in the former.³⁷

The authors of the inscribed poems are usually not named, although scholars have identified some as works of established poets.³⁸ Ostensibly, potters had considerable literary knowledge in order to cite writers of their day as well as ones from centuries before. A luster-painted bottle, for instance, bears a quatrain attributed to sixth-century personalities like Adi ibn Zayd, an Arab Christian poet.³⁹ The poem appears in contemporaneous literature, such as the anthology *Lubab ul-Albab* by Muhammad Awfi and the Seljuk history by Najm al-Din Muhammad ibn ‘Ali Rawandi, to which the artisan may have referred.⁴⁰ Some verses occur on multiple objects; the quatrain on the aforementioned bottle is seen again on a stonepaste bowl.⁴¹ Mistakes in inscriptions show that the potters did not copy the poems directly from written texts but instead transcribed them from oral recitations.⁴² Transcription, of course, necessitated writing ability. Certain verses were penned expressly for epigraphy on ceramics.⁴³ The mediocre writing noted by scholars is compelling evidence for composition by nonprofessional authors like potters.⁴⁴ The most common topic of the inscribed poetry, the torments of love, is quite universal material that would be approachable for writers lacking a formal scholarly education. As intimate expressions of passion and brokenheartedness, the romantic poems often use first- and second-person voices in addressing the anonymous speaker’s lover, rather than any beholder of the object. These verses might have taken after the *ghazal*, a leading form of Persian poetry around the late-twelfth century. The *ghazal*, which in its original conception mused on love, typically mentions the author in the final couplet of the poem.⁴⁵ At least one Persian potter, the illustrious Abu Zayd, identified himself as the poet immediately following a love quatrain on the outside of a piece.⁴⁶ The poetic compositions or selections that potters inscribed on their wares, separate from the texts of scholars, provide insight into the literary preferences of the public.⁴⁷

The predominant form of verse on medieval ceramics is the quatrain.⁴⁸ The least “professional” and most ubiquitous genre of Persian poetry, the quatrain would have been a particularly accessible form for potters who composed verses to inscribe on their wares.⁴⁹ The *rubā’ī*, the classical Persian quatrain, was very popular—and sometimes left anonymous—in the Seljuk period.⁵⁰ It originated in poetic conversations among the intellectuals of the court.⁵¹ While quatrains proliferated in royal poets’ collections (*divans*), they were compiled in anthologies beyond the court as well, and writers often embedded quatrains in their prose.⁵² In the scholarly culture of medieval Persia, the “quotation (and occasionally composition) of short verses in both Persian and Arabic was deemed a mark of erudition.”⁵³ Thus, brevity may not have been the only reason for potters’ partiality toward the quatrain. They presumably appreciated its literary significance as they sought to involve aristocratic practices in their wares.

The text and imagery of a luster-painted bowl in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 1) exhibit this ambition. In the interior, the sumptuous garden



Figure 1: Bowl with Musicians in a Garden. Late 12th-early 13th century. Stonepaste, 8.9 cm (height), 21.3 cm (diameter). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451358>.

scene dominated by musicians evokes royal or elite amusements. Such courtly activities were a common motif in the iconography of portable objects from this time.⁵⁴ Written on the bowl's exterior is "Oh friend, be wise—do not seek the qualities of fennel in cumin // Do not expect civility from base people..."⁵⁵ These verses seem to directly address the reader as "friend" and imply that neither maker nor owner are to be counted among the ignoble of society. This discrimination suggests that both maker and owner had an interest in social status. The literary engagement of medieval potters is evidence that aspirations of social mobility were not exclusive to a nouveau-riche clientele. The maker of the bowl with musicians exercised agency in coordinating text and imagery to enhance the prestige of his piece, and as a result, his own reputation.

Writing ability is a mark of refinement, as a piece by Muhammad ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Muqri, who signed at least six stonepaste vessels executed in multiple techniques in the early thirteenth century, declares. On the outside of a bowl decorated in luster and *mina'i*, alongside a love quatrain and Muqri's signature, is an Arabic couplet attributed to 'Ali (the fourth caliph): "Learn the art of writing, Oh you of good breeding, For writing is an adornment of the well-bred."⁵⁶ Muqri himself probably came from an educated background: his name means "reciter of the Qur'an." Based on his use of Arabic and Persian verses, Oya Pancaroğlu infers that he had substantial literary knowledge in two languages. On a bowl Muqri painted in luster, "Fakhr al-Din Mubarakshah says" is written immediately before a Persian quatrain.⁵⁷ Pancaroğlu interprets this unusual attribution to the author, a twelfth-century poet patronized by the Ghurid rulers and widely popular for his *rubā'is*, as a sign of Muqri's esteem for the poetry of his time. The luster-painted bowl also bears anonymous Persian verses, an Arabic quatrain, general good wishes, and two signatures—"Muhammad ibn Abi al-Hasan al-Muqri wrote it in Muharram the year 603" (August-September 1206) on the outer rim and "Muqri wrote it" on the inside. The date distinguishes the object, while

the repetition of the signature (with the verb "to write") stresses the accomplishment of the potter. He valued his own writing ability together with the compositions of poets.

THE SCHOLARLY AMBITIONS OF A MASTER POTTER

The most famous Kashani potter is Abu Zayd, whose renown may be credited to the high quality of his work and the distinctiveness and frequency of his signatures.⁵⁸ Watson suggests that the outstanding skill of Abu Zayd and his fellow artisans may have been a key factor in Kashan's domination of the luxury ceramics craft.⁵⁹ Abu Zayd was one of the potters whose signatures specify they made and decorated their pieces.⁶⁰ He is the only potter whose signatures appear on both tiles and vessels.⁶¹ He also composed some of the poems on his pottery, as his signatures reveal. Working in the most exquisite class of ceramics, he and Muqri represent the top echelon of potters in medieval Persia. Kashani potters had a much higher status than the average potter, as this craft was a lowly one.⁶²

Pancaroğlu perceives Abu Zayd's conscious choices in the text and imagery of a ewer (Figure 2), now in the St. Louis Art Museum. In a single line in the middle of the body, a dated signature follows a Persian quatrain: "[This belongs] to its writer. Abu Zayd wrote it in his own script in the year six hundred" (1203-1204).⁶³ The first sentence attributes the poem to the epigrapher identified in the second sentence—Abu Zayd.⁶⁴ "In his own script" (or "in his own hand," *bi-khattihi*) is a phrase unique to Abu Zayd and a sign of his pride in his ability.⁶⁵ He effectively spotlighted the central inscription (in contrast to the good wishes in Kufic script much higher and lower on the ewer) by applying luster to certain parts of the ewer, rather than all over the surface area in the typical manner.⁶⁶ Together the love poetry and animal imagery engage the viewer in reference to courtly traditions.⁶⁷ Pancaroğlu notes that the quatrain, which brings to mind dignified ideals, aligns with the cheetah and gazelle chase on the upper



Figure 2: Zayd, Abu. Ewer with Design of Animals and Inscriptions. 1204-1203. Fritware, 27.3 cm (height), 14 cm (diameter of body). St. Louis Art Museum. <https://www.slam.org/collection/objects/1061/>.

part of the ewer. The gazelle was a regular symbol of the beloved, while the cheetah's hunt symbolized a historic royal activity.⁶⁸ The ewer's emphasis on literary authorship and its evocation of refined culture manifest the sophistication of its creator.

At least three stonepaste bowls attributed to Abu Zayd are similar in composition and imagery, the latter depicting a genteel outdoor gathering. Scholars identify the event, variations of which recur in Persian ceramics starting from the twelfth century, as a *majlis*.⁶⁹ Revolving around the recitation of poetry, this festive literary soiree was “foremost among the idealized activities of cultivated society in the medieval Islamic world.”⁷⁰ *Majalis* were often, but not always, a courtly affair, with professional poets and other guests in the company of a royal, according to Pancaroğlu. Illustrating this civilized pastime alongside poetic epigraphy, the bowls “may be interpreted as a mirror of the *majlis* setting, reflecting the cultural pursuit of literary aesthetics in visual terms.”⁷¹ The text and imagery linked to the *majlis* confer its prestige to the objects.

The bowls in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure



Figure 3: Zayd, Abu. Bowl with a *Majlis* Scene by a Pond. 1186. Stonepaste, 8.1 cm (height), 21.6 cm (diameter). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451752>.

3), British Museum (Figure 4), and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) (Figure 5) all depict a group of seated figures on a *takht* (throne) and surrounding attendants on the right half of the inner surface. With the left hand, the frontmost seated figure points downward diagonally toward the fishpond. The group faces a seated individual who likewise gestures downward, as if in dialogue, on the left side of the inner surface. Below the figures, one or more birds gesture toward the pond. The bowls resemble a series, for a single figure sits on the *takht* in the British Museum bowl (dated March-April 1187), two figures sit on the *takht* in the Metropolitan Museum bowl (dated March 27, 1186), and three figures sit on the *takht* in the LACMA bowl (dated March 1187-March 1188). Perhaps the painter sought to vary his creations, in line with the artistic tendency to differentiate pieces amid recurring imagery in production for an open market.

On each bowl, on the exterior, interior rim, and under the fishpond below the *takht*, are inscriptions, which include verses and a date. Although the figural scene is the visual focus of the bowls' interior surfaces,



Figure 4: Zayd, Abu (attributed). *Bowl*. April 1187. Fritware, 9.5 cm (height), 21 cm (rim diameter). British Museum. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1945-1017-261. © The Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

the craftsman ensured that it does not eclipse the writing. The human figures and birds pointing to the fishpond direct the viewer's gaze toward the poetry shoehorned under it. The Metropolitan Museum bowl is the only one that names the maker: the signature states "Abu Zayd himself made it and composed it" followed by the day, month, and year.⁷² Watson read the authorial inscription on the LACMA piece similarly: "Its narrator is the writer."⁷³ Therefore Abu Zayd authored one (or more) of the poems on each of these bowls—the one written closest to the signature, at the least. Pancaroğlu argues that the uncustomary full date on the Metropolitan Museum bowl likely exemplifies the potter's intention to document the creation of either his poem or the entire object, rather than to merely fill space.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the British Museum bowl was probably signed; on it Watson observed the remains of "wrote it" (*katabahu*).⁷⁵ Abu Zayd's identification of his roles in production communicates his skill in not only ceramic making but also in the oral and written aspects of poetry—his pieces' ingenious features.⁷⁶ His signature declares his multiple talents employed in the



Figure 5: *Bowl*. 1187. Fritware, 9.2075 cm x 21.2725 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Public Domain. <https://collections.lacma.org/node/228685>.

craft, which distinguish him as a potter. In conjunction with the date, the signature marks the vessels as objects of art and literature.

Immediately following the autographic statement (which provides the maker's name, roles, and the date) on the Metropolitan Museum bowl is a striking phrase: "Longevity to the owner and poet."⁷⁷ It wishes well on the owner, the traditional recipient of benedictory expressions, just as it does on the craftsman. Alongside the *majlis* imagery, the texts' emphasis on the potter-poet highlights the publishing aspect of the epigraphic object. A literate and creative potter—also a novice writer who would not have had direct access to the scholarly sphere of publishing—like Abu Zayd could have used his ceramic creations as a platform for his poetic compositions. By applying them on his wares in tandem with verses by established authors, the potter presents them as works of literary merit. As a poet Abu Zayd did in fact reach an audience beyond his customers; other artisans inscribed at least two of his verses on their wares.⁷⁸ A quatrain that Abu Zayd composed and inscribed on both the LACMA bowl and

the St. Louis ewer entered Kashani potters' repertoire; it was later used on luster bowls and tiles, several of which were made in the late thirteenth century for the Takht-i Sulayman palace in northwestern Iran.⁷⁹ The lasting presence of Abu Zayd's literary compositions on portable objects and architecture, including an Ilkhanid summer palace, augments his reputation as a poet. As the numerous surviving pieces demonstrate, ceramic is a fairly durable material, especially in comparison to manuscripts, which easily disintegrate. By "publishing" his verses on his wares, the potter may have inadvertently ensured the longevity of his writing.

In Abu Zayd's *majlis* bowls, the inscriptions may not be the only component through which the creator made himself visible. An exhibition catalog proposes that text and image could be working together to enhance the bowls' connection to literary culture: "The verses inscribed on these vessels, despite having no clear association to the images depicted, may complete the evocation of the *majlis*, as if giving voice to the performers."⁸⁰ If the gatherings are indeed *majalis*, the separate individual on the left is probably the orator, and the inscribed poems might represent the content of his performance.⁸¹ Since Abu Zayd is the narrator of the poems, as he identified himself in the Metropolitan Museum and LACMA bowls, the orator he painted may then be a self-depiction. The poet who wrote the verses and the poet in the *majlis* may be one and the same. By portraying himself as an active participant in a *majlis*, Abu Zayd asserted his eloquence and associated himself with the circle of the literati. Potters were likely far removed from the world of the palace poets and courtiers, but they could elevate their standing through their craft, as Abu Zayd's works show.

POTTERS AS AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

The larger literary context of late Seljuk Persia elucidates the functions of Abu Zayd's epigraphic pottery. Blair draws intriguing parallels between Abu Zayd and the aforementioned Najm al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Ali Rawandi, a historian and calligrapher. Hailing

from a village nearby, Rawandi considered Kashan a hub of Arabic study. His history text is interspersed with verses composed by many authors, including himself. Thus, both he and Abu Zayd used poetry from various sources to increase the sophistication of their work.⁸² Blair postulates that the compilations of verses and illustrations on ceramics, akin to Rawandi's combining of literary material, constituted a game of decipherment for a learned audience.⁸³ The viewer was to examine the unattributed poetry and imagery then identify their author or source. To design such a game, potters must have been familiar with the famous works of literature at the time. *Mina'i* wares in particular are noted for narrative scenes illustrating stories such as the *Shahnama*, the Persian national epic.⁸⁴ Medieval ceramics' abundant references to literature, including their resemblance to poetry compilation texts, speak to the learnedness of these artisans.

Blair's theory of an intellectual game in medieval luxury ceramics is difficult to substantiate since the authors of many inscribed verses are unknown and the meaning of images often unclear. Some vessels, such as the St. Louis ewer, have just one set of verses on them or none at all. Original poems by the potter would likely have been unfamiliar to the viewer—this could have provided Abu Zayd further motivation to ascribe his compositions. If a potter's verses were not attributed, on the other hand, they might have served as "trick questions" because they would not have appeared in published texts. Nonetheless, the epigraphy on luxury ceramics corresponds to the existing practice of "cultural re-contextualization": the varied assembly of inscriptions can be understood as a counterpart to "the literary tradition of embedding 'floating' verses in prose works and directing the reader's reception of those verses in the light of the surrounding text," according to Pancaroğlu.⁸⁵ In the juxtaposition of poetry by an established author and poetry by the potter (as in Abu Zayd's *majlis* bowls), the latter is an attempt to emulate the former. Abu Zayd's choice of form must have been strategic, for the quatrain was embraced by writers

of prose and poetry and well suited for the poetic exchanges in a *majlis*. Even though most potters did not compose any of the poetry on their wares, they still adopted the literary practice of poetic compilations and thus seized the agency of an author.

The stonepaste vessels decorated with poetry are not merely utilitarian objects, regardless of any puzzle-like design. They display the inventions of their creators and engage the minds of viewers in the manner of texts. Hillenbrand explores the function of luxury ceramics as manuscripts, especially for spheres beyond the palace; he writes that pre-Mongol vessels presented manuscript-style painting in a more common and affordable medium, as opposed to the very lavish and laborious illustrated book patronized by royals.⁸⁶ Thus, epigraphic ceramics are significant for not only artistic and cultural innovations but also their social impact. Moneyed clients of the market, rather than the “poor man” as Hillenbrand proposes, stood to benefit from this.⁸⁷ Hillenbrand makes close comparisons between Seljuk-period fine ceramics and illustrated manuscripts, exemplified by the thirteenth-century copy of the *Varqa va Gulshah* (one of the very few extant illustrated manuscripts from this era). Collectively, the Persian poetry, ordinary handwriting, and related figural imagery decorating vessels demonstrate the influence of manuscripts on potters, who wanted to evoke such visual and literary aspects in their pieces.⁸⁸ Presumably the prestigious arts of the book made an impression on these learned artisans. By compiling poetry or “publishing” their own compositions on their ceramic vessels—decorated with illustrations imitating book painting—these potters made their wares their manuscripts.

In the late Seljuk period, the increased production of poetry and art, alongside the growing prominence of the craftsman, were ideal circumstances for fine stonepaste pottery to diverge from preceding ceramic traditions in Persia. If potters desired simply to fill surface space with text, they could have readily turned to pseudo-inscriptions or benedictory expressions.

Instead, many embraced their artistic freedom and pursued literary aspirations. As royals sponsored writing and quatrains proliferated, master potters engaged with literature in the making of their wares. Whether or not they composed the poetry they inscribed, they were active participants in “an open culture of poetic recollection and reproduction.”⁸⁹ Such potters were evidently literate, even if they lacked the proficiency of trained writers. Poetic inscriptions, sometimes complemented by courtly iconographic themes, gave wares a refined character. Abu Zayd’s ceramics established their maker as an intellectual figure and an author through deliberate use of text and figural imagery. Pancaroğlu notes that Abu Zayd’s signatures and dates became less specific in his later work.⁹⁰ Perhaps he was already recognized as a potter-poet and no longer felt the need to distinguish himself to the same degree as he did earlier in his career.⁹¹ Through their epigraphy, he, Muqri, and other first-class potters consciously presented themselves as singular artists.

NOTES

1. The Seljuks, Turkish nomads from the steppes of Eurasia, conquered Persia in the eleventh century. The Great Seljuk Empire also encompassed Syria, Iraq, and Central Asia. After the vast empire fell in the second half of the twelfth century, it was succeeded by several smaller dynasties that had connections to it. Nonetheless, the Seljuk ruling house retained control of western Iran and Iraq until the 1190s. Despite the acute political fragmentation, the former lands of the empire remained unified in culture. The regional powers, which maintained Seljuk customs, patronized cultural endeavors as they competed for legitimacy and importance. The Seljuk period came to an end with the next major upheaval in Persia and the surrounding region: the Mongol invasion of the 1220s. A. C. S. Peacock, "The Great Age of the Seljuqs," in *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, eds. Sheila R. Canby, Deniz Beyazit, Martina Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 14-15, 30.
2. Oya Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory: Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection*, translated by Manijeh Bayani, first edition (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 114-15, 121, 127.
3. Sheila S. Blair, "A Brief Biography of Abu Zayd," *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 165.
4. Oliver Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware (Faber Monographs on Pottery and Porcelain)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 20.
5. Oleg Grabar, "The Visual Arts, 1050-1350 [in Iran]," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 643; Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 110; Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 154.
6. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 21.
7. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 154-55.
8. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 164.
9. Sheila R. Canby, Deniz Beyazit, Martina Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock, *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 186.
10. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 186.
11. Grabar, "The Visual Arts," 648.
12. Anna Contadini, "Patronage and the Idea of an Urban Bourgeoisie," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, vol. 1, eds. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 447-48.
13. Contadini, "Patronage," 447-48.
14. Grabar, "The Visual Arts," 648.
15. Contadini, "Patronage," 447.
16. Ruba Kana'an, "The de Jure 'Artist' of the Bobrinski Bucket: Production and Patronage of Metalwork in Pre-Mongol Khurasan and Transoxiana," *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 2 (2009): 196.
17. Kana'an, "The de Jure 'Artist,'" 188-89.
18. Kana'an, "The de Jure 'Artist,'" 196.
19. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 101, 148.
20. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 155.
21. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 165, 167.
22. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 165, 171.
23. Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware*, 20.
24. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 101.
25. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 155, 157.
26. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 158.
27. Robert Hillenbrand, "The Relationship Between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics in 13th Century Iran," in *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Edinburgh in 1982*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1994), 136.
28. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 155.
29. Kana'an, "The de Jure 'Artist,'" 189.
30. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 155.
31. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 148-49.
32. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 148-49.
33. Hillenbrand, "The Relationship Between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics," 135-36.
34. Peacock, "The Great Age," 30.
35. J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Persian Literature - Classical Poetry," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 10, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Persian-literature/Classical-poetry>.
36. Daniela Meneghini, "SALJUQS v. SALJUQID LITERATURE," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, May 25, 2010, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saljuqs-v>.
37. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 118.
38. Oya Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail: An Abu Zayd Ewer in the Saint Louis Art Museum," in *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text: Essays Presented to James W. Allan*, eds. Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 404.
39. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 117. This object, *Bottle with Birds, Stylized Vegetal Decoration, and Inscriptions*, is in the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection.
40. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 118. Both writers were active in Persia around the early thirteenth century.
41. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 96. This object, *Bowl with Stylized Vegetal Decoration and Inscriptions*, is also in the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection.
42. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 158.
43. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 98.
44. Blair, for instance, writes that poems on medieval ceramics are "not necessarily of the highest literary quality" (*Islamic Inscriptions*, 98). They are "sometimes disparaged as doggerel" (Blair, "A Brief Biography," 167).
45. de Bruijn, "Persian Literature."
46. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 112. See figure 3, Abu Zayd, *Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond*, 1186, stonepaste, 21.6 cm (diameter), 8.1 cm (height), Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451752>.
47. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 98.
48. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 406.
49. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 406.
50. Meneghini, "SALJUQS v. SALJUQID LITERATURE."
51. de Bruijn, "Persian Literature."
52. de Bruijn, "Persian Literature."
53. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 164.
54. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 112.
55. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 157-58.
56. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 145, 149. This object, *Bowl with a Falconer on Horseback* (1200-1220), is in the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection.
57. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 145-47. This object, *Bowl with Inscriptions and a Pair of Birds* (1206), is in the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection.
58. Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware*, 20.
59. Oliver Watson, "Documentary Mina'i and Abu Zaid's Bowls," in *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Edinburgh in 1982*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1994), 174-75.
60. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 162.
61. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 160-01.
62. Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), www.aeportal.com/?id=-20564.
63. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 399.
64. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 404.

65. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 163.
66. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 398.
67. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 400-01.
68. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 400-01.
69. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 112.
70. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 138.
71. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 138.
72. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 112.
73. Watson, "Documentary *Mina'i*," 173.
74. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 405.
75. Watson, "Documentary *Mina'i*," 173.
76. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 405.
77. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 112.
78. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 162.
79. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 404; Blair, "A Brief Biography," 162. Pancaroğlu identifies the same quatrain on the LACMA bowl and the St. Louis ewer, and Blair notes this quatrain on the works of other potters.
80. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 112-13.
81. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos*, 113.
82. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 163-67.
83. Blair, "A Brief Biography," 167, 169. In the proposal of an intellectual game, Blair draws from Julie Meisami's literary studies of Rawandi's writing ("A Brief Biography," 167).
84. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 110, 114.
85. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 405.
86. Hillenbrand, "The Relationship between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics," 134-35.
87. Hillenbrand, "The Relationship between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics," 135.
88. Hillenbrand, "The Relationship between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics," 135.
89. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory*, 118.
90. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 405.
91. Pancaroğlu, "Potter's Trail," 405.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Canby, Sheila R., Deniz Beyazit, Martina Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock. *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016.
- Contadini, Anna. "Patronage and the Idea of an Urban Bourgeoisie." In *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, edited by Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, vol. 1, 431-52. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

- Blair, Sheila S. "A Brief Biography of Abu Zayd." *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 155-76.
- . *Islamic Inscriptions*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Bloom, Jonathan M. *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001. www.aaeportal.com/?id=20564.
- de Bruijn, J. T. P. "Persian Literature - Classical Poetry." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 10, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Persian-literature/Classical-poetry>.
- Grabar, Oleg. "The Visual Arts, 1050-1350 [in Iran]." In *Cambridge History of Iran*, edited by J. A. Boyle, vol. 5. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
- Hillenbrand, Robert. "The Relationship Between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics in 13th Century Iran." In *The Art of the Saljuqs in Iran and Anatolia: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Edinburgh in 1982*, edited by Robert Hillenbrand, 134-45. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1994.
- Kana'an, Ruba. "The de Jure 'Artist' of the Bobrinski Bucket: Production and Patronage of Metalwork in Pre-Mongol Khurasan and Transoxiana." *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 2 (2009): 175-201.
- Meneghini, Daniela. "SALJUQS v. SALJUQID LITERATURE." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, May 25, 2010. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saljuqs-v>.
- Pancaroğlu, Oya. *Perpetual Glory: Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection*. Translated by Manijeh Bayani. First edition. Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- . "Potter's Trail: An Abu Zayd Ewer in the Saint Louis Art Museum." In *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text: Essays Presented to James W. Allan*, edited by Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen, 397-409. London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012.
- Peacock, A. C. S. "The Great Age of the Seljuqs." In *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, edited by Sheila R. Canby, Deniz Beyazit, Martina Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock, 2-33. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016.
- Watson, Oliver. "Documentary *Mina'i* and Abu Zaid's Bowls." In *The Art of the Saljuqs in Iran and Anatolia: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Edinburgh in 1982*, edited by Robert Hillenbrand, 170-80. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1994.
- . *Persian Lustre Ware (Faber Monographs on Pottery and Porcelain)*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



NICOLE LHUILLIER

SENIOR, MCMURTRY COLLEGE

ART HISTORY & MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN STUDIES

Nicole wrote this essay in Fall 2022 for HART 385: Architecture and Literature in Islamic Cultures. She discovered an enthusiasm for art history in her sophomore year of college. Since then, Nicole has explored the artistry of craftspersons and their roles in society in different geographic and temporal spheres. In the writing of this paper, she is indebted to the generous encouragement and support of Dr. Farshid Emami, who suggested references, decoded inscriptions, and responded to her ideas throughout the process.

RASR

Understanding Buddhist Nationalism in South and Southeast Asia

Shalin Mehta

ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in violence inspired by Buddhist nationalism in South and Southeast Asia. These incidents include the Rohingya Muslim genocide in Myanmar, sporadic clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand's south, and the populist oppression of non-Buddhist minorities in Sri Lanka. Though Buddhism has been involved in politics for centuries despite the Western myth that Buddhism is apolitical, this violence in the modern era is perplexing since many Buddhist schools promote the ideals of anti-discrimination and nonviolence. This paper seeks to understand the historical, political, and social forces that underscore Buddhist nationalist violence in the twenty-first century. The author argues that Buddhist nationalism's modern turn towards xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments originated in the colonial era due to resentment against British secularism and Indian migration to Buddhist nations. Today, this has manifested in the manipulation of Buddhist doctrine to fit pre-existing fears and resulted in a permeating view of Buddhist identity as endangered, especially at the hand of Islam. Going forward, recognizing the existence of this violence and the division in Buddhist nations on the global stage is critical to addressing it.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has seen a rise in religious power consolidation and monastic political action in Buddhist-majority nations throughout South and Southeast Asia, particularly in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. These movements have been marked by revivalist brands of Buddhist nationalism that seek to cement and protect a Buddhist identity in their respective nations. In recent years, these movements have turned to political violence, emphatically crossing the line from nationalism to true religious extremism.

The most explicit and extreme example of this turn towards violence is the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the concurrent 969 Movement, a Buddhist fundamentalist movement that gained traction in the early 2010s. The movement was led by Ashin Wirathu, an influential and controversial monk who was once jailed for inciting religious violence and called the "Burmese Bin Laden" (Ellis-Petersen,

2019). Upon his release, his influence grew dramatically with the 969 Movement and with populist sermons that denounced the country's Muslim minorities for seeking to overtake the nation and its supposed Buddhist identity (Fuller, 2013). Wirathu has encouraged followers to boycott Muslim businesses and asserted that Buddhists were facing violence at the hands of "a crude and savage Muslim majority" across Myanmar, calling for the total expulsion of the nation's Rohingya Muslims (Hodal, 2013). The growing support for these extreme ideas across Myanmar and its monasteries led to government institutionalization of anti-Rohingya discrimination with restrictions on nearly all aspects of daily life including employment, education, and free movement (Albert & Maizland, 2020). Over the past decade, with particular spikes in 2013 and 2017, Rohingya Muslims have faced extreme violence at the hands of both the Burmese military and Buddhist mobs who have burned their villages, sexually abused women and girls, and forced

a mass exodus of the Rohingya to neighboring nations. There are currently over 980,000 Rohingya refugees in surrounding nations, with thousands having died in Myanmar (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). Many nations, including the United States, have labeled these developments genocide. While these events are politically complex due to factors such as widespread poverty and an unstable government in Myanmar, Buddhist nationalism undoubtedly plays a major role.

Extreme developments such as these, which are found in a religion with many schools promoting the concepts of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and anti-discrimination, are puzzling. This paper seeks to understand how radical political violence in this manner is justified through Buddhism. It offers a historical analysis of the development of Buddhist nationalism during the colonial era and a discussion of the ideological justifications of Buddhist nationalism and its tendency towards extremism. In sum, I argue that Buddhist nationalists have constructed a view of Buddhist identity as endangered, which has come to permeate many Buddhist societies, and justified violence against minorities through the manipulation of Buddhist doctrine to align with pre-existing fears.

THE MYTH OF APOLITICAL, NONVIOLENT BUDDHISM

Before an honest discussion of Buddhist nationalism, extremism, and violence, it is necessary to address the myth that Buddhism is both apolitical and nonviolent by nature. The common Western perception of Buddhism is that the religion is entirely nonviolent and detached from politics. It imagines Buddhist societies as wholly peaceful and uninvolved in greater political struggles. Indeed, Michael Jerryson (2017) argues that the vast majority of scholarship on Buddhism pays no mention to Buddhist politics let alone Buddhist extremism and instead emphasizes Buddhism as pacifist. In Western popular culture, Buddhism is viewed as philosophical, focused entirely on concepts such as “inner peace and

harmony, not violent politics” (Jerryson, 2017). Thus, it is unsurprising that Westerners overwhelmingly view Buddhism as apolitical and free from violence. In reality, Buddhism, like nearly all religions, has always had a role in regional politics (Borchert & Harris, 2016). As such, studying the politics of Buddhism is an essential aspect of studying Buddhism itself. Without doing so, we are at risk of overlooking the lived experiences of Buddhists and the developments that have shaped Buddhism today. Nationalism in Buddhism is not a new phenomenon; rather, today’s extremist violence is a modern-day expression of Buddhism’s centuries of nationalist political involvement (Borchert & Harris, 2016).

As such, believing in the myth that Buddhism is apolitical is dangerous in that it allows us to ignore situations when Buddhism in politics results in atrocities and extreme violence. In 2004, when violence between Muslims and Buddhists broke out in three majority Muslim provinces in Southern Thailand, Jerryson (2017) notes that many analysts wrote articles and news stories emphasizing Islam’s role in fomenting the violence. However, the role of Buddhism was overlooked, as it is commonly associated with peace and nonviolence (Jerryson, 2017). Therefore, ignoring the role of Buddhism in violence prevents us from truly gaining an understanding of the causes of violence, and in turn, from understanding the necessary solutions to that violence (Jerryson, 2017). With that said, this paper discusses how certain nationalist movements have used Buddhist history, politics, and ideology to justify political violence in the twenty-first century, not why Buddhist violence and politics exist in the first place, as they have for centuries.

THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

Modern Buddhist nationalism in Southeast Asia has its origins in the time of colonial rule, when South and Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, were under the rule of European powers. Upon taking control over Burma (Myanmar) in 1885, the British abolished

the monarchy and declared secular rule. Prior to these events, the Burmese monarchy was closely connected to the Sangha, the Buddhist monastic order, and promoted Buddhism throughout the nation. Indeed, the monarch was the most outspoken “defender of the Buddha’s dispensation” (Foxeus, 2019). With the monarch gone, the responsibility for protecting, promoting, and ensuring Buddhist survival fell to the masses. Many lay associations dedicated to Buddhist survival began to emerge and became politically active. The most prominent of these was the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA), which began espousing religious messages that were intertwined with a nationalist identity to push back against British rule (Houtart, 1976). Indeed, “to be a Burman is to be a Buddhist” became a common phrase that defined the growing resistance movement (Lehman, 2006). By 1920, the YMBA had fully transformed into a nationalist and anti-colonial association that rebranded themselves as the General Council of Burmese Associations. With the support of many nationalist monks, the movement maintained that Buddhism was being threatened by the British government (Foxeus, 2019). Similar events occurred in Sri Lanka, whose nationalist movement arose as a result of the Buddhist majority’s perception of British secularity as threatening. A 1951 report by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress makes clear that the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists saw British rule as the sole reason for the decline of Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka (All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, 1956).

Though Thailand was never actually colonized, the threat of colonialism still served to strengthen Buddhist nationalist identity in the country. Similar to that in Burma and Sri Lanka, the Siamese (Thai) monarchy was historically tied to the Sangha and to Buddhism. However, the relationship of the monarchy and Buddhism was substantially more entrenched. Scholars have argued that the Thai monarchy’s primary function was “to patronize, support, and protect Buddhism” (Detchakbodin, 2022). Centuries of this belief led the institution of Buddhism to emerge as a national symbol,

whose purpose was to unite the nation and promote peaceful coexistence (Detchakbodin, 2022). Buddhist nationalism was thus an essential aspect of Siamese identity for centuries. When the threat of British and French colonization emerged in the nineteenth century, the King undertook a series of critical, nationalist reforms to prevent the colonization of Siam. These reforms included reorganizing the bureaucracy and centralizing power in Bangkok to cement Thailand as a true nation-state in the eyes of European colonizers and prevent them from pursuing colonization. These nationalist reforms included the creation of a national religious hierarchy that brought the entire monkhood into the Sangha with the king as the head (Keyes, 1989). Thus, the monarchy and Buddhism were tied even closer together as a response to the threat of colonization.

In many ways, Buddhist nationalism in the colonial era served as a positive force for the peoples, cultures, and identities of Southeast Asia. It led to unification that was essential in the fight to rid the region of the harms of European imperialism and exploitation. Indeed, monks were key political activists fighting colonial rule that represented the masses against Christian imperialist exploitation while advocating for political and social reform (Human Rights Watch, 2009). It would be insincere to overlook these benefits when analyzing Buddhist nationalism and its origins, as it was very much a force for good against the evils of imperialism. However, one critical aspect of the legacy of the colonial era and the history of Buddhism is xenophobia against other religions. Hatred towards other religions for historically oppressing Buddhism is entrenched in South and Southeast Asia, especially in Myanmar (Kyaw, 2022). One example of this is the fact that a large portion of the anti-colonial movement was driven by anti-Indian sentiments. Under British rule, the autonomy of Burma and India was blurred, with thousands of Indians, many of whom were Muslim, moving to Burmese cities and marrying Burmese Buddhist women (Foxeus, 2019). Furthermore, the army sent to take control of Burma in the first place was majority Indian (Foxeus, 2019).

The Burmese Buddhist majority resented the economic domination they faced in urban areas at the hands of Indians, whom they associated with Islam to a certain extent, resulting in widespread anti-Indian and anti-Muslim feelings out of fear that Buddhist culture would be eliminated. Because the Burmese blamed colonization for the creation of these issues, the Buddhist nationalist movement for independence was fueled by overlapping Indophobia and anti-colonialism (Foxeus, 2022). Even today, Buddhist nationalists still refer to Muslims as *kala*, which translates to “black [foreigners from India]” (Gravers, 2015). In Sri Lanka as well, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism arose as a response to blurred autonomy during British colonialism that allowed thousands of Tamil Indians, Muslims, and Europeans into the nation. Sinhalese Buddhists felt that these groups and British colonial secularism threatened the country’s true Buddhist identity, leading to lasting hostility towards non-Buddhists on the island (Waidyatilake & Sivaloganathan, 2018). These developments are essential to understanding modern Buddhist nationalism; the lasting legacy of the anti-colonial movement became a “nationalist paranoia” that was defined by a “fear of foreign takeover” (Gravers, 1999). This fear has permeated Buddhist societies and served to define Buddhist nationalist movements throughout South and Southeast Asia from the time of independence until now.

IDEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATIONS IN THE MODERN ERA & DISCUSSION

Against the historical and political background described above, modern Buddhist nationalists have sought to legitimize the religious foundation of their movements through various interpretations of Buddhist ideology. Sermons from Myanmar’s 969 Movement and Ma Ba Tha, a Buddhist political group whose stated aim is to defend Myanmar from Islamization, indicate a recurring narrative that the Buddha was in fact a nationalist himself. These sermons argue that in his past lives and his final life as Siddhartha Gautama, one of the

Buddha’s primary goals was to defend both his race and his religion. On many occasions, these sermons go so far as to say that the Burman ethnic group are blood descendants of the Sakiya Clan that the Buddha identified with, though this is historically inaccurate (Foxeus, 2019). Regardless, this narrative has served to encourage the masses in Myanmar to pursue Buddhism in its “truest” form by acting in accordance with the Buddha, meaning supporting Buddhist nationalism, just as the Buddha did during his time. This revision of Buddhist history is especially concerning due to its accessibility and appeal among the masses, which has contributed to the spread of nationalist ideas in Myanmar (Foxeus, 2019).

Buddhist nationalists have also sought more explicit re-interpretations of Theravada beliefs to justify nationalism and the political violence that has followed. Theravada Buddhism is one of the two major traditions in Buddhism and the most prevalent religion and school of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Theravada doctrine notes that a key innovation to the Indian concept of karma was the Buddha’s placement of intention as central to karmic culpability (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Today, many Theravada Buddhists have taken to believe that an action is only truly wrong and one can only face the consequences of those actions if the negative consequences of the action itself were explicitly intended (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Buddhist nationalists in South and Southeast Asia have extrapolated this to allow exceptions to the principle of *ahimsa* in Buddhism. Loose interpretations of this doctrine has allowed extremist monks such as Wirathu in Myanmar to ignore the manner in which their sermons have incited violence against minorities and called on the masses to pursue violence by denying that the violence was intended (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Despite this, it is important to note that many monks and Buddhist scholars disagree with this interpretation. They argue that “willful ignorance,” and thus acceptance, of the consequences of one’s actions is equivalent to having malicious intentions in the first place (Walton & Hayward, 2014, p. 30).

Another common argument espoused by Buddhist nationalists, both today and throughout Theravada

history, is that violence is justified when it is pursued to defend the Sasana, which refers to Buddhism as a religion but also includes the Buddhist community, Buddhist scriptures, and the direct teachings of the Buddha. Important to note is that for Theravada Buddhists, “without [the Sasana], enlightenment would be impossible” (Walton & Hayward, 2014, p. 21). The Sinhalese Buddhist Kings in Sri Lanka justified violence and conquest against Tamils in India for centuries for this exact purpose. In the modern era, Buddhist extremists like Wirathu have contended that defending the Sasana is achieved by ensuring the purity of the state. This has translated into violence and discrimination against Muslim minorities for the purpose of protecting Buddhism against the expansion of Islam (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Arguments related to the Sasana, whether in good faith or not, are especially difficult for laypeople to ignore, as failing to defend the religion is something that no one can afford to be accused of.

Finally, Buddhist nationalists throughout South and Southeast Asia have developed a nationalist interpretation of Buddhist cosmology, arguing that the moral order that Buddhism promotes is in danger. Buddhist cosmology is a broad term for the manner in which Buddhist ideas relate to the universe as an entity, as nearly all Buddhist ideas are understood in the context of the universe and its processes (Huntington, 2022). Throughout South and Southeast Asia, Buddhist nationalists have formed a “cosmological imaginary” that argues that Buddhism’s survival is at risk. They argue that the universe has entered an era of total “moral chaos” due to globalized Islam and Christianity, which seek to eliminate Buddhism from the playing field (Gravers, 2015, p. 1). While anti-Muslim sentiment in the region has existed since at least the colonial era, this nationalist cosmology has gained increased traction due to globalized stereotypes of Muslims as violent, extremist, and dangerous, which are largely spread through social media (Foxeus, 2022). When listening to rhetoric from Wirathu, scholars have noted that there are clear elements of a cosmological imaginary

defined by xenophobia and an extreme nationalist agenda (Gravers, 2015). This cosmology has resulted in the otherization of Muslim minorities and politically motivated violence.

In reconciling the variety of factors that have contributed to Buddhist nationalism and its turn towards extremism, it is evident that Buddhist nationalists have relied on impure and broad interpretations of Buddhist doctrine to fit pre-existing, racialized fears. Though Buddhist nationalists continue to espouse fears of Islamization and a Muslim takeover, Muslims remain a very small minority in these nations. In fact, as of 2021, just 4 percent of the populations of Myanmar and Thailand was Muslim, compared to the 88 to 89 percent of the two nations that are registered Buddhists (US Department of State, 2021; Joshua Project, 2021). The Buddhist majority is slightly less overwhelming in Sri Lanka, but still, 70.2 percent of the country is Buddhist with just 9.7 percent being Muslim (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019). Moreover, the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments in Buddhist societies originated in the era of colonial rule and has persisted and grown in the modern era due to global stereotypes of Islam as violent and dangerous. The characterization of Buddhist cosmology as one in which Buddhism is at risk of being taken out from other religions is thus not based in fact, but in pre-existing fears that originate from historical legacy. It is for this reason that scholar Mikael Gravers argues that Buddhist nationalists are promoting a cosmological imaginary; their beliefs stem from an improper and unsupported racialized view of the world that is contrary to Buddhism’s core beliefs (Gravers, 2015). With this, it is important to recognize that Buddhist cosmology is extremely diverse, nuanced, and complex. While Buddhist nationalists might subscribe to a misrepresented cosmology founded in the *imaginary*, alternative forms of the cosmology do not skew towards violence. For example, in some Mahayana conceptions, the universe is constructed as a lotus flower with infinite realms that each have a Buddha of their own (Sadakata, 1997). The worldly

concern of Buddhism at risk of takeover that defines the Buddhist nationalist cosmology would seem infinitely small and irrelevant within this conception. Therefore, the violence and oppression that is being perpetuated in the name of Buddhist survival is inspired by a racialized worldview and a fear of power loss, which are impure and non-Buddhist concepts.

CONCLUSION

The existence of extremist and violent Buddhist nationalist movements in the modern era is puzzling given traditional interpretations of Buddhist doctrine. In its most extreme case, Buddhist nationalism has contributed to the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, leading hundreds of thousands of people to become refugees. Buddhist nationalist violence has also been observed in Sri Lanka, which has seen violent clashes and rioting perpetrated by Buddhists against Muslim villages and populist oppression of Tamil and Muslim minorities. In fact, it is well recognized that Sri Lanka's long civil war (1989-2009) was in part fueled by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism (Gravers, 2015). In Thailand, Buddhist nationalists have sought to enshrine Thailand as a Buddhist state in the Thai constitution, leading to uneasiness among Muslims in the southern region who fear the loss of their human rights (Tonsakulrungruang, 2021). Violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand's south has continued sporadically for nearly two decades.

Though these events are difficult to understand at face value, when examining the history and politics behind the development of modern Buddhist ideology, the propulsion of Buddhist nationalism becomes more clear. Despite the Western-led myth that Buddhism is apolitical and nonviolent, history shows that Buddhism has been involved in regional politics in South and Southeast Asia for centuries. It has served as a tool for monarchs in Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka to legitimize and strengthen their rules and conquests. When Buddhist nations were colonized by European powers, or faced the constant threat of colonization in

the case of Thailand, skepticism towards other religions grew dramatically. The lasting legacy of the colonial era is the entrenchment of Western ideas of nationalism and xenophobia. Today, this has manifested in the form of severe anti-Muslim sentiment and the resulting violence. Furthermore, though Buddhist nationalists have sought to justify violence through Buddhist doctrine and cosmology, many scholars, as discussed above, agree that these are developed in the context of pre-existing fears. In other words, these interpretations have been stretched to justify prior fears and racist worldviews.

Going forward, acknowledging the growing tendency towards nationalism and violence in Buddhist nations is critical. Though Buddhist beliefs are popularly characterized by nonviolence and anti-discrimination, it is ignorant to expect that all Buddhists will act in such a manner. Indeed, promoting a belief and acting in accordance with that belief are two very different things, something that Buddhist philosophers throughout history have acknowledged (Arnold & Turner, 2018). Pushing back against the Western myth that violence in Buddhist societies is non-existent and recognizing the discrimination that exists within these communities is the critical first step towards reconciling the problem.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albert, E., & Maizland, L. (2023, January 23). The Rohingya Crisis. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background-er/rohingya-crisis>.
- All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress Buddhist Committee of Inquiry. (1956). *The Betrayal of Buddhism: An Abridged Version of the Report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry*. Dharmavijaya Press.
- Arnold, D., & Turner, A. (2018, March 5). *Why Are We Surprised When Buddhists Are Violent?* The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/05/opinion/buddhists-violence-tolerance.html>.
- Borchert, T., & Harris, I. (2016). *In Defense of the Dharma: Buddhists and Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Detchakbodin, P. K. (2022). Buddhist Nationalism and National Security in Thailand. *Journal of MCU Buddhasothorn Review* 2(1), 54-62.
- Ellis-Petersen, H. (2019, May 29). *Myanmar police hunt 'Buddhist bin Laden' over Suu Kyi comments*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/29/myanmar-police-hunt-buddhist-bin-laden-over-suu-kyi-comments>.
- Foxeus, N. (2019). The Buddha was a devoted nationalist: Buddhist nationalism, resentment, and defending Buddhism in Myan-

- mar. *Religion* 49(4): 661-690.
- Foxeus, N. (2022). "Buddhist Nationalist Sermons in Myanmar: Anti-Muslim Moral Panic, Conspiracy Theories, and Socio-Cultural Legacies." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2022.2032801>.
- Fuller, T. (2013, June 20). *Extremism Rises Among Myanmar Buddhists*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/world/asia/extremism-rises-among-myanmar-buddhists-wary-of-muslim-minority.html>.
- Gravers, M. (1999). *Nationalism as political paranoia in Burma: an essay on the historical practice of power*. Routledge.
- Gravers, M. (2015). Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Burma and Sri Lanka: Religious Violence and Globalized Imaginaries of Endangered Identities. *Contemporary Buddhism* 16(1): 1-27.
- Hodal, K. (2013, April 18). *Buddhist monk uses racism and rumours to spread hatred in Burma*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma>.
- Houtart, F. (1976). Buddhism and Politics in South-East Asia: Part One. *Social Scientist* 5(3): 3-23.
- Huntington, E. (2022, January 28). *Buddhist Cosmology*. Oxford Research Encyclopedias. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-1050>.
- Jerryson, M. (2017, April 26). *Monks with guns*. Aeon. <https://aeon.co/essays/buddhism-can-be-as-violent-as-any-other-religion>.
- Joshua Project. (2021). *Country Report: Thailand*. <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/TH>.
- Keyes, C. F. (1989). Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand. *International Political Science Review* 10(2): 121-142.
- Kyaw, H. H. (2022, June 22). *Anti-Colonial Legacy of Burmese Buddhist Monks: from Revolutionaries to Reactionary Ultrationalists*. Atheist Alliance International, <https://www.atheistalliance.org/blog/anti-colonial-legacy-of-burmese-buddhist-monks-from-revolutionaries-to-reactionary-ultrationalists/>.
- Lehman, F. K. (2006). Burmans, Others, and the Community of Spirits. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 18(1): 127-132.
- Sadakata, A. (1997). *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins*. Kosei Publishing Company.
- Human Rights Watch. (2009, September 22). *The Resistance of the Monks: Buddhism and Activism in Burma*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/09/22/resistance-monks/buddhism-and-activism-burma>.
- Tonsakulrungruang, K. (2021). The Revival of Buddhist Nationalism in Thailand and Its Adverse Impact on Religious Freedom. *Asian Journal of Law and Society* 8(1): 72-87.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2019, August 16). *Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Sri Lanka by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2019/08/preliminary-findings-country-visit-sri-lanka-special-rapporteur-freedom-religion-or>.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2022, July 13). *Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained*. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/>.
- United States Department of State. (2021). *Burma International Religious Freedom Report for 2021*. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/BURMA-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.
- Waidyatilake, B., & Sivaloganathan, M. (2018, July 25). *Can Buddhist Values Overcome Nationalism in Sri Lanka?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieindia.org/2018/07/25/can-buddhist-values-overcome-nationalism-in-sri-lanka-pub-76922>.
- Walton, M. J., & Hayward, S. (2014). *Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism, and Communal Violence in Myanmar*. East-West Center. <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/contesting-buddhist-narratives-democratization-nationalism-and-communal-violence-in-mya>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SHALIN MEHTA

JUNIOR, DUNCAN COLLEGE

SOCIAL POLICY ANALYSIS & POLITICAL SCIENCE (IR CONCENTRATION)

Shalin wrote this manuscript in Fall 2022 for ASIA 322: Introduction to Buddhism. He is interested in international security studies and political violence, which led him to explore the topic of Buddhist extremism as the focus of his research. He believes that violence within Buddhist communities is an understudied topic with low awareness among the general population in Western nations due to persistent stereotypes about Buddhism. He hopes that this paper will shed light on this issue for the Rice community and beyond.

RASR

Censorship through the Eyes of the Censors: The Cases of *Story of Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*

Rijuta Vallishayee

ABSTRACT

The historical phenomenon of Chinese imperial inner palace intrigue and conflicts between consorts of the emperor have been fertile grounds for television adaptation, spawning the genre of *gongdou*, or “palace conflict.” However, due to their incompatibility with existing content prohibitions, the genre was banned by the state of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 2012. Despite this, two *gongdou* dramas emerged to critical acclaim and popularity in 2018: *Story of Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the dramas were struck from the air in late 2018. The author examines this instance of censorship to conclude about the interpretation of history in television dramas enforced by the government of the PRC. By closely reading the relevant regulations and articles from PRC government institutions, as well as the dramas themselves, the author concludes that these instances of censorship reveal the state’s espousal of moral approach to the historical subject matter, which the dramas failed to utilize.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the 2010 ban on Google in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the most googled television show of 2018 was a Chinese historical drama.¹ *Story of Yanxi Palace*, a historical drama about the conflicts between the Qianlong Emperor’s consorts created and produced by Huanyu TV, aired on iQiyi to major acclaim in the summer of 2018. Aired after it on Tencent’s streaming platform WeTV was the show *Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace*, which covered essentially the same storyline. Though not as popular as *Story of Yanxi Palace*, both dramas aired on state-owned television networks in the last months of 2018. In January 2019, these channels replaced both dramas with other television shows before the dramas finished. The CNN article on *Story of Yanxi Palace* points to the “Communist Party and its ever-widening dragnet of cultural censorship” as the causal factor in the situation.² This veils the true mechanisms of “cultural censorship” by attributing it

to the unspecific institution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Additionally, it removes the historical context of “cultural censorship” by reducing its evolution to a single direction. Using “censorship” to describe the interactions between industry, audience, and the state in the PRC also reduces the state’s actions to mere suppression, when the actual situation is much more complex.³

It is true that in the PRC, the state and the party play a role in the production and distribution of television dramas. Until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the state directly produced and distributed all Chinese television dramas. During the subsequent reform period known as Reform and Opening Up, the party established the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television to manage the new television drama production units established by local television stations and even private groups. By 2018, the agency was under the supervision of the State Council, and was known as the State

Administration for Press, Publication, Film, Radio, and Television (SAPPRFT).⁴ As part of the government apparatus of the PRC, it is technically separate from the CCP's apparatus. However, the structure of the party-state makes it so that the agency, like other agencies of the PRC government, are composed of party members as employees and effectively serves to carry out the party's decisions. This management of television dramas is a way for the party-state to maintain the same level of oversight held before the Cultural Revolution in the current dynamic media landscape.

By 2018, all types of independent production units joined the industry under state supervision, including production companies, business conglomerates, and streaming services.⁵ Production units exist on a spectrum of association with the state, from state-owned production companies like China Central Television (CCTV) to private companies like Tencent and iQiyi which produced *Ruyi's Royal Love* and *Yanxi Palace* respectively. Though SAPPRFT was primarily responsible for the governance of the television drama industry, other state, or party institutions (especially local institutions) may have some degree of influence over the television stations which air these shows. PRC audiences, production units, and institutions use the umbrella term *shencha* to describe the regulation, examination, and censorship of television dramas on all levels. For specificity, I will translate *shencha* as "regulation," "examination," and "censorship" depending on the case.

I will also utilize these three aspects of *shencha* as the conceptual organization for this paper's analysis of the 2018 instances of drama censorship. The primary case study on censorship in PRC television dramas is Ng's piece on *Snail House*. However, while Ng utilizes an anthropological approach to understand the case of the censorship of *Snail House*, I utilize an approach that follows SAPPRFT's procedures of *shencha* to better understand the administration's motivations. First, I will read regulations in detail to extract a theoretical basis for historical interpretation. Second, I will explore the

dramas' production and distribution background to understand how the authorities deliberated to remove the dramas from the air. Finally, I will analyze the drama itself to understand its approach to historical subject matter. The analysis of the drama also determines whether the drama broke content prohibitions or validated the authorities' concerns. The method of this paper reveals the historical interpretation espoused by the state in practice, exposing the unwritten reasons for true censorship on the part of the state. Using this methodology, I conclude that the censorship of *Story of Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* reveals the state's espousal of moral approach to historical subject matter, which the dramas failed to apply to their plot and characters.

THE REGULATORY "THEORY" OF TELEVISION DRAMA SHENCHA

First, an analysis of the extant regulations and documents is necessary to understand the state's theory of historical interpretation within television dramas. As the written rules and regulations for television drama content, these serve as both the guidelines for drama production units to create standard-conforming dramas and the guidelines for drama censors to determine whether a drama should be distributed to the public. By reading these regulations closely, the criteria for a theoretically perfect television drama that would pass all SAPPRFT standards becomes clear. By close reading certain regulatory documents, I seek to determine what this perfect drama might include in terms of historical interpretation.

The most definitive regulations for television drama content are the "Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination." This document, issued in 2011, updated the 2006 "Temporary Provisions for Television Content Regulation."⁶ It repeats the eleven primary content prohibitions established in 2006. The most important of those eleven is the prohibition of "Content which endangers social morality or excellent ethnic traditions." The

section in the “Detailed Rules” dedicated to this prohibition contains three sub-prohibitions relevant to the moral lens on history. These include “Content which betrays historical facts, seeks to ‘reverse a verdict’ on historical figures or events, or ‘rectify the names’ of controversial historical figures or events; Content which belittles the role of the people in the advancement of history or defames the image of the people’s leaders,” and “Content which makes those on the wrong side objects of display, or biographize, eulogize, highlight the importance of, or positively portray reactionary, backwards, evil, or illegal social forces, social groups, and characters.”⁷ Additionally, the “Provision to the Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination,” issued in 2013, prohibits “Content which goes against basic common knowledge of history, lacks a basic historical foundation, arbitrarily twists history, or portrays revolutionary history in an excessively entertaining and gamelike fashion.”⁸

The ideal historical approach outlined in these regulations places all historical content in television dramas within a certain accepted narrative. The addition of quotation marks around the phrases “rectify the names” and “reverse a verdict” imply that verdicts and reputations were already established for controversial figures. The notion of “historical facts” is also prominent, pointing to the existence of an established and unchallenged historical narrative. This addition elucidates the idea of “historical fact” as “basic common knowledge of history,” divorcing the content of television drama from the history developed by academic historians.⁹ The ban on a lack of “basic historical foundation” and “twisting” history are vague, but also point to the existence of an established historical narrative though the “Detailed Rules” makes no explicit mention of historical materialism or any other established theoretical lens. The “Detailed Rules” also addresses the class through its ban on content which “belittles the role of the people in the advancement of history or defames the image of the people’s leaders.” This indicates the importance of class in the historical

narrative. Condensed, the laws imply that when telling a historical narrative, dramas should adhere to a set narrative that evaluates historical figures and events through the morals of the present.

Article 3 of the 2015 “General Rules for Television Drama Content Production” ties together all these elements into a direct statement on the desired historical interpretation for television dramas.¹⁰ Some of these provisions mention historical narratives and interpretation. For example, the second provision calls on television drama production units to “guide the people towards establishing and preserving a correct historical perspective.”¹¹ The third provision calls on dramas to record the “advancement of time and social progress.”¹² The fourth provision calls on dramas to use “history as a mirror,” or to teach from history.¹³ Each of these points supports the conclusion wrought from the 2011 “Detailed Rules.” All three imply the application of a moral lens of history, whether through the concept of a “correct” historical perspective, the priority of ‘social progress’ in the recollection of history, or the idea of learning lessons from history. With these standards, historical television dramas deviating from the set narrative, or a moral lens, are more likely to face legal consequences. However, the industry did not comply with the standards presented by these rules, and continued to produce historical *gongdou* dramas that defied them to adapt popular intellectual properties (IPs). This is evident in an analysis of *Story of Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace*. The censorship of these popular dramas demonstrates SAPPRFT’s enforcement of the moral approach to history on historical television dramas.

THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION BACKGROUND OF STORY OF YANXI PALACE AND RUYI’S ROYAL LOVE IN THE PALACE: SHENCHA IN PRACTICE

The previous discussion of rules and regulations brings the question of why these dramas were made in the first place. In fact, the production background

of *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love* reveals potential reasons for subversive qualities in these dramas. *Story of Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love* aired first on iQiyi and Tencent respectively. These video streaming platforms developed by multinational technology conglomerates diversified into original dramas in the early 2010s. The growth of internet usage and the sheer convenience of streaming platforms led to the rise of the “web drama” format in the later years of the 2010s, with *Yanxi Palace* marking one of the peaks of these companies' domination of the television drama market. The production units employed by web dramas are private, enabling them to adapt riskier, but popular IPs without immediate government pushback. These IPs included *Hougong Ruyi Zhuan*, the web novel which *Ruyi's Royal Love* was based on. Huanyu TV, the company which produced *Yanxi Palace* in collaboration with iQiyi, has also adapted popular historical web novels (novels published on less-regulated websites) into dramas. These included many titles in the same “palace conflict” or *gongdou* genre as *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love*.¹⁴

Based on the number of dramas adapted from popular IPs with content prohibited on screen, there is a connection between the increased boldness of private production companies and the rise of web novel IP adaptations. Though this does not explain how *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love* passed institutional review, it is likely that once the project plans for these dramas passed SAPPRT's initial examination, the production companies judged the growth in their membership and advertising revenue that would come from adopting popular *gongdou* IPs as web dramas would be greater than the potential risk of being struck down, leading to the high number of *gongdou* IPs from this period. In the case of *Yanxi Palace*, the investments led to increases in membership and advertisement revenue for iQiyi.¹⁵

The distribution background of these dramas is also necessary to understand the potential subversive qualities of *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love*. In 2011, SAPPRT banned *gongdou* dramas from airing during prime time on satellite television beginning on January

1, 2012. Additionally, SAPPRT would no longer accept project plans for *gongdou* dramas from October 1, 2012.¹⁶ However, both *Story of Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love* passed through both initial and episodic review to air in the summer and fall of 2018, which raises the question of why the dramas were able to pass review in the first place.¹⁷ As Michael Keane points out, there is a certain “elasticity of guidelines and widespread non-compliance with policy” within media organizations in China, leading to situations where dramas belonging to banned genres pass review. The “irregularity and haphazardness” of the process points to the complexity of the system of governance of television dramas.¹⁸

This haphazard complexity partially explains why various state-owned television channels ended the television run *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* and *The Story of Yanxi Palace* early. This occurred one day after the *Beijing Daily* (the Beijing Municipal Committee's official newspaper) published a criticism of the dramas.¹⁹ The text of the criticism piece reveals even more about the historiographical standards mandated by SAPPRT, emphasizing the moral approach to history even more than the regulations. Titled “‘Story of Yanxi Palace,’ ‘Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace,’ and Other Palace Dramas Dominate the Screen, Their Negative Influence Cannot Be Underestimated,” the criticism reveals that the reason for the *gongdou* dramas' censorship lay in their incorrect historical interpretation of the Qianlong era. Its content connects to three prohibitions in the 2011 “Detailed Rules,” as well as the 2015 “General Rules.”

The first of these is the “Detailed Rules” regulation on “Content which makes those on the wrong side objects of display, or biographize... reactionary, backwards, evil, or illegal social forces, social groups, and characters.”²⁰ The *Beijing Daily* accused *gongdou* dramas of glorifying the “emperors and ministers” of the Qing period, who are considered “backwards” social groups. The article bases this accusation upon the claim that Qing history overshadows the propaganda for the founders of the PRC and its important leaders. The criticism implies that through glorifying Qing emperors

and officials, the drama has caused audiences to forget about the contributions of important modern figures to the development of the PRC. However, the events of both dramas occur centuries before the founding of the PRC. This makes explicit reminders of the importance of modern figures impossible. According to the article, the way to avoid this criticism would be through an implicit comparison, which would involve depicting the Qing emperors and officials as the landowning class which oppressed the peasants and members of the proto-working class at their service. The emperors and officials would then contrast with PRC leaders and revolutionaries, which the article describes as “heroic” and “outstanding.” As part of the “wrong side,” emperors and officials should be reprehensible to contrast with the upstanding revolutionaries and PRC leaders.

Second, the *Beijing Daily* accuses *gongdou* dramas of “worsening the social environment.”²¹ The article claims that audiences only learn “mutual deception, internal strife, conflict and jealousy, mutual intrigue, unfathomable motives, and fawning favors with superiors while bullying subordinates” from *gongdou* dramas.²² This connects to the prohibition on “Content which endangers social morality or excellent ethnic traditions.”²³ *Gongdou* dramas had previously been accused of a lack of positive ideological significance. In 2011, right before the overall ban on *gongdou* dramas, SAPPRT published a rectification that claimed that *gongdou* dramas were “developing a deviation from the value orientation” and should instead preserve “historical materialism, carrying forward the excellent traditional morals” of the Chinese people.²⁴ This implies that certain characters must be morally upright. As previous research on television dramas has determined, the notion that the good are defeated by the bad promotes a negative ideological message.²⁵ This is known as a good “value orientation.” “Value orientation” is a vague term that generally means the ideological position of the drama with respect to the characters. Effectively, a good “value orientation” means the heroic

protagonists defeat the evil antagonists, leaving no room for ambiguity.

The notion of “value orientation” raises the question of which kinds of characters should be the heroic protagonists. Though the *Beijing Daily* criticism piece does not specify it, the “Detailed Rules” do prohibit content which “belittles the role of the people in the advancement of history.”²⁶ In the context of the “role of the people,” it could be proof that those working to “advance history” should be upright. This indicates a mandate to portray figures who played a role in creating historical change that led to the present status quo in a positive light. The reference to the collective “people” also implies that peasants and the working class should not be portrayed as villainous.

Second, the rectification states that dramas should preserve a historical materialist approach to history. It is difficult to determine exactly what this entails, as this is the only mention of historical materialism in the relevant SAPPRT documents. However, the state has prohibited portrayal of “feudal” behavior and superstitions since the 1990s. Through a historical materialist lens, the feudal means of production provides the nobility with power over serfs and peasants due to their ownership of the land.²⁷ A “historical materialist” approach to history in a historical drama might manifest as intra-drama class awareness or an emphasis on class relations of the feudal mode of production. Emperors, nobles, and officials, as holders of Chinese land and therefore the ultimate power over the Chinese people, are reprehensible because of their reproduction of an unequal distribution of power. Servants, workers, and farmers are upright because of their services to the nation despite this unequal distribution of power. According to the regulations, dramas should maintain an unambiguous ideological environment by punishing that ambiguous or reprehensible behavior and rewarding the righteous. This is the standard for historical interpretation in television dramas mandated by both SAPPRT regulations and authorities. Due to its identification of failure to adhere to standards of moral

uprightness and historical materialism, it is likely that the *Beijing Daily's* criticism piece led television stations to pull *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love* from the air.

VALIDATING THE BEIJING DAILY'S CRITICISMS: DEVIATION IN PRACTICE

Examining the *Beijing Daily's* criticism piece raises implicit questions concerning the validity of the piece's claims concerning *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi's Royal Love's* lack of adherence to the SAPPRT standards. This section will examine the dramas themselves to affirm the veracity of the *Beijing Daily's* concerns. I will specifically analyze the protagonists and antagonists of each drama to both address the *Beijing Daily's* claims and demonstrate what deviation from the rules looks like in practice by pointing to specific instances where characters demonstrate traits or receive treatment which defies SAPPRT's regulations and demonstrate the reason for their censorship.

On the surface, *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* seems to represent an application of the moral approach to historical events and characters. However, the fates of the primary characters represent the drama's ambiguous "value orientation" and rejection of the moralist approach to history. For example, Ula Nara Ruyi, the protagonist and Emperor Qianlong's primary consort within the show, is an example of incorrect "value orientation" due to her being punished for being moral. In general, she never harms those who harm her unless she has evidence of wrongdoing to support her decisions. Therefore, she often falls for the schemes of others until her luck, position, or relationship with Qianlong protects her. In episode 53, she nearly dies by protesting Qianlong's ingestion of dangerous substances provided by Consort Ling. Physicians in the palace were only able to save her when they discovered she was pregnant. While this may make Ruyi appear to be a passive protagonist with no drive, she directs her energies in a different direction. Rather than scheme to protect her position, she conducts herself according to the rituals and directs her energy towards exposing

palace intrigues. Though she punishes those who deserve it in a punitive fashion, she never schemes to displace those who threaten her position. Instead, she remains concerned only with her role as the empress, because she sees her role as empress and her role as wife as one. However, rather than living well because of her diligence, Ruyi falls because of those very traits. By protesting her husband's lecherous and degrading actions, she falls out of his favor and loses her authority and mobility. In this way, Ruyi's fate represents an example of the righteous suffering for their righteousness.

However, it is not the case that the unrighteous reap undue rewards, as might be expected from a drama with a "value orientation" that differs from the ideal. The unrighteous characters of *Ruyi's Royal Love* are not the villains which SAPPRT demands from a historical drama, either. This is evident in the identity and fate of the most successful villain of *Ruyi's Royal Love*, Consort Ling. Qianlong promotes Consort Ling to Imperial Noble Consort and effectively takes over Ruyi's throne. She continues to deprive Ruyi of daily necessities to take her life, though Ruyi no longer holds any power. In a triumphant moment, Ruyi and her allies in the inner palace expose her schemes to Qianlong, who then orders her to kill herself. When she does not follow the order, he confines her as well. On the surface, the conclusion of the drama makes it seem as though the unrighteous villain reaped an undue reward and was then punished for it.

However, Consort Ling differs from the other contenders for the throne in her class background, which alters the meaning of her death. Other minor villains in the story, such as Korean Consort Jia and the Mongolian Consort Yu, derive their lust for power out of entitlement due to their higher-class backgrounds as members of their kingdoms' royal families. In contrast, Consort Ling's lust for power derives from her lack of power. Initially a servant in the inner palace, her brother's poor spending habits forced her into supporting her entire family. She endured humiliation and abuse from

Consort Jia to make enough money to send back to her home. When Consort Ling realized she could rely on her charm to seduce Qianlong and lift herself out of the disgrace of servitude, she abandoned her lover to become closer to the emperor. Therefore, Consort Ling comes from a commoner, lower-class background since her grievances arise from her poor material conditions and abuse from her mistress.

Despite the drama's explicit development of her class-related abuse, Consort Ling is still the primary female villain of the drama, which contradicts the regulations' standards for portrayals of the "role of the people." As a member of the proto-working class, Consort Ling should not have been a villain. Rather than serve as motivation for immoral behavior, her hard work and suffering should have paid off as an indication of the "fine traditions of hard work and thrift" advocated for in the *Beijing Daily's* criticism piece.²⁸ Even though her punishment was consistent with the moral approach to history in the end, her villainous nature deviates from the standards of class consciousness expressed in the SAPPRT communications and regulations due to her lower-class background and experience of abuse on the grounds of class.

The only character who survives the plot of the drama is the Qianlong Emperor, who exemplifies the definition of "ambiguous value orientation" and therefore deviates from SAPPRT's standards for drama characters. As Ruyi states while confronting him about his dalliances with courtesans, Qianlong's suspicions about his own consorts led to the death of many consorts and imperial children. He caused both Ruyi's rise to power and her eventual fall, as the man who gave her love and then broke her heart. At the beginning of the drama, Ruyi respects his work ethic and natural ability to rule. By the end of the drama, she sees him as a "tyrant who lacks devotion to others" and only loves himself, as well as a man with an inferiority complex.²⁹

Nevertheless, it is difficult to characterize him as a villain. He is never malicious towards Ruyi, except towards the very end of the drama when she effectively divorces

him by cutting her hair. Ruyi's description of Qianlong as a tyrant is accurate, as he is the exclusive emperor of the massive Qing Empire. His lack of devotion to others arises out of his inability to trust others, another aspect of his character which Ruyi points out to Qianlong. Considering the schemes of the consorts and Dowager Empress Chongqing to either gain his favor for material gain or place their choice of prince on the throne, this aspect of his personality is understandable. Additionally, he repents before his death, finally understanding that power and responsibility had taken a toll on both his and Ruyi's personalities, leading to the demise of their relationship. Overall, the emperor is a complex character, with understandable flaws and even some redeeming qualities. He is the epitome of a character with ambiguous ideological orientation. His character arc is not the character arc of a villain like Consort Ling's arc, but the arc of a man whose relationship with his wife deteriorated. As a man with ambiguous morals, his character design contradicts the moral approach to historical figures.

The protagonists and antagonist reveal that *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* deviated from the moral approach to history mandated by SAPPRT. The primary protagonist suffers for her righteousness, while the secondary protagonist presents an ambiguous character who is neither a hero nor a villain. The antagonist is a member of the proto-working class painted as a villain. These elements diverge from SAPPRT's standards historical dramas, providing the reason for the censorship of *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*.

In contrast to *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*, *Story of Yanxi Palace* breaks the regulations on historical dramas through its morally ambiguous protagonist and incorrect "value orientation." Wei Yingluo, the future Consort Ling, demonstrates moral ambiguity through vengeful actions in the name of justice. In the conclusion of the first arc of the drama, she kills the consort of the previous emperor who ordered her sister's death. Through this act of punitive justice, Yingluo avenges her sister's death. However, this action breaks the "Provision to

the Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination.” This provision prohibits “Content which propagates using violence to curb violence or extreme actions and feelings of revenge.”³⁰ By killing the consort of the previous emperor, Yingluo used violence to avenge her sister, presenting a convoluted “value orientation.” While wrongdoers must be punished according to the standards, punitive justice lies outside of the scope of the correct “value orientation” because of the performance of a morally reprehensible deed validated by a just reason. If Yingluo was a standard protagonist, she would not be as willing to commit murder as her opponents. Additionally, Yingluo does not suffer for her violent acts of vengeance and enjoys the fruit of her successful relationship with Qianlong. If the drama preserved the moral standards of the SAPPRT, an ambiguous figure like Yingluo would not deserve such a happy fate. Though she has her positive traits, SAPPRT prohibits her extreme actions in the name of justice.

Another character who exemplifies a deviation from the standards is the Qianlong Emperor’s first empress, Empress Fuca. This is due to the inevitable difference between the so-called historical facts of Empress Fuca’s personality and the personality which would have complied with regulations based on her fate. This tension derives from her death, which occurred in 1748.³¹ Therefore, she must die in both dramas to remain close to the “historical facts” valued by the SAPPRT standards. However, due to the emphasis on history through a moral lens within the regulations, the dramas must justify the death by implying that she somehow deserved to die within the plot. *Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace* compensates for the death by making Empress Fuca as conniving under her virtuous demeanor. Though Empress Fuca’s death in *Ruyi’s Royal Love* is an indirect murder, the actions she takes to keep her fellow consorts infertile and even kill Ruyi. This offsets what would otherwise be a tragic death, implying that Empress Fuca got what she deserved. However, this contrasts from the historical Empress Fuca’s character, which

presents yet another deviation from the standards for *Ruyi’s Royal Love* and a convoluted “value orientation” for *Yanxi Palace*. According to the Draft History of the Qing, Empress Fuca was respectful, frugal, and loved enough by the emperor for him to write poetry in her honor.³² Therefore, Empress Fuca’s character in *Ruyi’s Royal Love* is a straightforward deviation from SAPPRT regulations.

This differs from *Yanxi Palace*, where Empress Fuca’s character is consistent with her historical reputation and therefore represents a case of martyrdom, which contradicts the regulations. She refuses to scheme against the consorts that conspire against her and turns away from Qianlong, despite their childhood love. While Yingluo is searching for her sister’s true killer, she protects Empress Fuca from those schemes. In return for providing her with a meaningful friendship, Empress Fuca teaches Yingluo how to read, write, and do other ladylike activities such as painting and flower arranging. When Yingluo kills the consort of the previous emperor, Empress Fuca saves her by sending her to the laundry department before Qianlong can execute her. This decision opens her flank to attacks from the other consorts and leads to her forced suicide. Her death was unjust, as shown by Yingluo’s eventual resolution to avenge her. The lack of moral offset turns Empress Fuca’s death into another case of the upright suffering for their righteousness. Her peaceful yet unsuccessful method of surviving in the inner palace, in contrast with Yingluo’s cutthroat but successful methods, imply that kindness and peace are ineffective and not worth the effort. This is an indication of a deviation from the “value orientation” mandated by SAPPRT regulations, creating an inescapable trap due to the contradiction between “historical facts” and Empress Fuca’s historically recorded personality.

A similar contradiction exists between portrayals of upright officials in *Yanxi Palace*. Characters such as Fuheng of the Fuca clan (Empress Fuca’s brother) was accused of being “glorified” by the *Beijing Daily*, among other government officials in *gongdou* dramas.³³

However, his historical reputation is consistent with his “glorified” image in the drama. The first volume of *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period, 1644-1912* describes him as an “able statesman,” who “was extremely devoted to the Emperor, and punctilious in his observance of the proprieties.”³⁴ The only criticism mentioned by the writers of *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* was his alleged extravagance and “the vehemence of his likes and dislikes.”³⁵ The Draft History of the Qing describes Fuheng as “humble, one who wouldn’t presume authority, one who respected officials and made good use of their talents. He marched with his soldiers and shared joys and tribulations with them... he was especially cherished.”³⁶

To balance this positive portrayal and remain consistent with SAPPRT’s preferences for class consciousness, screenwriters could have examined Fuheng’s military conquests from a twenty-first century perspective to paint him as a suppressor of the working class. However, doing so would involve breaking the regulation against portraying the historical conquests of China. Instead, the drama utilizes his positive character traits as reason for Yingluo’s attraction towards him and their eventual relationship. He remains loyal to Yingluo throughout the factional struggles and assists her in clearing allegations and defeating the schemes of Empress Nara. Based on plot and character design, his character is righteous and loyal. The consistency between this portrayal and his biography in *The Draft History of the Qing* demonstrates that Fuheng’s character in *Yanxi Palace* is not a glorification but a portrayal of a historical figure as accurate to his biographies as possible. However, because the drama does not portray Qing royalty and officials as reprehensible, officials see the drama as glorifying the characters and therefore breaking regulations. The contradiction between the moral alignment and historical reality of historical figures in *Story of Yanxi Palace*, combined with the often-reprehensible actions of the protagonist, demonstrates the drama’s divergence from the standards for historical dramas.

The contradictions between different aspects of SAPPRT’s standards for historical dramas elucidate the reason why both *Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace* and *Story of Yanxi Palace* were removed from the air in early 2019. The portrayal of main characters in both dramas adheres to some aspects of these regulations, but deviates from others due to some of the inherent contradictions between the emphasis on “value orientation” in historical dramas and the importance of remaining true to “historical facts.” Therefore, there is a direct connection between deviation from the standards, the recognition of this deviation in the criticism piece, and the eventual censorship of the dramas.

CONCLUSION

The case studies of *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi’s Royal Love* thus demonstrate the complicated and murky *shencha* apparatus of the PRC government and highlight the extent of the state’s principles of historical narrative in the process. An examination of the extant regulations reveals the administration’s focus on the moral approach to history. The wording of announcements dating back to before the original ban on gongdou dramas in 2012 indicates that dramas need both a certain level of class consciousness and a correct “value orientation.” The plot and primary characters of *Yanxi Palace* and *Ruyi’s Royal Love* demonstrate the application of state standards to a drama, resulting in an instance of censorship. In combination, the regulations and drama uncover the true standards of historical interpretation for television dramas established by SAPPRT.

NOTES

1. “Yanxi Palace: The Most Googled show on Earth,” *BBC News*, December 23, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-46630781>.
2. Eduardo Baptista, “Will China’s hit period drama ‘Yanxi Palace’ face censorship?,” *CNN*, February 2, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/02/asia/china-period-dramas-yanxi-palace-censorship-intl/index.html/>
3. How Wee Ng, “Rethinking Censorship in China: The Case of Snail House,” in *Chinese Television in the Twenty-First Century: Entertaining the Nation*, ed. Ruoyun Bai and Geng Song (London: Routledge, 2014), 87.
4. During the Thirteenth National People’s Congress in 2018, the State Council shifted responsibility for the press and film to administrations directly under the party. The party is currently known as the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) and is still under supervision of the State Council.
5. Ruoyun Bai, *Staging Corruption: Chinese Television and Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 40-47.
6. Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize (电视剧内容审查实施细则) [Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination] (Promulgated by St. Admin. Of Radio, Film, and Television, 2010, effective January 5, 2011), *Baidu Wenku*, <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/2f23a5d96f1aff00bed51e36.html>.
7. *Id.*
8. Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize Buchong Guiding (电视剧内容审查实施细则补充规定) [Provision to the Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination] (Promulgated by St. Admin. Of Radio, Film, and Television, Jul. 10, 2013, effective July 10, 2013), *Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Nianjian* [*Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook*] (2014), 538.
9. *Id.*
10. Dianshiju Neirong Zhizuo Tongze (电视剧内容制作通则) [General Rules for Television Drama Content Production] (Promulgated by China Federation of Radio and Television Associations and China Television Drama Production Industry Association, December 31, 2015, effective December 31, 2015) *Sohu*, Mar. 4, 2016, https://www.sohu.com/a/61883713_154166/.
11. *Id.*
12. *Id.*
13. *Id.*
14. “Huanyu Zuopin,” *Huanyu Dianshi*, <http://www.huanyutv.com/list-2.html>, n.d.
15. Jia Liu, “Baokuan Wangju Yanxi Gonglue You Duo Huo? Daidong Aiqiyi Yi Huiyuan Shouru Du Ci Chaoguo Guanggao Shouru,” *Yicai*, <https://www.yicai.com/news/100049688.html>.
16. “Mingnian Gongdou Xi Buzai Fanlan,” *Qilu Wanbao*, December 3, 2011, <https://sjb.qlwb.com.cn/qlwb/content/20111203/Article-1A10002FM.htm#>.
17. Michael Keane, “Civil Society, Regulatory Space, and Cultural Authority in China’s Television Industry,” in *Television, Regulation, and Civil Society in Asia*, ed. Philip Kitley (London: Routledge, 2002): 171.
18. Ng, “Rethinking Censorship in China,” 88.
19. Tingzhao Liu, “‘Yanxi Gonglue’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan’ Deng Gongting Ju Bapi, Fumian Yingxiang Burong Xiaoqu,” *Beijing Ribao*, January 25, 2019, <https://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2019-01-28/doc-ihqfskcp1161992.shtml>. The authors of the criticism claims that their remarks apply to all gongdou dramas.
20. Liu, “‘Yanxi Gonglue’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan.’”
21. Liu, “‘Yanxi Gonglue’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan.’”
22. Liu, “‘Yanxi Gonglue’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan.’”
23. Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize, *Baidu Wenku*.
24. “Guanyu 2011 Nian 11 Yue Quanguo Paishe Zhizuo Dianshiju Bei’an Gongshi de Tongzhi,” *Guojia Guangbo Dianshi Zongju*, December 8, 2011, http://www.nrta.gov.cn/art/2011/12/8/art_113_5225.html.
25. Bai, *Staging Corruption*, 76.
26. Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize, *Baidu Wenku*.
27. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 78, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Engels_Socialism_Utopian_and_Scientific.pdf.
28. Liu, “‘Yanxi Gonglue’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan.’”
29. *Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace*, episode 81, “Episode 81,” directed by Jun Wang, broadcast January 14, 2019 on Dragon TV, <https://www.viki.com/videos/1136987v-ruyis-royal-love-in-the-palace-episode-81,00:21:41>.
30. Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize Buchong Guiding, *Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Nianjian*, 538.
31. Mark C. Elliot, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Longman, 2009), 43.
32. Erxun Zhao et al., ed. *Qing Shigao*, vol. 30 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977), 8917.
33. Liu, “‘Yanxi Gonglue,’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan,’” <https://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2019-01-28/doc-ihqfskcp1161992.shtml>.
34. Arthur W. Hummel et al., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period, 1644-1912* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 252.
35. Hummel et al., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period*, 253.
36. Erxun Zhao et al., ed. *Qing Shigao*, vol. 35 (Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1998), 10451.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bai, Ruoyun. *Staging Corruption: Chinese Television and Politics*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.
- Baptista, Eduardo. “Will China’s hit period drama ‘Yanxi Palace’ face censorship?” *CNN*, February 2, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/02/asia/china-period-dramas-yanxi-palace-censorship-intl/index.html/>.
- Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize (电视剧内容审查实施细则) [Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination] (Promulgated by St. Admin. Of Radio, Film, and Television, 2010, effective January 5, 2011), *Baidu Wenku*, <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/2f23a5d96f1aff00bed51e36.html>.
- Dianshiju Neirong Shencha Shishi Xize Buchong Guiding (电视剧内容审查实施细则补充规定) [Provision to the Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Television Drama Content Examination] (Promulgated by St. Admin. Of Radio, Film, and Television, Jul. 10, 2013, effective July 10, 2013), *Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Nianjian* [*Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook*] (2014), 538.
- Dianshiju Neirong Zhizuo Tongze(电视剧内容制作通则) [General Rules for Television Drama Content Production] (Promulgated by China Federation of Radio and Television Associations and China Television Drama Production Industry Association, December 31, 2015, effective December 31, 2015) *Sohu*, Mar. 4, 2016, https://www.sohu.com/a/61883713_154166/.
- Elliot, Mark C. *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World*.

- New York: Longman, 2009.
- Engels, Frederick. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Engels_Socialism_Utopian_and_Scientific.pdf.
- “Guanyu 2011 Nian 11 Yue Quanguo Paishe Zhizuo Dianshiju Bei’an Gongshe de Tongzhi.” *Guojia Guangbo Dianshi Zongju*, December 8, 2011. http://www.nrta.gov.cn/art/2011/12/8/art_113_5225.html.
- “Huanyu Zuopin.” *Huanyu Dianshi*. <http://www.huanyutv.com/list-2.html>.
- Hui, Kaidong and Deguang Wen, dir. *Yanxi Gonglue* [Story of Yanxi Palace]. Aired July 7, 2018 to August 26, 2018 on iQiyi. <https://www.viki.com/tv/36279c-story-of-yanxi-palace>.
- Hummel, Arthur W., Chao-ying Fang, and Lien-che Tu. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period, 1644-1912*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943.
- Keane, Michael. “Civil Society, Regulatory Space, and Cultural Authority in China’s Television Industry.” In *Television, Regulation, and Civil Society in Asia*, edited by Philip Kitley, 169-187. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Liu, Jia. “Baokuan Wangju Yanxi Gonglue You Duo Huo? Daidong Aiqiyi Yi Huiyuan Shouru Du Ci Chaoguo Guanggao Shouru.” *Yicai*. <https://www.yicai.com/news/100049688.html>.
- Liu, Tingzhao. “‘Yanxi Gonglue’ ‘Ruyi Zhuan’ Deng Gongting Ju Bapi, Fumian Yingxiang Burong Xiaoqu.” *Beijing Ribao*, January 25, 2019. <https://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2019-01-28/doc-ihqfsk-cp1161992.shtml>.
- “Mingnian Gongdou Xi Buzai Fanlan.” *Qilu Wanbao*, December 3, 2011. <https://sjb.qlwb.com.cn/qlwb/content/20111203/Article-IA10002FM.htm#>.
- Ng, How Wee. “Rethinking Censorship in China: The Case of Snail House,” In *Chinese Television in the Twenty-first Century: Entertaining the Nation*, edited by Ruoyun Bai and Geng Song, 87-103. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Wang, Jun, dir. *Ruyi Zhuan* [Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace]. Aired August 20, 2018 to October 15, 2018 on Tencent. <https://www.viki.com/tv/36164c-ruyis-royal-love-in-the-palace>.
- “Yanxi Palace: The most Googled show on Earth.” *BBC News*, December 23, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-46630781>.
- Zhao Erxun, et al. eds. *Qing Shigao*, vol. 30. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1977.
- . *Qing Shigao*, vol. 35. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RIJUTA VALLISHAYEE

JUNIOR, MARTEL COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES & HISTORY

Rijuta originally wrote this article in Fall 2022 for ASIA495: Asian Studies Research Seminar. Since high school, she has been an avid fan of Chinese-language film and television, and enjoyed combining her love for PRC media studies and Qing history in this paper. She would like to thank the following parties for their invaluable assistance in advising and funding this research: Dr. Tani Barlow, Dr. Steven Lewis, the Mellon Mays Fellowship Program, the Elizabeth Lee Moody Undergraduate Research Fellowship, and the RASR editorial board.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**HOANG NGUYEN**

JUNIOR, LOVETT COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES, HISTORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE

ASSOCIATE EDITOR**KAREN SIU**

GRADUATE STUDENT
ENGLISH

LEAD EDITORS**LILY REMINGTON**

SOPHOMORE, HANSZEN COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES, BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

JIN YAN

SENIOR, DUNCAN COLLEGE
ART HISTORY, ECONOMICS, PSYCHOLOGY

EDITORS**MATT BANSCHBACH**

SOPHOMORE, SID RICHARDSON COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES, OPERATIONS RESEARCH

MAYA HABRAKEN

FRESHMAN, BAKER COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES

ANNA HE

JUNIOR, MARTEL COLLEGE
ARCHITECTURE

DANIKA LI

SOPHOMORE, HANSZEN COLLEGE
BIOENGINEERING, ENGLISH

V LUNDQUIST

GRADUATE STUDENT
ENGLISH

YUFEI QI

SOPHOMORE, WILL RICE COLLEGE
ASIAN STUDIES, BIOENGINEERING

HANNAH SON

SOPHOMORE, HANSZEN COLLEGE
ENGLISH, SOCIOLOGY

WEB DESIGNERS**WINNIE FAN**

SOPHOMORE, MARTEL COLLEGE
ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

EMMA LI

SOPHOMORE, JONES COLLEGE
COMPUTER SCIENCE

Uzbekistan United Arab Emirates Tajikistan Israel Hong Kong Jordan Laos Kyrgyzstan Singapore Turkmenistan Palestine Lebanon Oman Kuwait Georgia Mongolia Armenia Qatar Bahrain Timor-Leste Cyprus Bhutan Macau Brunei Maldives



RICE HUMANITIES

Department of Transnational Asian Studies