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Urban Poetics and Politics in Asia, Part II

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Strangers in a Familiar City: Picun Migrant-worker Poets in the Urban Space of Beijing

Federico Picerni

Abstract

Urbanisation and rural-urban labour mobility are two founding traits of China's contemporary society and socio-economic model. The connection between the two and the peculiar social mobility control system still in force, which bars non-urban residents from accessing basic services in the city, creates a new form of social stratification between the "centre" and the "periphery" of urban society, as well as a new subject in the city – one not fully urban, nor still peasant, but remaining an outsider in the city. Migrant-worker communities have formed, one of the foremost being Beijing's Picun urban village. In this paper, I analyse a corpus of poems published online in recent years by members of a literature group of migrant workers based in Picun. Reading them as a case of subjective representation of the social space of the city and the authors' positioning in its web of social relations, and adopting a socio-literary approach, I particularly focus on the relation with the rural home, urban alienation and anomie, and the effort for symbolic recognition, locating this production in the larger spheres of contemporary migrant-worker literature and urban literature. By doing so, I demonstrate that such a literature challenges the coherence and uniformity of the city's "text" (and identity), offering a multi-layer perspective of the socio-cultural production of urban space.

Keywords: Beijing, Picun, migrant-workers, literature, poems, urban space

If it is true, as David Frisby puts it, that the modern city is a place where strangers meet, textual representation can tell us a lot about how this encounter is perceived in the subjective realm (and the city itself may be quite a stranger to newcomers). With this in mind, this article endeavours to examine a set of poems authored by Chinese rural-urban migrants to determine how the city of Beijing is perceived by this specific kind of agent, the stranger to the city for institutional reasons even without crossing the nation's boundaries.

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This may offer new or alternative perspectives on our understanding of the relation of politics and poetics of the urban space, both in China and elsewhere. As remarked by Liu Dongwu, himself an "outsider" poet and self-made scholar, "in turning the city into language, literature continuously gives the city – as a material entity – a rich symbolic meaning and cultural implication, and it influences our understanding of the actual city and its real features" (Liu 2012: 96). My enquiry mainly revolves around two questions: How do migrant workers, a largely invisible army of cheap labour, employ contemporary forms of artistic expression? How do they read the city through their peripheral, marginalised experience?

Such a vast army of rural-urban migrant workers is one of the most distinctive features of post-1978 Chinese society. The "floating population" (流动人口) started flooding the rapidly-developing cities of China's coastal areas in the 1980s, after the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up policy and land de-collectivisation. Forty years later, it officially counts 244 million people (National Bureau of Statistics 2018), although these numbers do not account for unregistered migrants and cut across different generations with different approaches to migration, family and urban life (Huang 2016: 56–57, 230–231). Beijing in particular, now closer than ever to becoming a *Blade Runner*-reminiscent megacity, saw its floating population reach 8.07 million in 2016, a relatively lower number than the previous year, probably set to further decrease due to more stringent quotas established by the municipal government (Beijing Bureau of Statistics 2017). The "floating population" comprises extremely varied members, ranging from people moving to the city to attend university (and possibly become accomplished urban citizens) to poor workers looking for better job prospects in the city who end up doing other menial jobs, often exploitative and precarious. Migrants' conditions are worsened by the lack of an urban household registration, the *hukou* (户口), which bars them from accessing basic urban services. Such migrant workers, variously called "farmer-workers" (农民工) or "precarious workers" (打工者), and who at times self-identify as "new workers" (新工人), also depending on the actual job they do, form the object of this paper.[1]

Some of them have long started writing novels and poetry. Today's literature abounds with stories on and by the city's underclasses, and commentaries are also following suit in huge numbers. In China, Liu Dongwu (2012) has

1 Caution is needed when stepping on the slippery ground of terminology. Terms like "migrant" or "floating people" might be too broad (young people coming to Beijing to study might also consider themselves migrants, and yet be totally separate from precarious workers in terms of social standing, lifestyle and ideas). Conversely, definitions like "precarious workers" (打工者) – which van Crevel (2017: 246) proposes translating with the Australian colloquialism "battler", while also remarking how "working-for-the-boss" would be the most literal translation (Pun 2005: 12) – or "peasant-workers" (农民工) are refuted by most in Picun, who prefer using the term "new workers" (新工人; Huang 2016: 101), initially employed by Lü Tu (2012; see also Zhang 2019), although the previous two terms often appear in the poems and other works by Picun authors. For the purpose of this paper, I am going to stick to "migrant workers".

written probably the most comprehensive work on the topic to date, crossing genres and themes, and engaging in a significant theoretical discussion on the question of authorhood and identity. Scholarship is on the increase also outside the country. Inwood (2011) sees migrant-worker poetry as the re-emergence of socially-oriented poetic responsibility in China, while Sun (2012) discusses how social commitment and literary value intermingle problematically in this poetry and in the related commentary. Gong (2012) focuses on its critique of the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation. Jaguścik (2014) and Dooling (2017) concentrate on migrant women's production, the first linking it with the broader scene of contemporary women's writing in China, and the latter highlighting it as a valid form of counter-narrative (with a strong emphasis on authors' urban experience); another intersection between migrant and gay subjectivities is explored by Bao (2018). Pozzana (2019) reads migrant-worker poetry as a space for subjective existence for the otherwise invisible, and connects it to the intellectual questions and poetic exploration spearheaded by the earlier trend of Misty poetry, whereas Li and Rong (2019) highlight the identity quandary in female migrants' "autobiographical" poetry. Van Crevel (2017a, 2017b: 38–44, 2019a, 2019b) is conducting a vast analysis of migrant-worker poetry, particularly discussing authors' creativity vis-à-vis the broader concept itself and their representativeness and position within contemporary Chinese poetry and literary establishments. Goodman's significant scholarly work on the translation of migrant-worker poetry should also be cited (2017, 2019).

The experience of social disparity, alienation and anomie in the city is undoubtedly a very relevant part of migrant-worker literature, and therefore a path worthy of further exploration. As a case study in this direction, I am going to focus on the literary production of the migrant community of Picun, an urban village on the outskirts of Beijing with a lively artistic scene. More precisely, I am going to examine the poems in the *Workers' Poems and Songs* (劳动者的诗与歌) series published on the WeChat blog of the Picun Workers' Home (皮村工友之家), concentrating in particular on their literary interpretation of the city and its social world.

1. Picun's literature group and literary Beijing

Picun, a "migrant heterotopia", lies on the outskirts of Beijing, closer to the Sixth Ring than the already-remote Fifth of the city's beltways. It is an "urban village", or "village-in-the-city" (城中村), the name used to designate former rural settlements that have been incorporated into the city following its expansion. Given the affordable prices of rents and other services, urban villages are the preferred destinations of migrant workers when they arrive in the city

(Wu 2016, Zhan 2018). It is noteworthy that this topological, in addition to social, marginalisation of migrant workers is also one of the aspects of the re-emergence of certain features of the pre-socialist urban divisions in China (Wang et al. 2009: 958).

Picun's thriving migrant cultural life, or "new-worker literature and arts" (新工人文艺), owes much to the New Workers' Arts Troupe, which moved to the village in 2005, after it was established in 2002 under a different name by Sun Heng, Wang Dezhi and Xu Duo, migrant workers themselves. The group runs the Picun Workers' Home, a service-providing space through which it organises several cultural events, festivals and writing contests, including the New Workers' Art Festival and the Precarious Workers' Spring Festival Gala. It also runs a Migrant Workers' Culture and Art Museum, schools for children and night classes for adults. The appropriation of this slice of urban space and the cultural self-management effected there is indeed a significant anomaly in the structure of the Chinese metropolis, although not in an antagonist relation with the state, also considering that it can count on the support from the local administration, at least to some degree – it would hardly be possible otherwise (Qiu / Wang 2012, Huang 2016: 93–134, Yang 2017, Lang 2018).

And finally, there is a literature group (文学小组), created in September 2014 on the initiative of Xiao Fu, a former migrant worker herself who still acts as its factotum, which aims to "provide a space for study and discussion to workers interested in literature" (Zhang 2019b: 320). It has some printed publications, such as multiple-author anthologies (*Picun Literature*), some individual collections, and, since May 2019, a bimonthly journal called *New-Worker Literature*.[2] By virtue of the unstable lives of migrant workers, who constitute the vast majority of its members (although its weekly activities sporadically see students and occasional comers among its audience), participation is highly irregular. The group enjoyed unprecedented notoriety after April 2017, when one of its members, house-care worker Fan Yusu, hit China's and international headlines with her acclaimed short autobiography "I Am Fan Yusu" (我是范雨素).[3]

Every week, the group holds talks or lectures given by high school or university teachers and other individuals who go to Picun as volunteers. One of

2 All the above-mentioned publications, including the journal, are considered "for internal exchange" (内部交流), therefore not for sale. This is a strategy to avoid possible risks. The same was done by avant-garde poetry journals in the 1980s, and generally by unofficial publications. Van Crevel's essay comparing the Picun museum with other worker-culture museums throughout China contains also an analysis of the literature group's poetry and activities (2019b).

3 The story was first posted on the website Noonstory.com, under a Shanghai media outlet, and it quickly became a sensation, being shared countless times before it was taken down, 48 hours later. Censorship, however, could not prevent it from going viral, and even a hashtag appeared, #*women dou shi* Fan Yusu (我们都是范雨素, "We are all Fan Yusu"), reflecting a growing interest in the lives of those at the margins of China's economic boom. Abroad, *The Guardian* termed it a "Dickensian" tale of Chinese migrants' lives. The story was printed in the first issue of *New-Worker Literature*, two years later, with a slightly different title (Fan 2019).

the very first to take up this role was Zhang Huiyu, a professor of film and communication studies currently at Peking University, still a prominent figure in the group. Another connection with the broader literary scene is Shi Libin, editor of the influential *Beijing Literature*, who actively participates in the group's life and who appears to have been instrumental in having some Picun authors published in the journal, as well as in including some of them in the anthology *Verses of Northern Floaters* (北漂诗篇). Zhang and Shi are currently on the editorial board of *New-Worker Literature*, together with other scholars, writers and activists, mostly based in Beijing.[4] These "outsiders" have been conceptualised in the group's publications as continuing the historical tradition of intellectuals contributing to worker writers' literary training (Zhang 2019b: 325), but they play a more than ancillary role, as they also act to a certain extent as conveyer belts between the group's unprofessional authors and Beijing's cultural establishment. As a form of creative, artistic production, regardless of its (still) unprofessional status, the group's poetry should be acknowledged with its own rightful place in the broader literary scene, with which it shares several tropes and topoi, including the representation of factory labour, homesickness, displacement, frustration, alienation and, last but not least, the questioning of the socio-cultural coherence of the metropolis[5] and the exposure to the complex undergrowth of the urban jungle. After all, this literature's birthplace (and current hotbed) were China's southernmost cities, where the earliest Special Economic Zones were established in the early 1980s.

Beijing is not an unexplored territory in contemporary urban literature. After the transition from the Maoist order, the capital also became the fictional setting where the striking and sometimes violent contradictions of post-socialist modernity unfolded. In her seminal work on artists' relation with the urban space in the post-socialist age, Visser offers a vast account of the literary (re-)imagination of cities from the late 1970s, particularly showing how Beijing was the site *par excellence* of the confrontation between the traditional and the modern. If, on the one hand, architecture, buildings, streets and the general cityscape, above all the traditional courtyards (四合院) and alleys (胡同), became concrete embodiments of an unforgotten and painfully preserved traditional identity, on the other hand, the crisis of values of the period, well exemplified by the "bohemian ethos" (Visser 2010: 139) of Wang Shuo's rampaging hooligan youth, together with the effects of China's transition to market economy and its entry into the global capitalist system, produced an urban subject plagued by anomie, estrangement and narcissism, exploring

4 Also on the editorial board sits Li Yunlei, a writer and editor of the academic journal *Theory and Critique of Literature and Arts*, author of a book on China's "subaltern" literature (Li 2014).

5 Notably, one of the earliest collections of such poems, by Bai Lianchun, was titled *Our Native Soil in the Cracks of the City* (城市缝隙里的乡土), published in 1991 in the *Shikan* poetry journal (Liu 2012: 75).

new urban life-styles and practices characterised by consumerism and unprecedented sexual transgression, as portrayed in the oeuvre of such authors as Liu Heng, Chen Ran and, later, Feng Tang. While many of these accounts came from a (local-born) middle-class perspective, new urban inequalities were unearthed by writers such as Qiu Huadong and Xu Zechen, whose characters deal with their outsider status, poverty vis-à-vis frustratingly unreachable possibilities and petty criminality. Visser concludes that "post-socialist urban fiction" reveals the "ethical dilemmas posed by consumer modernity" and the variety of ways in which individuals, left "with the burden of creating new belief systems", cope with them (ibid.: 286).

If we try to connect migrant authors' production with this background, some of the characteristics of contemporary urban literature, above all the feeling of alienation and anomie, appear to be common traits in city experience and are reflected in the production of migrant writers as well. At the same time, the unique perspective of migrant writers can offer additional and novel keys to interpret the city, highlighting in particular their own condition of class marginality, the re-articulation of the meaning of the figure of workers, and an urban experience mediated by the conditions of wage labour, with an emphasis on the contradiction between their role as the "constructors" of the city and their exclusion from it. Furthermore, migrant-worker literature's function as social discourse, in addition to its literary value, should not be overlooked, especially since, as Sun Wanning suggests, "these narratives should be read more as accounts of the collective experience of [migrant workers] as a socially marginalised cohort" (Sun 2014: 183), a point shared by Pozzana as she asserts that the "I" in migrant-worker poetry may be interpreted as a collective "us" (Pozzana 2019: 193).

2. Social space and representation

My approach here is to consider Picun migrant poets' literary production as a case of perception of the social world of Beijing directly by a subaltern group living at the geographical as well as social margins of the city. It may therefore be seen as an active act of reading *and* writing the city, primarily through the authors' own direct experience of the urban space itself, and vice versa, an attempt at reading *and* writing their very condition through this same act.

The fact that none of the authors were, nor are now, professional writers actually makes them reminiscent of the "ordinary practitioners" that, in de Certeau's words, come from "'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (Certeau 1984: 93). After all, they dwell at the margins of the city and their contribution to the city's (and the country's) progress is rarely acknowledged, pushing them below visibility's thresholds. However, unlike

the "walkers" described by the French scholar as "follow[ing] the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (ibid.), our ordinary practitioners here make a lucid effort to read, through writing, and to realise the "inscription of the body in the order's text" (ibid.: 130) – again, a text where they are objectively present by virtue of their labour, but that tends to hide their centrality.

The concept of social space can help us frame and make sense of how subaltern agents (or any agent, as a matter of fact) experience and interpret their surroundings. "Social space," argues Lefebvre (1991: 77), "is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production and with the relations of production". However, while it often overlaps physical space, social space is not confined by it; it reaches out to and connects other physical spaces by means of transversal (albeit hierarchical) social relations, rather than spatial relations per se. In fact, continues Lefebvre, "[w]e are confronted not by one social space but by many – indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces[.] *Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another*" (ibid.: 86, Lefebvre's italics). Such interpenetration or superimposition is made real by the cluster of networks that connect spaces (real, but also imagined and representational). While this may be particularly useful for analysing the production of authors socially located at the intersection between different spaces (primarily, city / countryside, downtown / periphery, centre / margins), what this principle implies is "that each fragment of space subjected to analysis masks not just one social relationship but a host of them" (ibid.: 88), meaning also that this juxtaposition is necessarily mediated by relations of hierarchy.

Social space, then, becomes unreadable (and "unwritable"?) if class and power relations between it and subjects, as well as between subjects themselves within it, are taken out of the picture – especially when, as in the case of migrant workers, these relations are determined by the condition of labour and what Marx would call wage slavery. These relations also contribute to determining what kind of representation is produced and by whom. Essentially in a similar manner to Lefebvre, although disagreeing with the latter's emphasis on relations of economic production,[6] Bourdieu describes social space as "a space of relations which is just as real as the geographical space", but also a "field of forces" where "a set of objective power relations" is at play, which determines what position each individual agent or actor occupies (Bourdieu 1991: 230).

6 Despite their differences, I believe both can be very useful to acquire a better understanding of the concept of social space. This is particularly true in a case like the one examined in this essay, where power and production relations clearly overlap, and cultural, symbolic as well as material power relations in the city are heavily dependent on (if not the result of) production relations.

Bourdieu thus holds that the perception of a social world or, for our purposes, a space (and its representation as a result) is a two-sided coin: objectively, "properties attached to agents or institutions do not make themselves available to perception independently", making it more difficult to discern and "de-naturalise", so to speak, the traits of a given socio-political order; and, subjectively, "schemes of perception and evaluation susceptible of being brought into operation at a given moment, *including all those which are laid down in language* [my emphasis], are the product of previous symbolic struggles and express, in a more or less transformed form, the state of symbolic relations of power" (ibid.: 234). Consequently, social conditions, power (and class) relations and hegemonic discourses variously influence – even when they are contested – subjects' perception and representation of their relation with the space. This does not mean, however, that the representation of a space by certain actors – namely, in our case, of Beijing by migrant worker-authors – is necessarily the mere reflection of these factors, passive and uncontested. After all, social space is a "site of co-existence of points of view" (Bourdieu 2000: 183), i.e. of ways to address and relate to the hegemonic way of life and culture, or *habitus*. What this does entail, however, is a certain influence on actors' attitude towards the social reality around them, mainly through the experiential relation with it that finds its expression in language.

Furthermore, a logical consequence of both Lefebvre's and Bourdieu's theories is that the dominant symbolic system is not the only factor influencing agents' understanding of the social space. In fact, their position in the "field of relations", while determined by the "objective power relations" (and in the concrete case, these are represented by labour relations, as well as by institutional-bureaucratic relations, namely the *hukou*), in turn determines how agents themselves will experience, interpret and possibly critique, explicitly or implicitly, social space. In particular, the question of proximity and distance is crucial in the social space, as it helps to conceptualise it as simultaneously juxtaposed with and different from physical space.[7] Also produced by objective conditions, understandings of one's own symbolic-cultural proximity to and distance from other actors in the field plays a role in framing agents', as well as groups', position and sense of belonging in the social space as a whole. With this in mind, I tried to read the poems under analysis as a field where the hegemonic discourse and individual agency coexist, in order to investigate how these texts, possibly shaped by both, offer an original perception of the city.

7 Reed-Danahay (2015) provides a comprehensive account of the development of the ideas of proximity (or closeness) and distance in social theory, particularly stressing the fact that social and physical proximity do not necessarily align, although some thinkers, like Bourdieu himself, believed that socially distant agents tended to be also physically distant. In the essay, Reed-Danahay also suggests the possible application of the concept to migration studies.

3. Reading and analysis of the poems

The Workers' Poems and Songs[8] series was run on the WeChat blog of Workers' Home from 2017 to 2018. It consists of 23 instalments, generally by different authors (although some have presented more than one entry), each providing the text of the poem and a recording of the author reciting it, accompanied by a song on a related theme. Some of the instalments included basic background information regarding the author and text; some were written around the time of publication, others are older and have been modified and rearranged. Most of them were previously published in the literature group's printed anthologies. My attempt at grouping them according to the main themes of each piece, although necessary due to the concrete limits of this paper, does not entirely render justice to their equally significant diversity.

3.1. "Home", nostalgia and habitus

What stands out immediately from this production is the constant sense of homesickness. Most of the poems, one way or another, deal with the issue of the author's nostalgia for the rural home, a feeling often expressed through tropes like the longing for the left-behind family or for a happy youthful past against a gloomy present. Oddly enough, but only seemingly so, our discussion on city should start from the countryside. The poem "Hometown" (故乡) by Li Ruo, a female migrant worker with more than ten years of factory labour and one of the literature group's most prolific authors, is entirely dedicated to a dream of a long by-gone childhood, so evanescent that it has to be conjured up by the unconscious mind, as made evident in the first stanza:

昨夜	Last night
我又梦回故乡	Once again I was back home[9] in my dreams
躺在儿时睡觉的小床上	I lay in the small bed where I would sleep my childhood sleeps
带着满身疲惫	My body covered with exhaustion
生活的累	The weariness of life
感情的伤	The wound of sentiments

Jin Hongyang performs a similar operation in "Mama Comes to Beijing" (妈妈来北京). The poem describes multiple attempts by the author to impress his mother with the magnificence of Beijing (where he, at the time of the poem, had worked for more than ten years), and her surprised exclamations are

8 The name is derived from the annual poetry reading held in Picun at the beginning of September, where musical pieces are also performed, hence the "songs" in the title.

9 Note that the Chinese is far more explicit here, thanks to its linguistic resources, in making "home" one with "countryside": the second character composing the word *guxiang* 故乡, "home(town/land)" or "native place", literally means "countryside, village, rural area".

revealing of the fascination that Beijing-centred national symbols and the modern lifestyle exercise on the collective imagination: “so great” (真长!) at the sight of the Great Wall, “so big” (真大!) in the overwhelming scene of Tian’anmen Square, “sorrow” (痛!) in front of Chairman Mao Zedong’s memorial hall, “so crowded” (真挤!) after chatting with other migrant workers, “so busy” (真忙!) at the end of a long evening eating out with friends. However, the structure of the poem, after five three-verse stanzas ending with the above-quoted exclamations, changes in the end:

我想留您在北京多住些时光	I wish to make you stay in Beijing some more time
但您还是走了，您说	But you insist on leaving, and you say
——还是老家好！	– home remains better!
妈妈回了家乡	Mama, you have gone back home
留下了妈的思念	Leaving here a feeling of your absence
带走了儿的牵挂	Taking with you your worries for your child

In another poem, “On the Road Back Home” (回乡的路上), Jin projects himself on a train taking him back to his hometown, perhaps during one of the festivals when flows of Chinese people set off to reunite with their families. Here, imagery related to food (“corn cobs [my old mom] cooks for me, piping hot”; 为我煮熟的热气腾腾的苞米棒), and landscape (“flock of ducks near the lotus pond in front of our door”; 门前荷塘边的一群鸭), add up to elements symbolising the rural home.

Lefebvre characterises representational space (i.e. space experienced through imagination) “as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (Lefebvre 1991: 39), hence the figures employed by the above-quoted poets. There is more, however. In expressing the personality and individual history of migrants, elements like the mother, childhood, the quiet of the countryside, food and even the rural landscape add up in configuring a *habitus* clash. For Bourdieu, the *habitus* is made up of interiorised lifestyles, preferences, tastes, but also rules, customs and practices that inform, through common sense, our understanding of things, and it is inseparable from the relations inscribed in the social space: Reed-Danahay (2017: 6) makes this clear by saying that “the *habitus* feels ‘at home’ and at ease if there is harmony between the criteria for social hierarchy in the social space where they are positioned and the understandings of that by the *habitus*”.

The rural–urban opposition is not only symbolic, however: it also has a raw, material side. Take “The Poetic Life of Precarious Workers” (打工者的诗意生活) by Guo Fulai:

我曾经是个农民	I used to be a peasant
碧绿的田野长满生机勃勃	Dark green, fields grew all around me,
每一棵庄稼都充实我们的欢乐	[vital and vigorous Every crop enriched our merriment
坐下来，亲一亲故乡的土坷垃	Sitting, we would softly kiss the clods
泥土的腥味里	[of our native earth And the hard taste of the soil
唱响我们诗意的歌	Would sing our poetic song
而今，我们在城市里打工	But today, we work in the city
像一块质朴的石头	Like a plain stone
走出深山老林的寂寞	That has left the silence of the old wood on
被城里的机器打磨成五光十色	[the mountain far away And has been ground into a dazzling gem by
其实，我们更像洁白的云朵	[the machines in the city Actually, we appear more like pure-white clouds
轻轻地，轻轻地	Softly, softly
在城市的天空中飘过	We float in the sky of the city
我们没有自己的住房	With no dwelling place of our own
没有固定的工作	With no stable job
国家的风一吹	The wind of state blows
我们便如秋天的落叶	But we, like falling leaves in autumn,
悄悄地，无奈地飘落	Have no choice but to quietly float down

The contrast between the merry bucolic picture in the first stanza and the delicately dull depiction of urban life in the second is striking. There are no poetic songs in the city, where migrants have passed from a communion with the crops to becoming lifeless gems, with only an artificial brightness, and the lack of dwelling places and stable jobs are very concrete markers of social disparity, stylistically emphasised with the abrupt break between the poem's first and second stanzas.

Speaking of the countryside, then, can be another way of speaking of the city. A constant comparison is built between "positive" traits of the first with "negative" ones of the latter, an urban present where the body is exhausted, life is weary and feelings are wounded. Rather than simply a melancholic remembrance of a vanished past and a lost childhood (of the authors, but also of China?),[10] this nostalgia – in its inclination to see the country as a locus where one can stabilise one's identity, otherwise one is left "floating" – conceals (but also reveals) an indictment of the urban social system. The longing for the social security (and emotional attachments) of the rural home is understandable in a social context characterised by individualisation (Alpermann 2011), even stronger in subjects with a non-urban identity, most of whom

10 Whereas these depictions forge an easy connection with "nativist" or "soil" literature (乡土文学), they also relate to scar literature (伤痕文学, as noted by Liu 2012: 28) as well as, to some degree, to root-seeking literature (寻根文学). The limits of this paper force me to give just an ephemeral taste of this aspect.

have left their family behind and, because of *hukou*-determined outsider status, do not have access to urban social services and struggle to forge new ties amid the frenzy of their long working hours. This process then may provide a further signification of migrant authors' feeling of strangeness and displacement in the urban space, while also producing a fracture in the symbolic dominance of the urban-centric discourse.[11]

This reminds us of Williams' observation, in his seminal study of the literary representation of the country and the city, that the old tends to reappear as something "against which contemporary change can be measured" (Williams 2016: 49), possibly activating "retrospect as aspiration" (ibid.: 59) when the social relations produced by this change are not satisfying. In the same vein, Hutcheon (2000: 195) further remarks that nostalgia and its aesthetics might "be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the invocation of a partial, idealised history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present".

Nostalgia, however, should be viewed critically and problematically. In particular, there is a risk of replicating a dichotomy that may fail to explain the pervasiveness of social relations in the current socio-economic system, and the essential function of the countryside as a reservoir of workforce for the city. Harvey (1989), in particular, warns against the fictional "aestheticization" of the (rural) locality. He admits that "the construction of such places, the fashioning of some localised aesthetic image, allows the construction of some limited and limiting sense of identity" (Harvey 1989: 303–304), but he also stresses that "the assertion of any place-bound identity has to rest at some point on the motivational power of tradition" (ibid.: 303), producing a sort of nationalist or ethnocentric critique of the present. In our case, such an "aestheticization" through (selective) memory and poetry conceals the existence of social relations in the countryside as unequal as those in the city; for, one might ask, what socio-economic necessity compelled rural people to become migrants, or floaters, in the first place?[12]

3.2. Urban alienation and labour precarity

Let us go now to the city proper. The representation of the metropolitan social space where migrants are condemned to a constant drifting amid precarious jobs is reinforced by four more verses later in Guo Fulai's poem, where another

11 Nostalgia, particularly through the figure of the mother, is identified as a trope of migrant-worker poetry by Qin Xiaoyu, who observes how "these poems of homesickness also feel illusory, as many of the 'hometowns' in the poems have not merely been embellished, but imply a kind of utopia". Such a utopia however "can only be reached by an impossible 'backward' movement, because the place only exists within the mother's body" (Qin Xiaoyu 2016: 30).

12 It is also true, however, that other works by Picun's authors create a much less idyllic picture of the countryside. Li Ruo herself, whose poetry has been analysed here, writes short stories highlighting issues determined precisely by the limiting social (and gender) relations of the village.

contrast is introduced, claiming for migrants the recognition of being the main contributors to the economic prosperity of China's urban upper class:

没有我们的青春奉献	Without the consecration of our youth
城市不会繁荣	The city would not be prospering
没有我们辛勤的工作	Without our energetic work
城里人过不上优裕的生活	The people in the city cannot live a life of abundance

This sense of alienation and social injustice is also present in other pieces of the collection, with a rich variety of styles and motifs. A very promising name of the literature group, Xiao Hai, features twice in the series. A young man hailing from Henan with a vast working experience in the factories of the country's south and north, Xiao Hai is an extremely versatile poet (and singer).[13] In "Aria of the Begonia Clan" (海棠家族咏叹调), the poet's journey to Picun offers an opportunity to compare lower parts of the city, dirty and full of trash, to the shining "dream-like light glimmering from the skyscrapers in the distance" (远处的高楼里泛起梦幻般的光). In "City of Dreams" (梦想之都), the physical journey to Beijing railway station is juxtaposed to a more abstract trip "looking for the myself who first came to Beijing" (找找初次来到北京的自己), and the unequal access to the possibilities offered by the city is addressed in the form of unfulfilled dreams:

有些人的梦想坐在车里
有些人的梦想飞在天上
有些人的梦想在地宫里日夜疾驰
而有些人的梦想破碎如尘埃洒落一地
那梦想遥远如天上的星星
被迷雾遮住在夜空 在时间的黑洞 在梦想之都 在梦想之都

Someone's dreams travel on trains
Someone's dreams fly to the skies
Someone's dreams gallop through night
[and day in underground palaces
But someone else's dreams are shattered
[like dust spilled on the ground
Those dreams, distant like stars in the sky,
Covered by the fog in the night
in the black holes of time
in the city of dreams
in the city of dreams

13 Xiao Hai is the pen name of Hu Liushi, in a tribute to Haizi, an appreciated poet of the 1980s, who committed suicide in 1989 and has been celebrated as a hero of poetry ever since (Xiao Hai literally means "little Hai"). References to Haizi abound in Xiao Hai's poetry, alongside other Western authors. Xiao Hai's first individual collection, *Howl of the Factory* (工厂的嚎叫), is explicitly named after Allen Ginsberg's famous poem "Howl", and contains some re-adaptations of Bob Dylan's songs. As observed by van Crevel (2019a: 141), he is being acknowledged and appreciated also beyond Picun, and his poetic versatility clearly plays a significant role in making this possible.

On a similar note, in "Worshipping Gods and Buddhas" (求神拜佛), Xu Liangyuan denounces the greed of the "Buddhas of money" (发财佛们) who "do not know the sufferings of mortals" (他们不知人间疾苦), with the former possibly identifiable as the *nouveau riche* of the city who are topologically located in the luxurious villas on the hills surrounding Beijing (and with an obvious hint at the commodification of religion). In the same pattern falls "Female Housekeeper" (家政女工), the piece written by Fan Yusu and entirely dedicated to the paradoxical and painful contradiction of having to lull a city tycoon's baby to sleep while longing for her own. She has her employer's baby in her arms, but all she thinks of is her left-behind daughters at home, whom she describes as "orphans with a mother" (有妈的孤儿).[14]

The city, then, appears to outsiders as inevitably associated with menial and oppressive jobs, family separation and unequal living conditions. Inequality is indeed a main theme and common thread connecting more or less all of the featured poems. One of the most powerful pieces is "Seventeen-year-old Shoulders" (十七岁的肩膀) by Wan Huashan, another young and prolific writer of the group, who moved to Beijing after going from job to job in factories, services, distribution and other occupations in the southern Pearl River Delta. The poem tells the tale of a migrant who starts working in the city at the age of seventeen, recounting the hardships he endures and sees other enduring. Youth, again, is a central element here, of which Wan laments the abrupt rupture, as "the rumbling noise [of the factory] / is the music of my seventeen years / and has clamoured down my beautiful dreams" (隆隆的噪声 / 就是十七岁的乐响 / 聒碎了美梦). In the following verses, he nimbly plays with a concept that in other poems appeared to carry a positive connotation, i.e. youth/childhood, to reverse it and make it another device of labour exploitation, that tramples even on the sense of aesthetic beauty that he is actually using now, to express his subjectivity:

一天的劳累	The fatigue of one workday
让我回复了儿时的酣睡	Allowed me to restore the deep sleeps of my childhood
舅舅只有用手拧 用脚踢	Only pinching and kicking me can Uncle
才能把我拉回这千里之遥	Finally drag me back one thousand li away
的孤独异乡	In this lonely strange land
曾经的梦幻 那些年少的激狂	Past dreams, that wildness of youth
那爱美的文艺的异想	Those strange thoughts of love for literature and art
都在这山脚下的轰鸣里埋葬	Are all buried under the rumble at the foot of this mountain

14 While Fan Yusu's poems – and also Li Ruo's "Forgive Me, Child" (对不起, 宝贝) – are written from the perspective of the migrant woman in the city, Zhang Yongxia's "Buildings. You" (楼·你), is the lament of a left-behind child: "I don't want high buildings or fancy houses / But just keeping you with me" (不要高楼, 不要洋房 / 只要把你挽留), but "You have turned around and left me / To go to / That city so far away" (转身离开了我 / 去那 / 很远很远的城市).

This piece (while also evoking again the ideas of a dream-like lost childhood) calls to mind the "rational fatalism" that Pozzana has identified as a trait of much of migrant-worker poetry, consisting in a rational admission of suffering which does not produce any social demands, but also warning against the fact that "while insight is a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of subjective existence, it is not enough to prevent self-destruction", since "as soon as one gives in the poetic urge to lament one's own sufferings, one risks succumbing to the 'hope' of recognition from the society which they ostensibly reject" (Pozzana 2019: 194). Wan's poem can definitely be described as "rational-fatalist" verses to an even more extreme point, also in lamenting how "Towards life I do not have much hope" (我对生活没有太多的期许), while his "shoulders, scraped by life / hiss in ache" (被生活磨破的肩膀 / 咝咝地疼痛). This is further reinforced by the strong interdependence of migrants' individual existence and labour exploitation, expressed on the imaginary level with frequent appearances of iron machines and physical fatigue, and on the linguistic level with the widespread use of verbs related to manual labour, or to the grinding and trampling down of individuality. These images variously meditate on the contemporary reproductions of wage slavery and labour alienation, made possible by migrants' position at the low end of the social hierarchy of the urban space – the "strange land" in Wan's verses.

This relates to yet another trope of migrant-worker poetry, i.e. the metamorphosis of the worker into the factory itself, his or her becoming just one more part of the assembly line.[15] Guo Fulai, however, goes in the opposite direction. In his "My Poems Are Written in the Factory" (我的诗篇写在工厂) he does not resign himself to a dependence on the factory; rather he actively tries to transform it through his verses, refusing to accept that the industrial machine may grind him down. He uses his poem to impress his own subjectivity on the machine; it is still a form of metamorphosis, but in this case the poet (i.e. the worker) is the one performing the active role. After a first part composed of eighteen verses, written with a vivid and delightful lyric, where elements of the language themselves are inscribed in the "text" of the countryside (where crops, grass and plants form nouns, verbs and adjectives), Guo reverses the operation with the factory, in what appears to be an attempt to reappropriate a space where migrant workers are typically penalised by existing power relations:

15 As a matter of fact, this was already experimented with by Shu Ting in her 1980 poem "Assembly Line" (流水线), which, despite relying on a less immediate network of images and symbols, is still able to depict "the erasure of individuality in an unnatural, dehumanizing environment of mechanized mass production" (Yeh 2003: 521).

现在啊	And now, oh,
我的诗篇写在工厂	I write my poems in the factory
一堆堆僵卧的铁管、方钢	Stacks of iron pipes and steel slabs, stiff and still,
沉睡在车间、库房	Sleep in the workshops and warehouses
它们了无生气，浑浑噩噩	They are lifeless and confused
像俗人一样困惑、迷茫	And bewildered and at a loss just like ordinary persons
经过我的焊接、打磨	While I weld and clean them up
突然间	All of a sudden
变得像鲜花般漂亮	They become beautiful as flowers
不，更像优美的	No, they are more like elegant
诗句一样	Verses of poetry
让人耐不住地欣赏	And they let people stand forever in admiration
那眼光如同欣赏	As if their eyes were contemplating
美丽的新娘	A beautiful bride

A similar rhetorical operation takes place in "My Youth" (我的青春) by An Zhesi (who stands out in terms of background as a teacher in a school for migrant children). In this case, the metamorphic juxtaposition of the migrant's individuality and social being is actuated through a series of predicates where the poet's youth is compared to the various signs of his urban experience. The forty-four verses of the poem are grouped in couplets, whose first verse starts with "My youth is" (我的青春是), and follows with an object, further elaborated in the second verse. These objects variously relate to mobility, like the long-way train ticket, documents to access the city, the author's social condition, daily life, youth and sexual life, and, towards the end, existential condition. His youth is a "part of the assembly line" (流水线上一个零件), the "arm of a tower cane" (塔吊上的长臂), a "tunnel 800 metres underground" (地下800米的巷道), "concrete+reinforcing steel" (混凝土+钢筋), variously alluding to jobs in the construction industry and not only, but also, among other things, a broken bed in the urban village where he lives (一张破床), again stressing undesirable living conditions, or a bottle of rice liquor (一瓶 "牛二") reminding him of his hometown. As we can see, the tone generally follows the pattern disclosed above; what is original about the poem are the references it contains:

我的青春是用孙志刚鲜血染红的	My youth is reddened by the blood of Sun Zhigang
那张生命攸关的 "暂住证"	A "temporary residence permit" with-out which
我的青春是许立志诗歌里	[it is impossible to live
咽下的 "那枚铁做的月亮"	My youth is the "iron moon"
	Swallowed in Xu Lizhi's poem

The reference to Sun Zhigang relates to a case that provoked widespread indignation in China: a young migrant labourer originally from the northern Hubei province moved to Shenzhen and later to Guangzhou to work. As is common for migrant workers, he maintained his home *hukou*. He died on

30 March 2003 under unclear circumstances after being detained by the police for failing to produce his temporary residence permit. He was 27. The tragedy produced a huge uproar in public opinion, and led to the swift abolition of the "custody and repatriation" system (收容遣送) in August that year.[16] Equally dramatic is Xu Lizhi's story: a worker at Shenzhen's Foxconn, he used his verses to denounce the harsh labour exploitation and despotic system in force at the infamous factory, before eventually committing suicide on 30 September 2014 at age 24.[17] The "iron moon" mentioned in the poem, after which the largest English translation of migrant workers' poems is also named (see Qin 2016), was an image used by Xu Lizhi in one of his poems, re-published posthumously in the collection *A New Day* (新的一天). What is relevant is how the poet uses this reference to the tragic injustices of the *hukou* system and to a poetic tradition stemming from oppressive labour conditions to produce a declaration of belonging both to a social group, with its position in the ramification of the city's social space, and to its artistic forms of subjective expression, turned collective. Still a metamorphosis ("my youth is…"), but this time into a collective body. It is, I would argue, a proclamation of identity of, or identification with, a collective body that is perceived and also perceives itself as the Other to the metropolis.

3.3. Symbolic power struggle

Although their position in the web of social relations of the urban space appears as unanimously characterised by undeniable inequality, Picun poets do not utter any explicit cry for social change. Li Wenli, however, has a different tone in the final part of her first poem "We Are a Group of Female Domestic Workers" (我们是一群家政工女). Throughout the piece, she repeatedly demands for female domestic workers the dignity that should be rightfully granted to such hardworking labourers (examples of their hardships recur across the verses), who came to Beijing full of hope for a city they were long taught to fantasise and dream about, only to be relegated to its social and geographical periphery: "We, hearts beating in excitement, entered the Beijing we had seen in the news on TV / […] But in the eyes of the capital Beijing, we / Are so insignificant, like a speck of dust" (我们心跳不安的走进电视新闻中看到的北京 / […] 可我们在首都北京的眼里 / 却那么渺小，像一粒尘土一样). Instead of contenting herself with a newfound relief in the space of poetry, of recasting a comforting or nostalgic image of the rural home, or of critiquing urban inequality with berating verses, Li strongly asserts that female domestic workers embody all the characteristics of the good (urban) citizen thought to be uncharacteristic

16 Sun's story features prominently in Picun's worker culture museum, as part of a section dedicated to the "important events" (重要事件) of the history of Chinese migrant workers.

17 See Pun et al. 2015 for an account of the Foxconn labour regime, and van Crevel 2019b for an analysis of Xu's poetry.

of migrants (Dutton 1998): they are "sincere and honest" (朴实善良), "cultured" (有文化), as they were "good students" in their earlier years (曾是学校里的好学生), and with good personal qualities (不要说我们没素质), whose only sin is to "be born under an unlucky star" (生不逢时). Then she writes towards the end:

我们靠自己勤劳的双手	We, counting on our hardworking hands,
想让亲爱的家人过得更好一点	Wish to give our dear ones a better life
我们苦在心里笑在脸上	With pain in our heart, a smile on our faces,
只为追求更美好的生活	We just seek after a life more beautiful

These verses call for further analysis. What is easy to spot here is, undoubtedly, the influence of the symbolic capital of the Chinese state, as 美好生活 ("better life" in the official English translation, see Xi 2017: 29–30) is an integral part of the official discourse, especially after the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017. For sure, Li is presenting migrant women as perfectly capable of conforming to the dominant form of good urban citizenship (as shaped in its characters and values), and in doing so, she emphasises migrant women's role as part of the national community: "We are children of the motherland too" (我们也是祖国的孩子啊), where the adverb "too" (也) linguistically underlines a proud demand for recognition and admission ("We […] thirst for understanding and respect", 我们[…]渴望理解和尊重), and the motherland is conjured up as an idealised unitary concept beyond country/city (and class) divisions. On the other hand, however, this may also be read as an active effort to exploit existing symbolic power relations to her own advantage, to claim migrants' right to the city and demand society's recognition through self-admission into the hegemonic discourse. "Beijing, we have made your homes our home" (北京，我们把你的家当做自己的家), she further writes, playing on the ambivalence of "home" as the migrant women's dwelling place, and the houses where they work.

Resorting again to Bourdieusian categories, the risk in this attempt to acquire a larger amount of symbolic capital would be to perpetuate, rather paradoxically, a doxic relation to the social world that leads to "the acceptance of established divisions […] through the affirmation of a higher unity (national, familial, etc.)" (Bourdieu 1991: 130). In particular, the dramatic "evictions" of winter 2017–18, which led to the expulsion from Beijing (and other cities as well) of a large number of migrants, labelled the "low-end population" (低端人口),[18] citing safety reasons, may have created a new, potentially more complicated situation.

18 Some of the literature group's members, led by Xiao Hai, performed a "flash mob" just after the evictions started in November 2017, holding a public reading of Yu Xiuhua's poem "Go, Child, With Beijing's Northern Wind" (走吧孩子趁着北京的北风) in support of the "low-end population". The clip recording the action can be seen at YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qqx3fGsXcYU (accessed 30 September 2019).

4. Concluding remarks

Meng Lang, a renowned Chinese poet who passed in December 2018, believed, although from a different poetic dimension, that "the poet inhabits the blind spots of history" (Meng Lang 1997: 131–132). Pozzana remarks that "these places are perfectly inhabited by the new migrant poets", as "today the worker toils away in the dark shadow of history" (Pozzana 2019: 190). We can further paraphrase Meng's statement and affirm that migrant-worker authors write from the darkest spots of urban modernity, prompting us to meditate on their artistic production in a way that fully grasps its multiple layers, especially as a "translation" of the city into (poetic) language and as directly, or indirectly, addressing poignant issues related to the access and the right to the city.

The "retrospect as aspiration" in the dreamful return to an individual's pre-urban, rural life and its association with a happy childhood – interrupted by an urban present that tramples youth down with its harsh reality of labour exploitation, the impossibility of living in the city outside of a marked social condition of "outsiders" ("so insignificant, like a speck of dust") that makes Beijing appear more like a "strange land" than a "city of dreams" in the eyes of those who suffer social misrecognition – and the persistent although unfulfilled desire to "make [Beijing's] homes our homes" variously conjure up the idea of an urban experience strongly determined by a social identity which is neither fully urban nor fully rural, even when it wants to be either one or the other. Generally, the city appears as an "Other", either in opposition to a more or less idealised rural home with which there is a stronger relation of identification, or in its inaccessibility to individuals positioned at the lower end of relations in its social space. The city's dark, invisible and overlooked spots can be socially, when not physically, very remote from the "dream-like light glimmering from the skyscrapers in the distance".

Furthermore, in serving as a form of textual self-representation for the subaltern domestic migrant subject in globalised Beijing, and in inscripting the subaltern migrant's body in the urban order's text, this poetry contributes to the transformation of the text itself, through a different urban narration provided by the "invisible" subaltern. In addition to depicting migrants' living conditions, the rural-urban divide and sense of rootlessness, it also challenges urban identity, or how it transforms after the impact with mobility, and the objective limits of individual agency in this social web. In particular, with the dialectical relation between country and city mainly expressed through the sense of rootlessness present in much of their poems, the authors under scrutiny remind us of the contemporary opacity of the city-country divide, even when they appear to imagine a lost bucolic utopia. With this I do not mean to negate the concrete existence of this divide, which is absolutely evident in the

striking material inequality between China's urban and rural areas (and between different-tier cities as well). My point is that these two dimensions are strongly connected by a tight socio-economic network. Not only is the countryside a reservoir of labour-force for the industrialised city, but the city itself is also permanently changed by the inflow of these "rural strangers" in its text. The fact that some of these migrant poets, at some point, might step out of their marginality and be acknowledged as members of the "official" cultural system (following the footsteps of other migrant writers, most prominently novelist Wang Shiyue and poet Zheng Xiaoqiong), further reinforces the concept.[19] This should provocatively challenge our conception of what it means to be "urban" or even "local" today, in China just like elsewhere, as well as the rationale behind the bureaucratic systems of exclusion still in force.

Migrant-worker poetry then needs to be fully considered in its double significance both as a form of literary expression and as social discourse. In dealing with the urban experience of its authors, it not only artistically represents this experience in the form of verses, but it also continuously poses the question of who can speak (for) the city. With this dialectical articulation of the politics and poetics of the urban space, Picun's literature group gives its own contribution to furthering that complexity of questions, both about its overall context and poethood itself, that, as stressed by van Crevel (2019a, 2019b), we are just beginning to realise in its fullness.

19 Li Yunlei, however, probably also influenced by the Maoist tradition (pre-Maoist too, to be fair) of the artist's integration with the common people, emphasises the risk for professionalised migrant writers of losing contact with their social base (Li Yunlei 2014: 185).

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Sex in the City: The Descent from Human to Animal in Two Vietnamese Classics of Urban Reportage

Richard Quang-Anh Tran

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between urban space, normative sexuality and animal metaphors in two Vietnamese classics of modern reportage, namely Tam Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw" (1932) and Vu Trong Phung's "Household Servants" (1936). Both reportages are set in colonial Hanoi, and both provide a glimpse of the explosive growth of urban space and its perceived effects on the city's inhabitants. While scholars examining early twentieth-century Vietnamese urban reportages have tended to focus on their historical and ethnographic value, the article pays special attention to a key dimension that defines the genre: their figurative language. The article demonstrates that the distinction between human and animal is intertwined with each author's critique of colonial modernity. For both Lang and Phung, urban space represents a postlapsarian descent of the human to the animal level. Far from embodying liberation, urban space metaphorically figures as a disruption of certain ideals of human sociality founded on a moral regime, whereby the category of the "human" is distinguished from the animal by norms of self-regulation and self-moderation. Insofar as it is founded on such a regime, normative sexuality and urban space embody antinomies of each other.

Keywords: Hanoi, Tam Lang, Vu Trong Phung, reportage, moral regime, sexuality, urban space

Introduction

In the 1930s in French colonial Vietnam, the new genre of urban reportage burst into the public sphere. As a form of investigative journalism, the genre enabled Vietnamese writers to undertake the task of interrogating social problems and critiquing them. In investigating society, many Vietnamese writers such as Tam Lang and Vu Trong Phung depicted diverse characters that populated the urban world of the time, characters that included opium addicts, prostitutes, rickshaw pullers, household servants and more. These are the characters that Shaun K. Malarney has called the "disenfranchised, dispossessed, unseen" members of society (Malarney 2011: 3), those whose predicaments the

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two writers sought to illuminate, thereby spurring some measure of social reform. Through their depictions of Vietnam's rapidly modernising urban space, the reportages are valuable in furnishing rare and often rich documentary evidence of the lives of those who are less likely to appear in official records.

Scholars, as a result, have relied on the reportages for their historical and ethnographic value. Those researching the social history of urban prostitution, for instance, have used these texts as primary sources to examine the phenomenon in question (Malarney 2011, Tracol-Huynh 2013, Firpo 2016). Others have exploited them as biographical windows into the political visions of their respective authors (Zinoman 2014). Still, others, such as Ben Tran, have looked at the ways in which writers like Vu Trong Phung incorporated the reportage's empirical depictions into their fictional works to contribute to the democratisation of Vietnamese aesthetic and political representation (Tran 2017).

Few scholars, however, have focused on the poetic qualities of the urban reportages. If by "poetics" we understand the term to mean broadly the literary and rhetorical practices, forms and techniques of discourse (Genette 1972), then scholars have yet to examine the poetics of these texts more carefully. Whether due to disciplinary training or methodological preferences, the overall tendency is to exploit the urban reportages for their empirical value.[1] Yet, while such an approach is warranted in certain contexts, it nevertheless misses the crucial other feature that defines the reportage genre. Reportages differ from their premodern predecessor, the genre of "chronicle writing" (*ky su*), by blending journalistic practices with what the critic Vu Ngoc Phan calls their "literary character" (*chat van si*, Phan 1960: 558). Indeed, urban reportage is distinctive, according to Phan Trong Thuong, precisely because of this "fusion" (*tinh luong hop*) of the empirical with the "literary", or what I refer to as poetics, more generally (Thuong 2000: 5). If "chronicle writing" was marked by dispassionate objectivity, urban reportage foregrounded not only the journalist's subjectivity, capturing the empirical world through his/her "eyes and ears", but also demanded a poetic sensibility to dramatise effectively a critique of society (Phan 1960: 557). Hence, the "poetics" of urban reportage represents, in fact, a critical feature of the genre; any analysis of these texts would be incomplete without due attention to this feature.

In this article, I focus on the poetics of two Vietnamese classics of modern reportage, namely Tam Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw" (1932) and Vu Trong Phung's "Household Servants" (1936), to examine their depictions of the relationship between urban space, normative sexuality, and conceptions of the human/animal. Both reportages take place in colonial Hanoi, and both pro-

1 Ben Tran maintains, for instance, that some of the reportage authors in no way intended to use metaphor or other abstract rhetorical symbols in their depictions of sex and sexuality but conceived of the latter as grounded in "material reality" (Tran 2017: 43). For the criticisms of metaphorical readings, see Zinoman 2014, and Tran 2017.

vide a glimpse of the explosive growth of urban space and its effects on its residents. Lang's reportage recounts the experience of an undercover journalist who dons working clothes and becomes a rickshaw puller to describe the lives of the people in this trade. Phung's reportage retells the stories of servants and their masters whom the narrator encounters in Hanoi. I will suggest that the question of what it means to be human is intertwined with each author's critique of colonial modernity. For both Lang and Phung, urban space represents a postlapsarian descent of the human to the animal level. Far from embodying liberation, urban space figures as a disruption of certain ideals of human sociality founded on a moral regime, whereby the category of the "human" is distinguished from the animal by norms of self-regulation and self-moderation. Insofar as human sociality is founded on such a regime, normative sexuality and urban space embody antinomies of each other.

"Sexuality" is here understood to be the effect of a complex array of discursive and institutional forces arising out of certain times and places. In this view, sexuality is not limited to the biological meaning but encompasses the complex "ensemble" of acts, expectations, pleasures, identity formations and knowledges formed at different social locations (Butler 1990: 92, Corber / Valocchi 2003: 14). Likewise, I understand "space" in the concept of "urban space" in the more capacious sense to include not only physical space, but also the imaginative space arising out of literary and artistic representation. Such a literary approach need not be antithetical to the so-called empirical-based methodologies. To the extent that one maintains a distinction between them at all, an attention to the poetics of urban reportage can complement the former approach by distilling the frames of reference of a culture, what Charles A. Laughlin calls the "literary construction of social space" (Laughlin 2002: 29). Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's concepts of space, Laughlin maintains that the characteristic "moods, rhetoric, and narrative situations" that appear in news reportage simultaneously capture the dialectic between the writer's physical environment and perception of it, on the one hand, and, on the other, the production of social space through literary and artistic representation (Laughlin 2002: 29–30). In this regard, I treat Vietnamese urban reportages as not only rhetorical artefacts, but also active agents in the empirical *production* of cultural space itself.

An analysis of the human/animal distinction has profound social and political implications. To be classified as "human" confers not only societal recognition, but all sorts of legal and political rights. To be classified as "animal", on the other hand, is to be sub-human, potentially outside the purview of the human and, therefore, politically disenfranchised and disempowered. Yet, the division between the two is not self-evident. Rather, it is culturally and historically specific (Butler 2004: 1–17, Feher et al. 1989). An analysis of such a question has scholarly implications not only for Asian studies specialists, but

also queer studies scholars for whom the conceptual and historical relation between social norms and sexual personhood remains an abiding preoccupation (Davidson 2001, Corber / Valocchi 2003). By examining the representation of this dyad through two colonial-era reportages, this study is a preliminary inquiry into understanding this division in early twentieth-century Vietnamese urban society.

The article in no way intends to be comprehensive. For practical reasons, it limits its analysis to the two Vietnamese reportages mentioned above. The study acknowledges that there are other texts that could have been examined.[2] Still, there are reasons why the study focuses on Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw" and Phung's "Household Servants". First, critics consider Lang's piece as the seminal reportage that would come to define the genre in this period (Thuong 2000, Malarney 2011). In fact, Phung was inspired to write "Household Servants" – arguably considered as one of his best pieces – due in no small part to Tam Lang's classic (Lockhart 1996: 121). Second, by examining reportages by two different authors, the article aims to show how the moral regime that distinguishes the human from the animal cuts across different evidentiary sources and is not reducible to a biographical reflection of any one author's worldview. Finally, since the two reportages have already been translated into English, a broader audience can readily engage with them, with the hope that they will someday do so in the original Vietnamese. In this article, unless otherwise noted, I rely on Greg and Monique Lockhart's translations with reference to the original Vietnamese sources.[3]

The article will be divided into two main parts. First, I survey some of the historical tropes associated with the rural and urban, especially in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Vietnam, to provide a broader context for the argument. Then, the article turns to an analysis of the reportages to demonstrate how the growth of urban space has led to a moral crisis, and hence, a dissolution of the normative category of the "human".

The historical context: Tropes of the rural and urban

There have been contrasting views of the urban in history. On the one hand, the view of the urban as a space of moral crisis is associated with the idea that the city is an embodiment of depravity while the rural is a frontier of pastoral innocence. Yet, this view is neither self-evident nor timeless. The countervail-

2 Some reportages for future inquiry could be Vu Trong Phung's "To Be a Prostitute" (*Lam Di*, 1936) and his "Municipal Dispensary" (*Luc Xi*, 1937).

3 Greg Lockhart / Monique Lockhart (translators): *The Light of the Capital*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. The Vietnamese versions are accessible online: for Tam Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw", see https://vietmessenger.com/books/?title=toi%20keo%20xe; for Vu Trong Phung's "Household Servants", see https://www.sachhayonline.com/tua-sach/com-thay-com-co/mo-dau/678 (accessed 17 December 2019).

ing view is to envisage the urban as a symbol of cosmopolitan sophistication, as evidenced, for instance, in the relatively positive connotations associated with the word "urbane" – people who display elegance and refinement in manners – in contrast to the rural provincialism of a country "bumpkin".[4]

Both contrasting views of the urban, in fact, represent stages in the historical evolution of the development of capitalism. In his classic study of this issue in English literature, Raymond Williams (1973) delineates at least three historical stages. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the city is associated with money and law; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with wealth and luxury; in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with mobility and isolation. In short, the idea of the urban is in no way a static phenomenon but has shifted over time in response to larger structural forces.

In the context of Vietnam, we can delineate two historical periods relevant to this study, namely the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, during the reign of the Nguyen kings, the idea of the urban was associated with the "imperial city". Located in Hue, the "imperial city" was modelled after Beijing and aimed to emulate the latter's symbolic grandeur. Alexander Woodside explains:

> Although its [Hue] imitations of Chinese-style grandeur are its principal concern to this study, it must be remembered that these imitations were never enjoyed or greatly understood by its non-bureaucratic population. Nguyen court records document episodes in which the people of Hue interfered with imperial processions through the streets, offered little respect to officials in sedan chairs, and indulged in hooliganism. Hue in the early 1800's was renowned for its discordantly noisy food peddlers, whom a desperate Minh-mang tried to license. The Sino-Vietnamese imperial dream coexisted uneasily with Southeast Asian market town. (Woodside 1971: 127)

The imperial city populated by the scholar elites symbolised the "Great Tradition". In such a tradition, the Nguyen elites constructed an orderly, homogenous, hierarchical and tightly organised society. At each ascending level was the replication of the same ritual patterns that mandated the use of Chinese as the official language, as well as the adoption of legal codes that placed women in subordinate positions, restricted Buddhism and promulgated Neo-Confucian doctrines. Such a society sought to socialise officials and villagers alike to behave in orthodox ways and to inculcate in them social solidarity (Jamieson 1995: 38). This "Great Tradition" towered above the smaller traditions that lay behind the "bamboo walls of the villages".

In the villages, Vietnamese society at the time was also hierarchically organised. At the helm was the village chief under whom were the community and the family, communal entities that subordinated the individual to the interest of the collective. The idea of "individual liberty" was minimal and, to

4 See the second entry [for "urbane"] in the Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/220387?redirectedFrom=urbane#eid (accessed 25 July 2019).

the degree that one identified with the collective, life in such a system could be deeply meaningful. Like the king and the administrators of the "imperial city", the village chief exerted influence by virtue of his example and ensured harmony and prosperity for the collective. A separate space was made available for an outdoor market (Jamieson 1995, Papin 2002). Thus, in the nineteenth century, whereas the imperial city embodied the solemn space of law, architecture and learning, the space beyond the imperial walls comprised the life of the villagers and the values of the boisterous market.

By the early twentieth century, many of these divisions would collapse and new ones would emerge. The division between the solemn space of law and the market would no longer hold. The urban space of colonial Hanoi would be an amalgamation of both, as well as many other things but, most importantly, a sign of modernity. Modernity in the Vietnamese context was marked by rapid social, cultural and economic modernisation, a profound departure from traditional practices, beliefs and epistemologies. The most notable conditions were a relative openness to the market economy, and hence to the global circulation and exchanges of products, commodities, ideas, trends and fashions; a booming printing press; and, most important, a heightened sense of collective anxiety about the uncertainties of the modern era (Zinoman 2002).

As a vivid illustration of these uncertainties, Vietnamese newspapers published the urban adventures of a popular cartoon character, Ly Toet, a country bumpkin. In his study of this character, George Dutton states that "Ly Toet's encounters with city life revealed the ambivalences of this new modernity, including its physical dangers and its often abrupt departures from long-established patterns of daily life" (Dutton 2007: 81). Through the character, the cartoon revealed what Dutton calls a dual notion of modernity. On the one hand, urban colonial Hanoi would embody the temporal-spatial horizon of the modern present. On the other hand, the countryside – represented in the figure of country bumpkin – symbolised the spatial-temporal horizon *before* the modern. Indeed, in many parts of Southeast Asia, the division between the countryside and the city accelerated by the early twentieth century. As the cities began to boom, many country folks migrated to the urban centres in search of better living conditions and work opportunities. But as Milton Osborne (2016) notes, such aspirations quickly dissipated in the face of harsh labour conditions, rising unemployment, overcrowding and poor public services.

The human vs the animal: An analysis of a moral regime

I Pulled a Rickshaw

Scholars studying Tam Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw" agree that the reportage is not merely reporting for the sake of doing so but aims to advance a message to bring about societal change. In depicting the rickshaw puller's deplorable working conditions, the author uses the pen to bring about what he perceives as necessary social reforms in the rickshaw trade. The Vietnamese literary critic Vu Ngoc Phan has remarked that "there is no other genre that has helped officials, law-makers, and sociologists reform society more than that of reportage" (Phan 1960: 558). Situating Tam Lang's reportage in the Vietnamese new discourse of "civilization", Mark P. Bradley has argued that it represents "radical conceptions" of the individual and society insofar as it articulates aspirations for social transformation (Bradley 2004: 80). In this regard, as Bradley notes, the Vietnamese reportage genre is akin to the American progressive tradition of muckraking journalism, such as Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle", which exposed the unsanitary conditions of Chicago's meatpacking industry; or to Weimar Germany's *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement, which sought to raise critical awareness of objective reality, as exemplified in the works of Bertolt Brecht, Otto Dix and Heinrich Mann. While acknowledging the presence of this modern radical vision of the "self" in the Vietnamese reportage, the following analysis uncovers other intellectual strands that have been underexamined in Tam Lang's work, namely a critique of the colonial discourse of developmental "progress" and the moral Confucian regime according to which the "animal" is hierarchically inferior to the "human". The analysis will focus on two central questions. First, with what is the human associated? How is the "human" defined? Second, how are notions of sex and sexuality related to this paradigm of the "human"?

To answer these questions, let us first look at how the reportage describes the conditions of the "human", particularly through the lives of rickshaw pullers. The most conspicuous clue as to how the reportage defines the human appears towards the conclusion. The narrator steps out of the diegesis and addresses his audience ("Dear Readers"). He continues by asking them what has led the rickshaw pullers to be treated with such "contempt" (*khinh bi*) and locates the cause in "society" (*xa hoi*), which he defines as "all of the people who come from the same origins [*coi re*] and who all live together under the same system, and that includes you and me" (p. 113[5]). The narrator calls on his readers to show more sympathy for the workers of this trade and insists

5 Throughout this section, unless otherwise noted, the page numbers refer to Lockhart's translation of "I Pulled a Rickshaw".

on the abolishment of the rickshaw. The rickshaw trade, according to the narrator, is the epitome of inhumane treatment in turning men into "horses":

> To lower a powerless person from his status as a human being to that of a **horse** [*con ngua*], to give him two wooden shafts and say, "I will sit up here while you pull me" is the same as saying "**You are not a human being**" [*May khong phai la nguoi*] (p. 113, my emphasis).

The rhetoric of the human (*con nguoi*) is not some incidental, isolated word choice on the narrator's part. Rather, it pervades the narrator's call for societal reform. He writes that society robs rickshaw pullers of their "human dignity" (*nhan pham*) yet accuses them of committing "undignified" acts (*khong co nhan cach*) (ibid.: 113). Earlier in the reportage, when he first describes his experience as a rickshaw puller, the narrator also uses the same rhetoric. He states, "breathing through my mouth, my nose and, also, my ears with sweat streaming off me, I no longer felt like a **human being** [*nguoi*]" (ibid.: 60, my emphasis). Instead, as the quoted passage suggests, the rickshaw puller has been reduced to the level of a horse. Implicit in this claim is a hierarchy whereby the category of the animal is inferior to that of the human. The narrator's justification for abolishing the rickshaw, after all, is *not* because of the flagrant exploitive acts by other humans – the supervisors who abuse, the middlemen who swindle, the clients who refuse to pay for services. Rather, the narrator's key argument is that the rickshaw as a mode of transportation symbolically drags the workers to a lower level within some broader cosmology, namely the animal level.

Indeed, this human/animal dichotomy is ubiquitous throughout the reportage. In the opening scene, when the narrator first tries to pull a rickshaw, he believes that he is "panting like a cow" (*tho hoi hong hoc nhu bo*, p. 55); his stomach dangles like a "pig's belly" (*bung lon*) (p. 60). The rickshaw uniform smells like something out of a "stable" (*mui chuong ngua*) (p. 56). When a supervisor abuses a coolie for failing to repay the cost of the rickshaw rental, the latter is portrayed as a "trembling dog" (*run len nhu cay say*, p. 67). The area in which the rickshaw pullers rest for the night is compared to a "rat's hole" (*cai hang chuot*, p. 67). In each of these examples, the narrator's descent to the animal world implies a kind of moral degradation, a profound sense of shame.

But there is more. The reportage also depicts urban colonial Hanoi as a postlapsarian space into which humans are tempted to slip. At one point, the narrator refers to Hanoi as a "jungle" (*hang rung*) (p. 94). In such a descent, humans lose their moral values and become transformed into animals. Two examples help to illustrate this point. First, halfway through the reportage, the main narrator meets a former rickshaw coolie, brother Tu, who recounts his life. Jaded by the exploitation and deplorable working conditions, he decides instead to become a "pimp" (*ma co*). In this urban space, he explains, to

live an "honest life" is to make oneself into a laughingstock for "city people" (*ke thi thanh*) (p. 97). As a result, brother Tu states that he "began to take the tortuous path, the dirty, dark one of an animal" (*con duong ban thiu toi tam cua mot phuong trau cho*) (p. 97). It is significant that the chapter narrating his entry into the sex industry is titled "A Fox in Coolie's Clothing" (*Con cao ao xanh*). The image of the "fox" (*con cao*) is deployed to describe the "many devices, many tricks" (*nhieu cach*, *nhieu khoe*) the animal uses to lure all sorts of girls, including "country girls" (*con gai nha que*), into the life of prostitution (p. 103). To survive in this urban space, according to brother Tu, one must abandon all moral values. "Life is money," he explains, "virginity [*trinh tiet*] and humaneness [*nhan nghia*] are nothing" (p. 108). Hence, the story of brother Tu allegorises the human descent to the animal world. Second, like brother Tu who slipped into the animal's "dark, dirty" path, the reportage also depicts the ease with which city girls slip into the sex industry. Brother Tu explains:

> After the first step comes the second. The first step is difficult, the second easier, the third … if you make one small slip, it's fatal. It's not difficult … [to] go past the limit, part the hair on one side, put on a flashy smile, draw on a pair of eyebrows, paint on a beauty spot, put on a corset, and you're gone: you've become a prostitute. (p. 107)

If Hanoi is, metaphorically, a "jungle" and if brother Tu is the "fox", it follows that the girls that he turns into prostitutes represent a species below the human. In these examples, the distinctive quality of the human, as opposed to the animal, appears to be an embrace of certain moral values, the loss of which leads to one's descent into the animal kingdom. In all cases, the reportage presupposes a moral hierarchy according to which the animal is inferior to the human.

Yet, such a connotation of the animal is neither inevitable nor necessary. Writers can use animals to symbolise human vice or virtue, even the suprahuman, in cases where the animal stands in for the holy. And one must not forget that animals can also be pets, thereby serving, in some contexts, as people's "best friend" (Lee 2014). The question, then, is the following: what is the origin of this moral regime in Lang's reportage?

The notion of the animal's inferiority has its roots in different cultural and intellectual traditions. Scholars of the Western tradition, for instance, have studied different paradigms that demarcate the line between the human and animal. The classical and Cartesian paradigms saw the nonhuman animal as belonging to nature's mechanistic universe devoid of subjectivity, and hence inferior to the human. Kant extended this line of reasoning by showing that, since animals are a means to an end, they lack the powers of self-purposiveness that is a condition of human freedom.[6] This lack of autonomy explains why, in addition to the bevy of animal metaphors, the narrator also compares him-

6 For a philosophical genealogy, see Cavalieri / Woollard 2001, Peterson 2017.

self to machines. As the narrator explains, "I no longer felt like a human being, but like a steam engine [*cai noi sot-de*]" (p. 60). Elsewhere, the narrator observes: "As far as I'm concerned, to be a rickshaw coolie you must bow to the command of two wooden shafts [*hai canh tay go*]!" (p. 60). The distinctive quality of the human, in other words, depends on the causal source: not from external natural laws but from within – through the powers of self-regulation. But while Western ideas, including those of Descartes and Kant, did make their way into Vietnam in the early twentieth century (Marr 1981: 118), it is unlikely that these ideas played a significant role in influencing Tam Lang and his reportage.

A more likely source of this moral hierarchy between the human and animal is a certain developmental discourse that was pervasive in many parts of Asia and the world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This developmental discourse derived from a fusion of ideas emanating from the natural sciences and the imperialist project, a combination of evolutionary thinking and a colonialist imperative to divide the world based on its moral and intellectual progress (Baker 1998, Bennet 2004, Jones 2011). In the context of Lang's reportage, this developmental discourse is exemplified in the association of the "animal" with Vietnamese ethnic minorities, the highlanders. In one of the scenes in which the narrator describes his rickshaw-pulling experience, the narrator states that he felt like an "animal or someone from the mountain tribes" (*mot con vat hay mot nguoi Moi*) (p. 89). The association of the animal with Vietnam's ethnic minorities provides a clue as to the inferior status of the animal figure.[7]

During this period, the prevailing colonial discourse saw the mountainous minorities as "savages", an ambivalent connotation depending on the ideology of the beholder. The highlanders could be perceived as either "heathens", "noble" or "underdeveloped" within a Social Darwinist framework (Salemink 2003, Jennings 2011). While the highlanders were useful to the dominant ethnic Vietnamese for the purposes of trade and labour, Osborne explains that the terms used to describe them throughout Southeast Asia mark an "absolute social division" between the upland minorities and lowland majorities. "Without exception," Osborne further explains, "the words are pejorative, laden with disdain" (Osborne 2016: 63). To counteract this prevailing local perception, James C. Scott has argued in the *Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) that the highlanders embody not so much "barbarism" as an attempt to escape the clutches of the modern state and its seemingly relentless forms of control. In all

7 One might argue that the inference is the other way around: by comparing the mountain tribes to animals, the narrator is lowering the former's status. Such an inference, however, already presupposes the animal's inferiority. Yet, as I have noted earlier, depending on the context, the animal figure could embody vice, virtue or even the sacred. So the question at issue is precisely to discern the animal's symbolism – which, in this context, is linked to that of the mountain tribes.

cases, within the Vietnamese imaginary, the highlanders, like the figure of the animal, signify the limits of modern civilisation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the reportage depicts the rickshaw puller's living quarters as dark spaces where "[t]here was no ray of light". The narrator continues: "Here, the light of civilisation [*anh sang van minh*] is blocked by a wall of dirt; the wheel of progress [*banh xe tien hoa*] is stopped by a long stretch of dike" (p. 70). Just as the "light of civilisation" cannot reach the natural world of the animal, so too does the narrator feel that he has slowly descended into the animal level.

The metaphor of the "light of civilisation" functions as Lang's ironic critique of colonial modernity. The promise of the French civilising mission was, ideally, to help modernise the peoples of the colonies culturally and materially (Lam 2000, Brocheux / Hemery 2011, Jennings 2011). In the metaphor, however, the "light of civilisation" fails to extend to the living quarters of the rickshaw coolies and all those whose lives are what Malarney calls the "disenfranchised, dispossessed, unseen" members of colonial society (Malarney 2011: 3). These marginal characters, many of whom migrated to Hanoi from the countryside, are ironically associated with the very rural animals that they have left behind – pigs, cows, dogs, horses. By depicting the descent of the human to the animal level, the reportage shows how the natural environment of the countryside has ironically inscribed itself onto the urban space of colonial Hanoi. The French civilising mission, according to the reportage, appears to have been a developmental failure.

Another source for this hierarchical distinction between the human/animal comes from the Confucian moral tradition, however. In *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, Haiyan Lee (2014) explains that Confucianism sees animals as belonging to a certain cosmological order. She explains:

> Much of what goes on in these venues of animal suffering is tolerated by many [in the Confucian society] who consider themselves upstanding, responsible citizens, usually on the grounds of the proper order of things, albeit articulated in more or less anthropocentric or utilitarian terms. (Lee 2014: 74)

She further explains that Confucianism urges that animal butchery and other unsightly activities ought to be removed from sight as a "form of *moral self-discipline, of cultivating an understanding of the proper order of things*" (ibid.: 74, my emphasis). In the Confucian tradition, therefore, the animal is hierarchically inferior to the human who, in turn, can exploit it for various utilitarian ends. This tradition, as Lee notes, is profoundly different from the Buddhist doctrine of the equality of all sentient beings: humans and animals alike are subject to the endless cycle of transmigration.

Evidence of the influence of this premodern Confucian idea of the human is illustrated in the vocabulary the narrator uses in his appeal to reform the rick-

shaw trade. Let us circle back to the paradigmatic scene that I introduced in the analysis, wherein the narrator insists that society has robbed the rickshaw pullers of their "human dignity" (*nhan pham*) (p. 113). The conceptual origins of the idea of "human dignity" suggest two different intellectual strands in Tam Lang's text. On the one hand, notions of equality and human rights were reinvented premodern concepts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, created to serve, among other purposes, the translation of Western political theory. Certain modern abstract terms such as "public", "society" and "democracy" entered Vietnam by way of the complex process of translation and modernisation (Liu 1995, Heinrich forthcoming). It is no coincidence that the narrator invokes the French League for the Rights of Man in his exhortation for better working conditions for the rickshaw puller. He states, "if it [the rickshaw trade] hadn't been regarded as a shame, the League for the Rights of Man would not have intervened in the rickshaw issue" (p. 114). On the other hand, the notion of "human dignity" clearly has premodern roots, not least of which is a Confucian ethical cosmology.

The Vietnamese word for "dignity" (*nhan pham*) is revealing here: it is comprised of two Sino-Vietnamese characters, "human" (*nhan*; 人) and "trait" (pham; 品), and predates Vietnam's modernity in the early twentieth century. The word, in fact, can be traced as far back as the 14th-century Sino-Vietnamese text *An Nam Chi Luoc* ("Abbreviated Records of An Nam").[8] As Tai Van Ta has demonstrated in *The Vietnamese Tradition of Human Rights* (1989), premodern Vietnam under the emperors exhibited a complex notion of "human rights", arguably stronger in some cases than modern international covenants today.

This premodern Confucian tradition is very likely a contributory source of Tam Lang's human/animal dichotomy. Tam Lang himself was known to have been raised in a family of Confucian scholars and, long before he entered the French-Vietnamese secondary school system, learned Chinese characters at the age of five (Lockhart 1996: 51). Apart from biographical context, the reportage itself also lends further weight to this interpretation. As Ben Tran has noted, approximately half of the reportage – ten of the twenty chapters – is an encounter with a rickshaw puller, "brother Tu," who apparently used to be a mandarin scholar and teacher (Tran 2017: 27). Let us circle back to brother Tu's story. As noted earlier, the degrading urban environment led him to opt to be a pimp. He explains:

> From that day on, I regarded everyone around me as **snakes** [*loai ran*] and **centipedes** [*loai ret*]. I committed a serious crime, I worked as a **pimp** [*ma co*], I became addicted to opium, I spoke obscenely, I opened my trousers and urinated in the street without blushing, farted without embarrassment as I pulled the rickshaw. In sum, I was in a

8 The following useful search engine is a compilation of Sino-Nom print sources published since 1942 and points to the term's usage dating to the 14th-century text *An Nam Chi Luoc*: https://hvdic.thivien.net/.

> state where I didn't pay attention to anyone, like the louts who shit shamelessly in the fields with the **dogs** [*cai Vang cai Ven*] standing around them, waiting. […] Benevolence, virtues, rites – I tossed them all away [*nhan, duc, le, nghia…vut di het*]. (p. 102, my emphases)

This passage is significant in providing to the Vietnamese readers a model of what not to emulate. After all, recall that Tam Lang's narrator addresses the readers throughout the reportage and, as Bradley explains, aims to instil in them an altered consciousness to reform society. The moral values against which brother Tu compares himself are clearly based on Confucian notions: "benevolence, virtues, rites". But urban life has led this mandarin scholar, once guided by these Confucian values, to descend to the animal level. At this level, according to the passage, there are no social rules of decorum and propriety, no question of ethics, no consideration of others, no regime of sexual restraint or self-regulation. Like the dogs who stand waiting, the narrator inhabits a "shameless" world of pure biology and animality. He urinates, farts and shits. Everyone else, too, has transformed into some of the lowest species in the animal kingdom –"snakes and centipedes". In this urban space, the light of civilisation has been snuffed out, replaced by an unruly world in which the hierarchy between the human and animal has collapsed.

Household Servants

As the title implies, Vu Trong Phung's "Household Servants" is a reportage about the everyday lives of servants in Hanoi. Like Tam Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw", the reportage is filtered through the lens of a narrator. Hence, as some literary critics have noted, these reportages cannot be taken as unadulterated "objective" mirrors of Hanoi urban life. Scholar Ben Tran, for instance, has questioned the access and privilege of the indigenous heterosexual male voice in these works. For him, these works establish their authority by constructing a Self through an Other, namely a female prostitute. He explains, "I am interested in how these works illuminate the ways that culture forms through asymmetry and difference, in this case through the native, male autoethnographic voice" (Tran 2017: 25). By showing the exclusionary mechanisms by which the authors construct their narratives, Tran is able to problematise the articulation of a "totalized ethnic and national culture" (ibid.).

Building on this scholarship, the following analysis seeks to reconstruct another facet of Vu Trong Phung's narrative strategy. I suggest that, even more fundamental than the female prostitute, the "animal" is in fact the Other of Phung's conception of the "human". In particular, for Phung, the erosion of sexual norms in this new urban space symptomises the human descent to the animal level. Throughout the reportage, Phung depicts the urban as a space that attracts those from the countryside only to lead to their dehumanisation.

In a paradigmatic scene, the narrator describes a group of thirteen servants who migrated from the countryside to the city in search of work. Explaining their predicament, the narrator states:

> Based on their appearances and clothes, these thirteen people were not from the city [*de do*]. They came from the country [*thon que*] because they couldn't find enough work there to have two meals a day. The **capital** [*kinh thanh*] **attracts** [*cat tieng*] and **corrupts** [*cam do*] them. When they left the country, they did not realise that they would find themselves in such a plight. (p. 143[9], my emphases)

The urban space is depicted as a place of false hope. Those from the countryside live in wretched conditions and look to the city as a place where they can improve their lives. But once drawn to it, they realise too late that their lives are no better, if not worse, than the ones they once endured before. In his translation, Lockhart uses the word "corrupts" for the Vietnamese word *cam do*, which can also be translated as "to seduce" in a pejorative sense. Later in the same chapter, the narrator contends that those from the countryside are "dazzled" (*bi quang mat*) by the "light of the capital" (*anh sang cua kinh thanh*) (p. 144). They are drawn to its allure, to the potential opportunities that it can provide, only to end up like "moths to a flame" (*con thieu than bay vao dong lua*) (p. 144). Like the moths who meet their own destruction, those drawn to the city also experience a form of loss. This loss, however, is not so much their own mortality as their own morality. The city morally corrupts all those who inhabit it. As the narrator further explains:

> The city **lures** [*cat tieng goi*] people from the countryside [*que*] who leave dry fields and dead grass, and who starve a second time after they have abandoned their homes. It reduces people to the **level of animals** [*ngang hang voi gia loai vat*]: it often drives young men into prison and young women into prostitution. (p. 130, my emphases)

In the passage, prostitution is associated with animal behaviour, here characterised by that which is located beneath the human. The city, after all, reduces people to the animal level, and it is at this level where people presumably lose their humanity. Indeed, animal metaphors are ubiquitous in the reportage. The workers at the eating houses lie around "like pigs" (*nhu lon*) (p. 125). The servants looking for work are like "flies attracted by the smell of honey" (*ruoi thay mui mat vay*) (p. 129). These servants live the lives of "bees and ants" (*hang con ong cai kien*) (p.151). They move to the city from the countryside only to find themselves inhabiting squalid conditions, huddled in courtyards filled with "chicken shit and human shit" (*cut ga va cut nguoi*) (p. 144).

The rhetorical figure of "shit" is non-trivial. It is not merely evidence of the city's unsanitary conditions. Rather, it suggests that the moral codes and regulations that govern human conduct have broken down. Observing the mistreatment of servants, the narrator notes that a person's value can be even

9 Unless noted otherwise, page numbers in this section refer to Lockhart's translation of "Household Servants".

"lower than an animal's" (*khong bang gia suc vat*) (p. 130). But this animal imagery extends beyond the lower classes. As the narrator points out, the richer people are, the "meaner" they are, and the more they behave "like dogs" (*cho deu*) (p. 138). For Vu Trong Phung, therefore, urban life seems to have corrupted a huge swathe of people, stripping them of their humanity and thrusting them to the level of animals, if not lower.

But if the human is defined as that domain which is not yet corrupted, that which has not yet fallen to the animal level, then it seems that the human is characterised by a certain moral regime. It is not always clear what this moral regime consists of. Phung's narrator invokes the figure of Jean-Jacques Rousseau towards the end of the reportage. He states, "I can tell you that before he became a great thinker, a great writer, and a great man, Jean Jacques Rousseau had lived the life of a humble servant" (p. 154). Rousseau is notable, among other things, for his notion in the *Discourse on Inequality* that civilisation corrupts man's natural happiness and freedom by artificially multiplying social inequality.

Likewise, for Phung, the urban space of colonial Hanoi appears to have multiplied inequality while morally corrupting its residents in the process. But Rousseau's ideas only go so far in helping us to understand Phung's moral discourse. For, if Rousseau idealised an imaginary state of nature (Sorenson 1990, Klausen 2014), Phung conceives of the animal world as a level beneath the human. Hence, there seems to be something else about Phung's moral regime that distinguishes it from Rousseau's so-called state of nature.

Moreover, this moral regime is not necessarily the same as a legal one. During the French colonial period, the authorities tolerated prostitution and sought to manage it through regulatory measures, however ineffective the latter ultimately were. In fact, countryside people were increasingly drawn to the city precisely because, as scholar Tracol-Huynh notes, "working as a prostitute appeared to be more lucrative than staying and working in the rice paddies" (Tracol-Huynh 2013: 178). So, however deplorable Phung may have deemed it, the practice was not in itself illegal. Society's laws and their interdictions could intersect with Phung's moral regime, as when the narrator states that urban life "drives young men into prison" (*Dan ong se di den Hinh phat*) (p. 130). That is, urban life is so morally corrupting that it can lead young men to engage in unlawful acts that lead to imprisonment. But since prostitution was not illegal, it is clear that Phung's moral regime is not necessarily the same as a legal one.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that a bourgeois sensibility is the source of this moral regime. Scholars have shown that the rise of the bourgeoisie coincided with a certain subjectivity that embraced refinement and delicacy, banishing all that which is deemed vulgar (see, for instance, Mosse 1985). The bourgeois

subject, according to Stallybrass and White, defines itself through the "exclusion of what it marked out as low – as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating" (Kipnis 2003: 106). The removal of the distasteful from the field of vision parallels the course of the civilising process. This process, as Norbert Elias argues, includes people's propensity to "suppress in themselves every characteristic they feel to be *animal*" (ibid., my emphasis).

Yet, there are at least two problems in ascribing a bourgeois sensibility to Phung. First, unlike Tam Lang, Phung came from a relatively poor class background and continued to live modestly for most of his life. He was also quick to criticise bourgeois morality (Zinoman 2014: 14–15). Second, rather than remove from sight themes that the bourgeois world would consider distasteful, Phung foregrounded them in his works. Not shy to depict conditions of human abjection, he more than any of his contemporaries used the reportage genre to disclose what he considered as profound societal problems. As a result, he earned the label "Northern King of Reportage" *(Ong Vua Phong Su Dat Bac*) (Thuong 2000, Malarney 2011). Hence, it is unlikely that Phung's moral regime derives from a bourgeois sensibility.

There is, however, one aspect of this moral regime that we can deduce from the text. Although Phung never explicitly defines it, the moral regime can be discerned based on what it is not. For Phung, the characters who have descended to the animal level are those who seem to have lost touch with what Phung perceives as *normative* sexuality. Scholars have noted that Phung was fixated on sexuality and sexual deviance and often conflated class oppression with sexual immorality (Zinoman 2014: 132). In the context of this reportage, sexuality is portrayed as an unruly, destabilising and hence corrupting force. In the opening scene, the narrator notes that the woman in charge of the eating house occasionally "felt the need to pull her pants up to her crotch and, without any inhibitions [*cao hung*], scratch herself vigorously like a man" (p. 124). Women who are lured to the city "fall into the abyss of lust" (*di den Duc tinh*, p. 144). The young man who owned a "bag" of pornographic photographs went "crazy" (*nhu dien*) and "threw himself down on the bench" to have sex with the maid (p. 140).

By contrast, in a chapter not included in the Lockhart translation, the male narrator reflects on his ideal relationship with Miss Dui, a fallen woman who has turned to prostitution. The narrator observes: "I wanted to see in Miss Dui traces of the former country girl [*co gai nha que*], obedient and meek [*ngoan ngoan*]." He continues: "These are dreams that are simple [*binh di*] but pure [*trong sach*]" (Chapter 5, Vietnamese version).[10] Normative sexuality, then, is that which is characterised by sexual propriety and self-restraint.

10 The chapter is available here: https://www.sachhayonline.com/tua-sach/com-thay-com-co/chuong-5-su-cam-do-voi-manh-hon-ngay-tho/683.

And if normative sexuality is a component of Phung's moral regime, then so too are the qualities of sexual propriety and self-restraint.

This moral regime that Phung espouses seems to depart from other known paradigms. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (1961) offered a less-than-optimistic view of civilisation. He asserted that it was the repression of humanity's fundamental drives, Eros and Thanatos, that led to civilisation's "discontents". Freudian notions did make their way to the colony during the interwar period, and so the invocation of Freud is not unwarranted. Few authors in colonial Hanoi, moreover, were as fascinated by Freud's theories as Vu Trong Phung (Zinoman 2002: 11). However, while Phung shares Freud's critical view of civilisation and its effects, he in no way believes that the liberation of human drives would be the antidote to the ills, both literal and metaphorical, that befell so many of the inhabitants of urban colonial Hanoi. On the contrary, as the prior examples already demonstrate, Phung would assert that, if anything, modern colonial Hanoi needed *more* regulatory norms. So, it seems that the key issue here is not the critique of civilisation per se, but the *kind* of civilisation to which one refers.

Indeed, it is very likely that one of the significant sources of Phung's moral discourse is Confucian ethics. This is not, however, a formally acquired notion of ethics. Unlike Tam Lang, Phung was not raised in a family of Confucian scholars. His father, an electrician, died seven months after Phung was born, and the author was raised by his widowed mother, who would never remarry. To Phung, his mother embodied the Confucian ideals of female virtue, and there may have been a connection between Phung's upbringing and what some critics call Phung's "conservative fondness" for Confucian morality and "traditional moralism" (Zinoman 2002: 5). In fact, the author's profound lack of ease with the rapid changes in sexual norms in urban colonial Hanoi led to charges of "cultural conservatism" (ibid.: 20).

The contention that traditional Confucian morality is the source of Phung's moral regime is further corroborated by the author's idealised view of Hanoi as an ancient civilisation. Let us circle back to the paradigmatic scene wherein thirteen household servants migrated to Hanoi from the countryside. In this scene, the narrator states: "Based on their appearances and clothes, these thirteen people were not from the city [*de do*]" (p. 143). The narrator's peculiar use of the word *de do* is revealing here. Whereas Lockhart translates the word to mean "city", it can also more accurately be translated to mean "imperial capital". The reference to Hanoi as an "imperial" city alludes to its ancient history and its location as the centre of numerous Vietnamese dynasties. Malarney has noted that Phung saw in Hanoi something potentially "noble, even grand" and made frequent references to the vernacular metaphor of Hanoi as city of a "thousand-year civilization" (*nghin nam van vat*). For Phung, according to

Malarney, this metaphor captures something of the "ideal of what the city should be and a standard against which to measure the contemporary city" (Malarney 2011: 17). Not surprisingly, then, towards the end of the section mentioned (Chapter 6), Phung's narrator refers to Hanoi precisely as the location of a "thousand years of culture" (*noi nghin nam van vat*, p. 144), but also as an urban culture in which household servants live in squalid conditions next to "chicken shit and human shit" (p. 144). The passage's irony stems, in part, from the yawning gap between ideal and reality: the ideal of Hanoi as a venerable city steeped in Neo-Confucian high culture and learning, on the one hand, and, on the other, the gritty realities of urban colonial modernity in which masses of people live in abject conditions that are no different from those of an animal.

Regardless of the sources of Phung's moral regime, whether they come from a mix of Western ideas by Rousseau or Freud, whether they reflect his own psychobiography or a belief in traditional Confucian morality, my point is still the same: the human/animal dichotomy underwrites the author's moral cosmology. Even more fundamental than the female prostitute, the figure of the animal is the Other of Phung's conception of the human. It is the animal that is the symbol of moral degradation; it is the animal that no human ought to aspire to become. Yet, it is into animals that the urban space of colonial Hanoi, the "light of the capital" (*anh sang cua kinh thanh*), has ironically transformed all those who are drawn to it.

Conclusion

As I have suggested, the question of the human/animal is intertwined with Tam Lang's and Vu Trong Phung's critique of colonial modernity, and by extension, their conceptions of normative sexuality. In both Lang's "I Pulled a Rickshaw" and Phung's "Household Servants," the urban space of late colonial Hanoi represents a dystopian descent from the human to the animal world. In the early twentieth century, as rural folks migrated to the city in search of a better life, these reportages problematised the division between the rural and urban. The contact between the urban and rural folks leads to a symbolic hierarchy whereby the latter become reduced to the very rural animals they have left behind.

Both reportages, therefore, presuppose a hierarchical moral regime whereby the human is superior to the animal in possessing the attributes of self-regulation and self-moderation. By contrast, the animal embodies that abject zone beyond normative codes of conduct. Faced with an increase in rural migrants,

the city thus becomes a symbol of moral decay and dissolution. In such a world, urban space and normative sexuality are antithetical to each other.

While this moral regime can certainly be ascribed to modern notions of equality emanating from Western political theory, the study has also suggested other sources, namely the Confucian moral tradition. For Tam Lang, the influence of this tradition partly derives from his own upbringing, raised as he was in a family of Confucian scholars. For Vu Trong Phung, the sources are less apparent; his life background, nevertheless, does shed some light on the roots of this traditional morality, the imprints of which are profoundly manifest in his attitudes towards sex and sexuality in the reportage. A study of the figure of the animal in early twentieth-century Vietnam has profound implications for understanding the histories of the "human" and its conceptual and cultural delimitations. By examining the various strands that constitute the human/animal hierarchy in two late colonial era reportages, this study serves as a preliminary effort towards such investigations.

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Smart Energy for the World: The Rise of a Technonationalist Discourse in Japan in the Late 2000s

Marco Zappa

Abstract

In recent years, "smart city" has become a buzzword in discussions about urbanisation. While in Europe and North America the initial utopian optimism has now receded, due to booming implementation costs and surveillance concerns, the smart city model has taken root in rapidly urbanising Asia in particular, thanks to the activism of China and Japan. For the latter, smart city technologies and technical know-how represent the new frontier of export goods. In April 2018, the Government of Japan and that of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam announced the construction of a new smart city on the outskirts of the Vietnamese capital Hanoi that is set to become Japan's largest ODA project to date. Despite changes in the global hegemonic narratives on smart cities, the new project bears the features of an urban settlement that revolves around technological data collection for the sake of perfect efficiency, rather than for its prospective inhabitants. Against this backdrop, how did the Government of Japan succeed in constructing a convincing narrative for made-in-Japan smart cities? Since 2011, thanks to specific initiatives by Japan's government and investments by Japanese tech companies in the sector, a Japanese discourse on smart cities has emerged. Through an examination of earlier critiques of the smart city model and a close analysis of official policies and books by energy policy intellectuals, this paper will identify the main features of the Japanese discourse on smart cities and place it in the context of an evolving broader global narrative. The study demonstrates how the Japanese discourse on smart cities largely reflects a corporate managerial vision of the city and, at the same time, a "technonationalist" approach that informs the country's foreign policy.

Keywords: Japan, smart cities, information and communication technologies (ICT), energy diplomacy, foreign policy, technonationalism, discourse

1. Introduction

In recent years "smart city" programmes and initiatives have appeared across the world. While in Europe and North America the initial utopian optimism seems now to have succumbed to booming implementation costs and over-

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whelming surveillance concerns,[1] the smart-city paradigm has taken root in East Asia especially, thanks to the activism of China and Japan.[2] In particular, the latter has fostered cooperation agreements with other regional actors on smart-city projects. For an export-dependent country such as Japan, smart-city technologies and technical know-how represent the new frontier of export goods. In April 2018, the government of Japan (GOJ) and that of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam, hereafter) announced the construction of a new smart city on the outskirts of the Vietnamese capital Hanoi, which is set to become Japan's largest Official Development Assistance (ODA) project to date.[3] A few months later, during Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's visit to Beijing in October 2018, China and Japan agreed to cooperate on a number of infrastructural projects including a "smart city" in Chonburi province in Thailand, not far from the capital Bangkok.

In light of these facts, the concept of *machi-dzukuri* ("city building"), which has been at the centre of Japan's international cooperation activities since the 1980s (JICA 2008), has acquired new significance. Despite the relative loss of their world-market share in core sectors for smart-city construction, such as electronics, heavy industries and car manufacturing, Japanese companies have been able to advance their technologies and know-how abroad, while profiting from tax cuts and subsidies domestically, along with incentivised urbanisation schemes and foreign aid abroad (Berndt 2018). As the above-mentioned smart-city projects show, however, despite a fundamental lack of clarity regarding the very definition of "smart city" (Joss et al. 2019), this public-private coalition has been successful in building a specific narrative reflected in government policy papers, statements, state-sponsored events and essays. Against this backdrop, this paper will address the following research questions: What kind of ideas and concepts are associated with the smart city in Japanese discourse? What kinds of models has the GOJ built and presented, at least at the level of public narratives, to project a convincing story?

Thus far, a consistent part of the academic literature on the "smart city" has struggled to provide a definition of the concept itself, though it commonly highlights the importance of technology in the attempt to improve the city-

1 See e.g., Greenfield 2012, 2013; Poole 2014; Sterling 2018; City of Boston 2019.

2 Since 2011, following the approval of the 12th Five-Year Plan aiming at reducing carbon emissions by 17 percent per unit of GDP by 2015, China has launched dozens of smart-city projects. China is today the country with the highest number of pilot projects (Tokoro 2016).

3 According to the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (2018), the project has an estimated value of 37 billion dollars. It entered its first phase in late 2018 after the Vietnamese government granted permission for foreign investments and it is due to be completed in 2023. It is being designed by Nikken Seikei and will feature 7000 condo facilities and commercial activities. The smart town mobility system will be managed by self-driving buses and charging stations for electronic vehicles provided by Mitsubishi. All houses will be furnished with solar panels and food waste recycling equipment, smart appliances for energy conservation and smart meters, supplied by Panasonic and KDDI, to gauge energy consumption. Daikin Industries will supply air conditioning in the complex. Japanese group Aeon will open groceries and supermarkets in the area. In addition, 3000 cherry trees will be planted in green areas.

dwellers' quality of life.[4] More recently, scholars have focused on global narratives and discourses regarding the smart city. In his review of smart-city projects around the world, Tokoro (2016) identifies a dozen keywords such as "smart grid", "recyclable energy", "urban development/redevelopment", "next-generation transport system" and "environment protection" (Tokoro 2016: 3).

At the same time, authors such as Greenfield (2012, 2017), Townsend (2013) and Holland (2015) have problematised the role of major global tech companies in the diffusion of the smart-city model, contending that this transition has led to the privatisation of public goods and spaces. Linked to this critique is the argument, based on a close analysis of official documents issued by regional organisations such as the European Union, that points to a fundamental absence in smart-city projects of a bottom-up citizen-centred perspective (De Waal / Dignum 2017, Engelbert et al. 2019) and attention to social issues such as social inequality and urban violence (Gonella et al. 2019). Specifically in the Japanese case, DeWit (2014, 2015 and 2018) clearly shows the revolutionary potential of the GOJ's smart city and smart community programme in terms of the decentralisation of Japan's energy sector and the revitalisation of local economies (cf. in particular DeWit 2014), while still underscoring the lack of citizen participation in government-sponsored smart-city projects in Japan (DeWit 2013, Samuels 2013).

2. Historical "disjunctures" and the rise of discourse coalitions

In light of recent developments in Japan's international cooperation regarding smart-city projects in developing Asia, it is worth analysing how this idea has been discursively framed by relevant policymaking actors in recent years. It is assumed that this articulation has taken place in response to a critical juncture in Japan's recent history: the 11 March 2011 tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster, the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals framework and the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015. The first event was instrumental in re-orienting Japanese domestic policies in the field of energy and environment. The second historical phase has been crucial to enriching existing policies with new, and possibly more attractive, ideas and concepts.

At the basis of this assumption is the belief that specific historical processes, events, crises and "disjunctures" are a key part of the development of specific hegemonic narratives at the national and transnational levels (see Jessop / Sum 2013: 130, Samuels 2013). The Cultural Political Economy (CPE) approach developed by Jessop and Sum provides a suitable approach in

4 See Mahiznan 1999, Caragliu et al. 2009, Washburn et al. 2010, Guan 2012, Nam / Pardo 2012, Albino et al. 2015.

this sense, as it focuses on the correspondence between "imaginaries" and "real material forces in the existing international political economy". At the foundation of this approach is the idea that economic systems and the relative set of regulatory political institutions are not the product of mere rationalism (economism). Rather, they are the product of social relations that emerge from specific institutional arrangements and historical as well as geographical conditions (Jessop / Sum 2006a: 4). In fact, what matters here is "the interaction between the discursive and extra-discursive that gives relatively successful economic and political imaginaries their performative, constitutive force in the material world" (ibid.: 158). Consequently, any shift at the level of discourse reflects a shift in the "material apparatuses" and "social practices" consolidated in a given context, e.g., that of global neoliberalism.

In addition, the CPE approach stresses that hegemonic narratives are the product of a multi-scalar process of adaptation and negotiation among "actors with different horizons of action" (global, national, regional, etc.). In this process, the role of "sub-hegemonic nodes" is fundamental. These are the actors developing appropriate "technologies of power" that "anchor" globally hegemonic discourse to a regional or local level, and which might even contribute bottom-up to the emergence of new discourses. Their success depends on their ability to "absorb alternative meanings and marginalise resistances", and therefore on their capacity to "adapt to more global or local circumstances" (Jessop / Sum 2006b).

In particular, this study aims to analyse the emergence of epistemic communities or "discourse coalitions", i.e., groups of actors sharing a common definition for "ambiguous social circumstances" and trying to impose their views on others through diverse means, including "manipulation and the exercise of power" (Hajer 1993: 45). In the case study presented here, the smart city is interpreted as a storyline around which different actors (governments and private companies) formed a coalition in order to impose a certain "view of reality", and at the same time, to advance their specific interests by suggesting new social practices and arrangements. In particular, this ideational convergence revolves around the idea of a "technological nation", valorised as such after a series of a traumatic events (the disaster of March 2011), that is based upon a "romantic interpretation of history" that nonetheless guides the formulation of public policies (Charland 1986: 197). From a policymaking perspective, this projection of a national identity is arguably necessary in the attempt to establish a (sub)hegemony.

Through a review of public documents and the Japanese literature, this paper will shed light on the discursive interactions between the policymaking arena and a number of energy-policy intellectuals and examine how the smart-city model has been framed as a "storyline" able to provide a solution to a specific issue or a number of issues. Specifically, the entry point for this re-

search is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (hereafter, MOFA) set of policies labelled "energy diplomacy". An analysis of these policies is presented in the final part of the paper. Energy is among the top MOFA priorities, given the ministry's task to contribute to national security through diplomacy and international cooperation. Assuming the existence of a network of entrenched relations among ministries and government agencies, this paper aims at describing the Government of Japan (GOJ)'s energy policy shifts in the last decade and the agency of experts and energy intellectuals, particularly after the historical disjuncture of March 2011. To this end, we have conducted a content analysis of the work of influential energy experts and GOJ energy and innovation strategies before and after the Fukushima nuclear incident. Focusing on keywords and recurrent themes, the study underscores paradigm shifts (albeit partial) in the public and official discourse on energy and environmental sustainability, and, consequently, the inclusion of such themes in foreign policy.

3. A new imaginary of the city

In 2018, 4.2 billion people lived in cities – approximately 55% of the total world population. By 2050 the ratio will increase to 68%. Today 70% of global wealth is produced in cities. However, urban areas are also responsible for more than half of total global energy consumption and waste production, with dramatic consequences for the natural environment (Van Beurden et al. 2019).

In its effort to promote sustainable development and tackle the current environmental crisis, particularly after the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015, the UN has integrated the concept of "smart city" into its policy guidelines regarding urban development. Since the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) held in Quito in October 2016 and the adoption of a New Urban Agenda, the concept of "smart" has been consistently associated with that of "sustainable". However, despite the general vagueness of this new model of urbanisation, official definitions stress the importance of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to make urban spaces more efficient, and also economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, in an attempt to increase the quality of life of present and future city-dwellers.[5]

Such a shift toward an "efficient" and citizen/customer-oriented idea of city testifies to the emergence of a new imaginary, and its relative narrative, about

5 See for example the definition provided by the Focus Group on Smart and Sustainable Cities of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a specialised agency under the UN Economic and Social Council (ITU FG-SSC, UN 2015).

cities in the second half of the 2000s. Particularly after the 2008 global financial and banking crisis, a wave of financial austerity in large parts of the global North led city administrators to direct efforts toward the attraction of global private capital, resorting in certain cases to the privatisation and corporatisation of public urban spaces (Hollands 2015).[6]

Like other major developed economies, the Japanese government adopted the smart-city model as part of its energy and environment strategies in the last decade for very practical reasons. The March 2011 disaster was certainly a "crucial disjuncture" in this transition (Samuels 2013). According to one definition provided by the GOJ, a Smart city is

> a sustainable city or region where issues intrinsic to urban areas are managed (planned, prepared, managed and run) using new technologies such as the ICTs. At the same time, it is a city or region where overall optimisation of the city activities is devised. (MLIT 2018)

In addition to renewable energy sources, a smart city is fundamentally data-driven and employs cutting edge information technologies in view of "the realisation of efficient management and deployment of the city infrastructures and services, while improving the residents' quality of life" (MIC 2018).[7] Ideally, such a city is the hub for the creation of new products and services that may contribute to growth of the local economy.

To date, more than 104 smart city/smart community projects are ongoing in Japan (CO 2019). The majority of them (63) are implemented by the Cabinet Office's Bureau for the Promotion of Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalising Local Economy under the scheme for the implementation of a "near future technology-based society" (*kinmirai gijutsu shakai*). This programme, inspired by the UN SDGs, aims to enhance the use of ICTs (Internet of Things, 5G connectivity, self-driving vehicles, etc.) to solve local issues with the support of ad hoc regulations (CO 2019).[8] The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (MIC) is in charge of 35 other projects which are more strictly focused on ICT deployment for data collection and analysis to improve resi-

6 Citing growing public mistrust against governments all over the world, IBM, for example, maintains the need for the public sector to "embrace new technology, processes, ideas, and workforce skills" in order to better respond to the citizens' needs and demands as efficiently as private companies (IBM 2019). Such a marketing strategy has been relatively successful. Hollands, for instance, estimates that between 2009 and 2013, IBM generated 3 billion dollars from its smarter city initiative (Hollands 2015: 69). Tech companies have also shown particular flexibility in adapting their offer to emerging issues such as migration and border control, climate change and natural disasters.

7 As clearly illustrated by DeWit (2015), the GOJ does not adopt a singular definition of the smart city, rather it adopts a multifaceted description resulting from various government agencies' involvement in the identification and implementation of smart-city projects. However, the resemblance of such descriptions to those provided by major tech companies is evident. More comprehensive definitions are offered by private companies such as Mitsubishi Electric that stress the importance of low carbon sustainable power sources along with the provision of consumer-oriented control devices for maximum energy saving and emergency responsiveness (Mitsubishi Electric 2019).

8 Projects managed under this scheme also comprise the so-called "environment cities" (*kankyō shīti*), "environment model cities" (*kankyō mōderu shīti*) or "SDG model cities" (CO 2019).

dents' quality of life. This scheme includes cities such as Kashiwa, Sapporo and Takamatsu, where ICT has been deployed in disaster prevention (systems of sensors for early warnings) and tourism (bike sharing systems). The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), on the other hand, is the frontrunner in projects aimed at using ICTs for a better and more efficient management of energy, with a stronger focus on the business sector. The METI has sponsored projects aimed at promoting the use of renewable energy and at the creation of local energy management systems (EMS) in residential areas (such as in the Kashiwa no ha project or in Senju, in Tokyo) and energy cogeneration in commercial and business districts (Nishishinjuku), educational institutions (Chūbu University) and manufacturing areas (Ohira) (METI n.d.).

The Abe government has since incorporated the concept of smart urbanisation into its national growth strategy aimed at realising a "Society 5.0", i.e., a "super smart society" (PMO 2017). According to the strategy, the extensive employment of ICT for data collection and use in diverse sectors, ranging from car manufacturing to logistics to infrastructure building and management, is key to enhancing Japanese cities' and companies' competitiveness worldwide. In 2018, the Cabinet Office launched an expert commission aimed at the promotion of the concept of the "super city", which is conceived as an evolution of the data-driven smart city, where e-government is enhanced, e-learning is implemented in schools and services, such as public transport and garbage collection, are automated (PMO 2018).

4. Rethinking energy grids in Japan: Pre-3/11 state-led efforts

The earthquake and tsunami that hit the Tōhoku region on 11 March 2011 (3/11) prompted the GOJ to adopt policies and technologies in an attempt to enhance the resilience of urban communities and infrastructures against the possibility of a natural disaster of major proportions. The 2011 natural disaster and nuclear accident represented a "critical juncture" in contemporary Japanese history, as they provided the grounds for new narratives to arise in view of the substantial political, economic and social changes (Kingston 2012, Samuels 2013). That of the smart community, or smart city, is an elucidatory case. It shows in fact that the emergence of certain discourses and the rise of relative discourse coalitions – groups of individuals sharing the same social construct identified as a "problem" and, thus, the same storyline regarding the problem itself and possible solutions – has accelerated. In addition, it shows how little impact the differences in the political orientation of successive cabinets have had against the backdrop of a hegemonising global narrative.

Given Japan's structural lack of primary energy sources and its vulnerability to natural disasters, government bureaucrats had been struggling to find solutions to ensure energy security and to enhance the country's overall resilience to global energy crises, natural disasters and climate change well before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami (DeWit 2015). In the aftermath of WWII, the Japanese power generation sector was re-organised into regional monopolies subject to state supervision.[9] Power generation was initially achieved with a combination of large, slowly operating hydroelectric power plants covering baseload consumption needs and more rapid coal-fired thermal power plants to accommodate peaks of consumption. This model suffered structural distress during the high economic growth period in the 1960s, leading to the construction of new cost-efficient oil-fired thermal and nuclear power plants. In rural areas, government subsidies fostered local acceptance of large-scale energy facilities that mainly served distant metropolises and industrial parks (Berndt 2018: 131–139).

The oil crises of the 1970s prompted Japanese policymakers to rethink the country's policies in securing energy sources, but did not really affect the GOJ's industrial policy of plant and heavy machinery construction. Between the early 1970s and early 1990s, the GOJ started investing in energy conservation technologies and nurtured the domestic nuclear industry in view of its future export potential (ibid.: 144). The nuclear industry would remain central in the GOJ's energy strategies aimed at stabilising the country's energy supply at least until 2010.

With the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in response to the new international concern about climate change, the Japanese government enacted a specific law on global warming (*chikyū ondanka taisaku no suishin suru hōritsu*) in 1998. The legislation and its successive amendments set a 6% greenhouse gas emissions reduction target by 2008–2012 and urged domestic appliances and car manufacturers to adopt world-class energy efficiency standards. It also stipulated that local governments throughout the archipelago were responsible for limiting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and finding viable countermeasures in accordance with their respective areas' "natural and social conditions" (Sugiyama / Takeuchi 2008: 425–26). Despite the relatively limited authority conceded by the national government to prefectures, municipalities, towns and villages on climate change, local government initiatives in this regard started appearing in the early 2000s. The launch of initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions by encouraging the public to use mass transportation services was accompanied by the establishment of specific regulations (in the case of Tokyo and Kyoto in the mid-2000s) requiring companies and

9 I.e., the state is responsible for setting the electricity price.

businesses to adopt environmental management systems and energy efficiency measures (ibid.: 431–32).

The 2005 Aichi Expo, whose concept revolved around the relationship between man and nature, was an occasion for the display of Japanese companies' achievements in public transportation and power generation and distribution technologies, as well as examples of public-private collaboration in curbing carbon emissions. Among the Japanese companies involved, Toyota Group took centre stage. The world's top carmaker presented its efforts in the development of hybrid vehicles (specifically buses) and hydrogen technology for engine fuel supply and their practical applications in Toyota City, a town of 420,000 people located nearby the Toyota plants. At the same time, an ad-hoc power generation plant installed near the exhibition grounds by a consortium of nine companies including Toyota, Kyocera, NTT, Mitsubishi Heavy and Chūbu Electric, the regional power utility, supplied electricity and heating, generated through a mix of renewable energy sources (fuel cells powered by biogas and solar panels), to the pavilions. The power supply system was designed by a team of engineers coordinated by Kashiwagi Takao, Professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology and one of the leading Japanese "energy intellectuals" of the last two decades (Kashiwagi 2011, DeWit 2014).

Initiatives at the local level remained key to attaining environmental policy targets even after the Aichi Expo. In 2008, the conservative Fukuda cabinet announced that Japan would cut by 80 per cent its GHG emissions by 2050 through investments in the latest nuclear power generation and carbon capture technologies. In order to encourage local governments to participate in the national strategy, Fukuda launched a contest for the best ecologically sustainable cities, which resulted in the nomination of a dozen "environmental model cities" (*kankyō moderu toshi*) and their CO_2 emissions reduction plans (Sugiyama and Takeuchi 2008: 428–29).

Such a state-led model area strategy for GHG reduction continued under the successive reformist DPJ[10]-led cabinets. Starting in late 2009, Tokyo identified four Test Projects for Next Generation Energy and Social Systems, i.e., smart cities and communities. If certain projects (Toyota, Keihanna and Kitakyūshū) were mere continuations of previous initiatives (such as the "environmental model cities"), others started from scratch (Yokohama). Each project was developed in collaboration with at least one key actor in the energy, infrastructure and tech sectors, such as Toshiba, Toyota, Mitsubishi Heavy and IBM Japan (Samuels 2013: 145). The smart-community model, based on an energy distribution model structured around a network of small-scale power distribution systems (smart grids), came to be seen as a more secure and potentially more resilient alternative to large centralised power distribu-

10 Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

tion systems.[11] All the more so, if one considers the absence of connections to macroregional power distribution systems and the internal differences between Eastern and Western Japan, as opposed to the regional connections or even nationally integrated energy networks found in Europe. Concomitantly, a more compact and infrastructurally efficient model of urbanisation centred on the smart grid might help the national and local governments to tackle pressing issues such as ageing and depopulation (DeWit 2018).

Reformist sections of the METI bureaucracy were thus moving toward nurturing an alternative energy sector, aware of its export potential in the near future. The Government of Japan also created a specific budget (amounting to 126.5 billion yen) through which the METI and its New Energy Promotion Council (NEPC), established in 2008, could subsidise future projects in sustainable urban development (Pham 2014: 21–24). Table 1 summarises the contrasting views on power generation and supply, within the METI, before and after the Kyoto Protocol.

Table 1: Pre- and Post-Kyoto Protocol views on power generation within the METI

Pre-Kyoto Protocol Dominant Model	Post-Kyoto Protocol Alternatives
large-scale infrastructure	small-scale infrastructure
region-specific supply network	integrated network (possibly inter-regional and international)
constant baseload	demand-based baseload supply
urban-rural divide	local generation and consumption

Source: compiled by Marco Zappa

11 For a detailed discussion of Japan's power generation industry and its links to national and local politics and policymaking, see Berndt 2018.

5. The DPJ New Growth Strategy and the emergence of the "radical thinkers"

In 2010, the DPJ-led GOJ issued a New Growth Strategy[12] emphasising the role of "green innovation" in the attempt to revitalise the national economy and to contribute to solving global issues. The 2010 strategy stressed the importance of enhancing Japan's strengths (such as the country's longest life expectancy, its scientific and technological advancement) to gain global leadership in the energy and environment sectors.

Priority areas were: spreading and expanding renewable energy sources along with nuclear power; developing innovative technologies for energy conservation, efficient power supply and material recycling; promoting a shift toward a low-carbon lifestyle, expanding eco-housing and transforming energy consumption habits through the adoption of new lighting technologies (such as LEDs and electroluminescent displays); promoting urban renewal and redevelopment through deregulation and green incentives; and creating eco-friendly and self-supporting local communities through the enhancement of ecologically sustainable infrastructures and mobility networks supporting local economies based on the environment, healthcare and tourism (PMO 2010: 15–17).

In this way, advancing "green innovation" through a comprehensive policy package would lead to a reduction in Japan's GHG emissions by 25 per cent by 2020 and create a 50-trillion-yen market and 1.4 million new jobs. Globally, this would curb 1.3 billion tonnes of CO_2. In this effort, a collaboration between the public and private sector (*kanmin ittai*) was crucial. According to the strategy, in addition to implementing green innovation, to achieve a strong economy Japan needed to look toward Asia. With many regions in Asia confronting challenges such as urbanisation, environmental decay, falling birthrates and rapid ageing, Japan needed to be able to meet the demand for transport and energy infrastructure, waterworks, healthcare services and goods, green technologies and, broadly, know-how, to further sustain the country's economic growth in the coming decades. It is worth noting that terms like "innovation" (*inobēshon*) and "energy" (*enerugī*) occur far more frequently (52 and 48 times, respectively) throughout the New Growth Strategy than unemployment (*shitsugyō*) and poverty (*hinkon*) (12 and 1).[13]

12 The Japanese version of the strategy document carries a subtitle that reads: "recovery scenarios toward a healthy Japan" (*Genkina Nihon fukkatsu shinario*). The rhetoric of the lost two decades is present in this document. In fact, the strategy affirms that in order to achieve a "healthy Japan", a new growth strategy was required in order to break with the past and with the old-school pork barrel politics conducted by the LDP.

13 Even though the document is not specifically focused on smart cities, this result is in line with the findings of the analysis carried out by Gonella et al. (2019) on European Commission documents and with the technocratic argument put forward, among others, by Greenfield (2017).

Besides national and local government endeavours in drafting new energy policies, the late 2000s saw the emergence of prominent individuals advocating a large-scale paradigm shift in Japan's energy policies. As argued by DeWit (2014), "radical technocrats", like the above-mentioned Kashiwagi Takao, have been able to exert some influence on the public debate and, eventually, thanks to what could be defined as a form of "technonationalism", on actual policymaking. For instance, the largely technocratic tone of the 2010 New Growth Strategy is reminiscent of one of Kashiwagi's most influential works, published a few months after the release of the New Growth Strategy and dedicated to the Smart Revolution (*sumāto kaikaku*) (Kashiwagi 2010). In the introductory note to the book, which praises the affiliation of both former PMs Hatoyama and Kan with the Tokyo Institute of Technology (the first as former researcher, the latter as alumnus), the institution where Kashiwagi himself teaches, the engineering professor offers an optimistic look at the regime change (*seiken kōtai*) that ousted the LDP from power and might put the Japanese economy back on track. He praises the DPJ's earlier initiatives regarding the economy and environment, hoping that DPJ leaders will be able to affirm the supremacy of politics to win over the bureaucrats' cooperation in the name of "national interest" (*kokueki*) without falling into LDP-style logrolling.

Further on, the Tokyo Institute of Technology professor argues for a gradual energy paradigm shift that would not only contribute to the achievement of the ambitious CO_2 reduction goals set by the GOJ, but would also create new business opportunities and jobs leading to the revitalisation of the Japanese economy. One of the key elements in this transition is the spread of "smart grids", i.e., ICT-based decentralised power supply networks enabling the integration of diverse natural energy sources and a demand-based energy supply. Technological innovations of this sort could spur international cooperation with preeminent international partners, such as the US and Europe, thus contributing to the establishment of new international standards based on Japanese technology and avoiding international isolation (i.e., the "Galapagos" effect; Kashiwagi 2010: 19, 186).[14] Kashiwagi also adds that many developing countries in Asia, such as China and India, have already started or will soon start looking at Japan for solutions to issues such as decarbonisation, energy supply optimisation and countermeasures against an ageing society. In particular, China is expected to complete its transition from emerging country to advanced economy in the next few decades, and will possibly turn to Japan for clean technologies (including nuclear power generation) and human resource development in the energy and environment sectors (Kashiwagi 2010: 71, 186).

14 Page numbers for this book refer to the electronic edition of the text as available on Honto e-reader in full-screen visualisation.

6. The immediate post-3/11 technonationalistic solutions

However, it was in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear accident that new energy generation and supply models became more popular. Following the meltdown of three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, the GOJ opted for a phase-out of all 54 of the country's commercial nuclear reactors. This decision would lead to a drop of almost 20 per cent in Japan's power generation capacity. Against this backdrop, the GOJ took steps towards reducing the demand for electricity and diversifying the sources of energy supply, while also drafting power system reform plans and strengthening standards and regulations in the nuclear sector (Duffield 2016). The GOJ swiftly passed a law on renewable energies, introducing a feed-in tariff in order to promote the spread of private and mass systems of power supply generated by renewable sources (METI 2012, Samuels 2013). On top of this, one year after the 3/11 events, Tokyo put out an energy and environmental strategy based on the idea of a nuclear-free society (*gempatsu ni izon shinai shakai*; Committee for Energy and Environment 2012).

These moves aimed to respond somehow to the growing public distrust toward nuclear energy (Kitada 2013). Against this background, the government turned to experts for policy advice. For example, another renowned energy intellectual, former President of the University of Tokyo and chairman of the Mitsubishi Research Institute Komiyama Hiroshi, came to the fore urging the cabinet to accelerate the adoption of a new national energy strategy based on energy conservation. At a hearing with the House of Representatives (HOR) Special Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, Komiyama maintained the need to "use" the earthquake- and tsunami-stricken areas as spaces to carry out "social experiments" in terms of the application of technological innovations that might eventually help Japan move from a 20th-century model of industrial and social arrangements (increased production through an increased energy supply) to a 21st-century one (based on green innovation, smart technology for maximum energy efficiency, tourism and service sector development). According to Komiyama, who shortly after the 3/11 disaster was appointed president of the Miyagi prefectural assembly for disaster recovery, the key to the region's recovery and to Japan's "re-creation" (*saisōzō*) is investment in broadband connectivity and ICT-technologies – the foundations of the smart communities envisioned by the government – in a fiscally deregulated environment, i.e., through the identification of recovery special zones (*fukkō tokku*) where local governments take the lead.

More specifically, in drafting his vision for the year 2050, Komiyama depicts a country that through energy saving and resource recycling is able to become fully self-sufficient (*shigen jikyū kokka*) and lead the world in a global

energy transition (HOR 2011). Even though he did not touch upon the topic during the hearing with the HOR Special Committee, Komiyama believes that Japan has the capability if not to lead the world, then at least to become Asia's intellectual and technological leader in the 21st century. In his 2011 book *Japan's Re-creation*, much in the same vein as Kashiwagi, Komiyama states that Japan has the advantage of being confronted with issues such as a scarcity of natural resources, environmental decay and an ageing society in advance of other emerging Asian countries. Technologies and know-how developed in Japan can be utilised to solve such issues and eventually be exported to neighbouring countries and peoples when needed. This might be Japan's greatest contribution to the history of humankind (Komiyama 2011).

In this context, the debate on Japan's energy and environment plans expanded to include businesspeople and local administrators. In particular, a few weeks after the disaster, a bloc of renewable-supporting entrepreneurs led by Softbank founder and CEO Son Masayoshi, backed by a number of prefectural and municipal leaders, emerged and attracted national attention. On the one hand, local politicians, such as Kanagawa governor Kuroiwa Yūji, started pushing an agenda for renewable sources based on local energy autonomy and cashed in on public distrust against regional energy utilities and the national government (Kuroiwa 2013). On the other hand, Son successfully vouched for state measures aimed at favouring the development of photovoltaic power generation through government subsidies[15] and started envisioning his own technonationalistic view, well exemplified by the idea of an "Asian super grid" (Japan Renewable Energy Foundation 2012). This is the name that the telecommunications entrepreneur gives to a multinational energy supply network through which Japan could buy energy generated in comparatively larger quantity and at a lower price in Mongolia or any other country in the region, and sell domestically generated renewable energy abroad:

> [The Asian super grid] would connect many countries in Asia through cables and promote the exchange of power generated from natural sources. If we manage to build it, we would solve problems such as the high generation costs, limitations to supply and instability. [...] It implies producing energy from natural resources across Asia, and sharing it according to each country's needs using a continental power network [...] Possibly, even in Japan in the near future, we will develop magnificent solar power technology and will be able to supply it at a low cost and in great quantity. We could sell this energy to other Asian countries, thus transforming Japan into an energy-exporting nation. (Japan Renewable Energy Foundation 2012: 20–22)

Even though Son presents his vision as a win-win strategy, Japan would be the greatest beneficiary, for it would definitively renounce nuclear power and would

15 The GOJ was receptive and a year later approved a feed-in-tariff scheme aimed at favouring the distribution of renewable-generated energy, in particular solar, in the national grid (METI 2012, Samuels 2013). Also, the GOJ drafted an energy and environmental policy based on the idea of a nuclear-free society (*gempatsu ni izon shinai shakai*; Committee for Energy and Environment 2012).

take the lead of the project, giving Asian countries the chance to become energy exporters.

Embedded in this plan is a sort of "reification" of Asia, viewed as a land of infinite opportunities and resources, and at the same time, a hierarchical vision of the system of international relations in the region with Japan at the top (Tamaki 2015). However, as discussed above, such an understanding of Japan's position is not uncommon among other energy intellectuals and, as it will be shown, still somewhat informs the GOJ's approach to international cooperation in the smart-city technology sector.

7. Energy and environment policies under the second Abe cabinet

The DPJ's ambitious "zero nuclear by 2030" policy, launched in the aftermath of the March 2011 disaster, was scrapped upon the return to power of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the current Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō. However, the new conservative cabinet did not abandon the idea that new energy and environmental technology could contribute to the country's national and local economic recovery. In addition, it is worth noting how the government has successfully integrated revisionist views on energy and the economy, such as those of Kashiwagi and Komiyama, into its official policies.

In fact, while proposing a gradual return to nuclear energy, in 2014 the Abe cabinet adopted a new Strategic Energy Plan based on the concept of an energy mix, a combination of traditional energy sources (including nuclear) and renewables.[16] Even though the paper did not set any specific long-term targets for the contribution of each type of energy source in the energy mix (Duffield 2016), the GOJ's plan to trigger economic growth in peripheral regions by increasing the ratio of power generated through sustainable sources was clear. Furthermore, in the third paragraph, section 2, of the document, the GOJ reaffirmed the importance of establishing an "advanced energy-saving society and smart and flexible consumer activities" (*tettei shita shōenerugī shakai no jitsugen to, smāto de jūnanna shōhi katsudō no jitsugen*) promoting the use of high-performance insulation materials for heat conservation in the construction sector; power-efficient lighting equipment, electric appliances and cars; and the introduction of energy management systems for businesses. The 2014 strategy stresses the importance of a smart energy supply (based on

16 The strategy officially reinstated Japan's nuclear energy policy. The restart of idled reactors could be allowed only after safety inspections by the Nuclear Regulation Authority. In 2015, the GOJ finally set targets for the nuclear share of energy production to be 20 percent of the total (that is, pre-3/11 levels), as against 22 for renewables.

actual demand) and set specific targets (such as the 100% switch to LED lighting and an increase by 50%–70% of next-generation vehicles by 2030).

Earlier in 2013, the Cabinet Council for Science Technology and Innovation, chaired by PM Abe, had expressed the intention to make the draft of a new national plan for environment and energy technologies one of the GOJ's top priorities and to make it an integral part of the country's continual diplomatic efforts (CO 2013). In order to do so, the council had to take on a leadership and coordination role in two state programmes aimed at promoting strategic scientific and technological innovation: the Cross-ministerial Strategic Innovation Promotion Program (SIP) and the Impulsing Paradigm Change through Disruptive Technologies Program (ImPACT). Particularly, the SIP aims at answering "critical social needs" and "offering competitive advantage to Japanese industry" by facilitating coordinated research and development activities among government, enterprises and universities. It operates under a 50-billion-yen budget (2017) and has launched 23 issue-based programmes,[17] including innovative combustion technology, next-generation power electronics, automatic driving systems, infrastructure maintenance, the enhancement of societal resiliency against natural disasters, big data and cyberspace technologies, cybersecurity, technologies for next-generation smart agriculture and energy systems toward decarbonisation.[18] Programme directors are chosen from both academia and industry. Specifically, the decarbonisation programme is directed by Kashiwagi Takao, whose "radical" positions on power generation have gained popularity since the late 2000s.

The METI-sponsored smart community development and energy conservation plans launched under the DPJ were not shelved. On the contrary, while insisting on the role of nuclear energy in the best energy mix, the LDP-led government chose to "maximise opportunities" in the green and smart technologies sector.[19] To this end, the Abe cabinet in coordination with the Keidanren decided to accelerate the "smart communities" initiatives initiated prior to March 2011. Proof of this acceleration is the rise in ministerial budgets and government expenditures in this sector over the last eight years. For example, METI's budget requests to support energy efficiency and conservation initiatives (through the development of new technologies for hydrogen utilisation) have grown steadily from 2014 to 2019. They amounted to nearly 243 billion yen in 2015, 323.4 billion in 2018 and 501.5 billion for 2020 (DeWit 2015).[20]

17 11 in the first 2014–18 period, 12 since 2018

18 An exhaustive list of the issues is available in English on the Cabinet Office website, https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/panhu/sip_english/sip_en.html (accessed 25 September 2019).

19 DeWit 2014, 2015, 2018; Samuels 2013:

20 In particular, DeWit (2014) points out that Tokyo Institute Technology Professor and government advisor Kashiwagi Takao has been one of the key figures in this transition. Kashiwagi is in fact the designer of the first Japanese "smart community" presented at the Aichi world fair in 2005. For an exhaustive description of Kashiwagi's role in the draft of Japan's energy and growth policies see DeWit 2014 and 2018.

Thus, as was the case for the nuclear sector in the previous two decades, the GOJ aims at developing a domestic economy of scale centred on defined "green energy" technologies and eventually meeting demand from overseas (Berndt 2018: 144). To foster growth in external demand is the task of both the METI and the MOFA, whose role will be discussed in the following section.

8. Smart cities as a tool of foreign policy

As illustrated above, the 3/11 events accelerated the articulation of new energy distribution and use models by the Japanese government for domestic purposes. Japan's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the 2015 Paris Accord[21] while promoting the adoption of Japanese technologies abroad provided the background to the enhancement of GOJ's outbound public-private coordinated initiative on the smart city.[22]

In his address at the COP21 in Paris in 2015, Japanese PM Abe put forward his cabinet's priorities for complying with the agreement. Preference would be given to initiatives designed to strengthen developing countries' resilience to climate change and to provide a good quality of life for their people. For instance:

> We will bring Africa clean power using geothermal energy from the centre of the earth. We will bring light to those areas left out of power networks. We will pass down the lessons learnt by Japanese cities to developing countries in Asia where cities are experiencing a rapid growth of their populations. We will make sure that the peoples of the island countries in the Pacific can take refuge hours before a typhoon hits, providing early warning equipment and know-how. These are all sectors where Japanese enterprises have developed the best solutions after years of efforts. We will always be there to help whoever needs it. (PMO 2015)

This quote exemplifies the willingness of the GOJ to offer assistance to developing countries struggling to mitigate the effects of climate change by sharing Japan's "experience" and state-of-the-art technologies. It also reveals the GOJ's ambition to become a regional and global intellectual and technological leader as also argued by energy intellectuals such as Kashiwagi, Koyama and Son. In other words, this quote signals the existence of a shared "storyline"

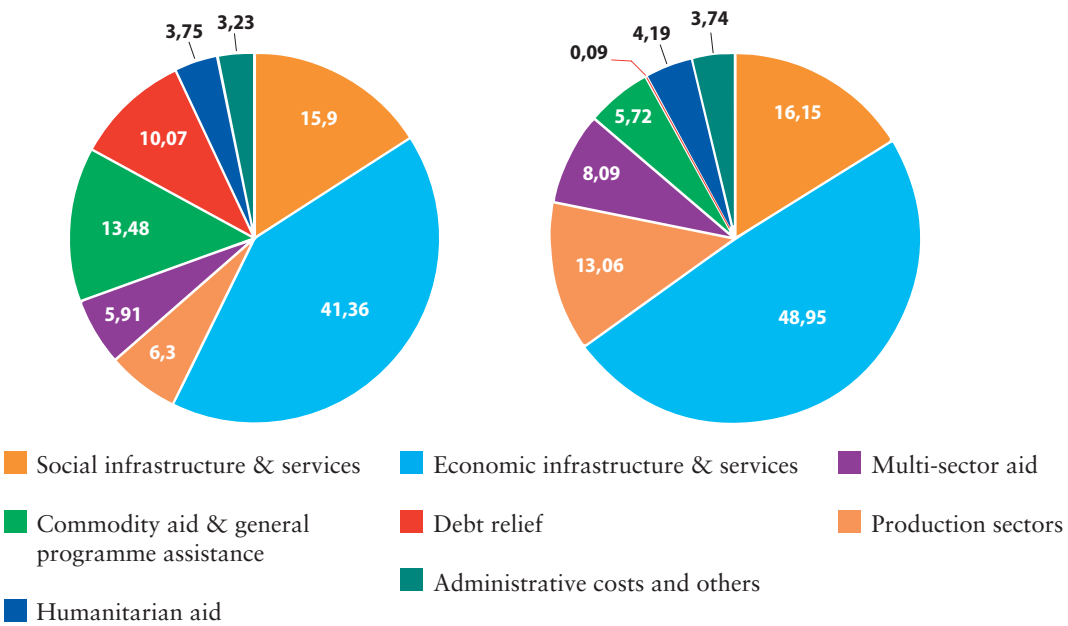
21 Member countries agreed to contain global warming within the 2°C threshold.

22 The private sector has been particularly responsive to this transition at the level of public discourse. Sumitomo Corporation, one of the largest Japanese trading companies, was among the actors that saw a business opportunity in the export of smart city technologies. In light of traumatic natural events such as the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami, as well as the emergence of global issues such as the constant increase in the global population, the uncontrolled growth of cities, ageing, the use of natural resources and so forth, in his 2012 inaugural address former Sumitomo president Katō Susumu encouraged his employees to work for "the realisation of the smart city toward a recycle-oriented society" and "the establishment of a new lifestyle in accordance with the ageing of many societies around the globe" in response to the "new needs" that societies around the globe will experience in the future (Katō 2012).

concerning the role that Japan must assume in order to help to solve global issues.

A key public actor in this process has been the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After its 2006 comprehensive reorganisation, the Japanese government opened a Climate Change Division within the International Cooperation Bureau in order to foster better cooperation with other ministries in charge of energy and environmental issues, specifically the METI and the Ministry of Environment. In September 2015, the Ministry appointed a ministerial advisor to support MOFA's activities in "science and technology diplomacy", signalling the growing importance of this sector to the country's international cooperation efforts. Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio nominated materials engineer and University of Tokyo Professor Kishi Teruo for the post. Kishi is another pre-eminent member of the Strategic Innovation Promotion Program, in charge of two programmes: Structural Materials for Innovation and Materials Integration for revolutionary design system of structural materials. In his function as scientific advisor to the FM, in addition to organising conferences and study groups with scientists and experts of all fields, Kishi took part in several international summits contributing to ministry network-building activities. He also helped to draft strategy papers, such as a "roadmap" on technological innovation for SDG achievement later adopted at the 2017 G20 summit meeting in Osaka (MOFA 2019a).

Figure 1: Distribution of Bilateral ODA by Sector, in per cent (2013 vs 2017)



Source: Compiled by author based on data from MOFA 2014a and 2018a

In particular, the promotion of smart-city solutions to ODA recipient countries has intensified. This development can be traced by studying Japan's ODA disbursements before and after 2015. In 2013, 40% of the total outlay of 17.3 billion dollars in bilateral aid was allocated to economic infrastructure and services (comprising energy and transportation) and 10% to multi-sector aid (i.e., environmental protection). In 2017, the ratio was up in both sectors, by 51% and 15%, respectively.

One of the tasks of the ministry is to contribute to the country's national security (and specifically energy security) by gathering information from across the globe, using its network of embassies and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) branches. Its initiatives in the energy sector constitute the so-called "energy diplomacy" (*enerugī gaikō*; MOFA 2019b). Japan's foreign ministry acts in accordance with the national energy strategy, summarised in the expression 3E+S, i.e., Energy Security, Energy Efficiency, Environment, plus Safety. The MOFA undertakings are, however, concentrated on the contribution to the UN-led global effort against climate change and on support for the improvement of global access to energy. According to a 2019 pamphlet, between 2013 and 2017, the ministry invested nearly 13.5 billion dollars in energy-related cooperation (the largest donor among OECD countries), 3 billion of which has been in renewables (MOFA 2019: 4). Since 2017, FM Kōno Tarō, previously a detractor of LDP's conservative energy policies after 3/11, has promoted a more comprehensive diplomatic approach to environmental issues. For instance, at the International Renewable Energy summit in 2018, Kōno specified that he was committed to making Japan a global leader in the global energy shift toward renewables such as solar power and to electric mobility thanks to the country's advancement in battery technologies (Kōno 2018: 2).[23]

As opposed to other Ministries, however, the MOFA does not have a specific document or a specific interpretation of smart cities. The ministry's position regarding this issue emerges from a wide range of documents, such as joint statements, conference reports, speeches and press releases available on the MOFA's website.

Since 2011, Japan's foreign ministry has been building a network of cooperation agreements with international partners, in particular from the Eurozone (MOFA 2013, 2014b), Russia (MOFA 2014c) and India (MOFA 2016a) for the development and application of environment-friendly technologies in cities. Furthermore, the GOJ and its agencies (JICA and Japan External Trade Organization [JETRO], in particular) figure among the dialogue partners for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) regional sustainable urbanisation

23 It is worth considering that since the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident, Kōno has been one of the strongest supporters of renewables inside the LDP (Kōno 2010). Another resister has been absorbed into the hegemonic discourse.

strategy (ASEAN 2018) and as supporters of specific smart city projects in continental Southeast Asia under the framework of the ASEAN Smart City Network (Centre for Liveable Cities 2018).[24] JETRO operates in ASEAN countries in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme in order to match local governments' demands for digital innovation with Japanese tech companies' solutions in the sector. The smart-city model has in fact become synonymous with sustainable and resilient urban development and is envisaged as a solution to developing countries' demand for infrastructure in line with achievement of the SDGs (PMO 2019: 25).

This is consistent with the ministry's overall strategy, in particular concerning international cooperation. According to the 2015 Diplomatic Bluebook, one of the priorities of the MOFA's overseas actions is to foster "quality growth". This expression points to a shift from a quantitative to a qualitative model of aid. In particular, the definition of quality growth promoted by the MOFA entails the concepts of "sustainability", "harmony with the environment" and "resilience", specifically against "shocks" such as economic crises and natural disasters. Moreover, it is fundamentally rooted in Japanese experience, i.e., in the country's postwar "miracle" (Zappa 2018: 424).

As of 2018, the GOJ through its overseas agencies such as JICA and JETRO contributes to and leads smart projects overseas under its numerous international cooperation agreements. The most relevant of these are: a) the development of a dedicated freight railway along the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial corridor; b) the development of a new central railway station in Bangkok and the "smart"-ification of its surroundings; c) the Hanoi smart city project, involving more than 20 companies including Sumitomo Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy, focused on self-driving electric mobility and energy-efficient housing and business facilities; d) the Philippines' smart city project in New Clark City, a special economic zone in the Northern Philippines, funded through the Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport & Urban Development (PMO 2018).

Apart from being an attempt to differentiate Japan from emerging donors such as China, the ideas of "quality growth" and "quality aid" through sustainability are particularly significant in the post-3/11 environment. In March 2012, less than a year after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, the MOFA, along with the METI and the Ministry of the Environment, hosted an international seminar on "smart community proposals for reconstructing the disaster-affected areas". On that occasion, the then UN general secretary Ban Ki-moon sent a message promoting "sustainable energy for all". As publicised

24 Specifically, JICA is working with the Yangon City Development Committee in Myanmar on the construction of a "pedestrian friendly" road network that will help to preserve and enhance historical buildings and monuments. Concurrently, JICA is working on the new Phnom Penh municipal Urban Transport Master Plan 2035, aimed at implementing the Cambodian capital's public transportation service (CLC 2018: 20, 45).

on the MOFA website, the ultimate aim of the event was to "gather global wisdom in Tōhoku, and spread a new Tōhoku community model to the world" (MOFA 2012a). In so doing, the participants pledged to provide "solutions to the international community's challenges such as realising sustainability, disaster prevention and a low-carbon society". At this international conference, the GOJ started envisioning a new model of sustainable and disaster-resilient urban development extensively relying on renewable energies, electric mobility and ITC infrastructure. The 3/11 incident, a man-made disaster, was reframed by the Japanese authorities themselves as a "lesson" whose main legacy was a new model of energy infrastructure and urban development.

Japan's public efforts towards building sustainable smart cities at home and abroad was clear in September 2012, when at the 14th Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, along with another 15 country representatives, the GOJ, after presenting Japan's achievements in smart city development and renewable energy use, pledged to continue acting towards the mitigation of the effects of climate change (MOFA 2012b). One month later, the MOFA, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), was among the participants in the 1st Asia Smart City Conference in Yokohama, an event that saw the participation of mayors and representatives from cities in developing Asia and international organisations engaged in a discussion of the technologies and know-how to build low-carbon sustainable cities. The event was also designed as a showcase for Yokohama's (one of METI's model "smart communities") cutting-edge initiatives and best practices (City of Yokohama 2012).

Subsequent editions of the conference saw a more direct involvement of the MOFA. In his keynote address at the 3rd edition of the event in 2014, Nakane Kazuyuki, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, hoped for more cooperation between the central government, local authorities and private companies to share experiences and know-how with partner countries, particularly from Asia, in order to foster more sustainable urban development in the region (MOFA 2014e). At the 5th edition of the conference in 2016, Odawara Kiyoshi, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, reaffirmed the MOFA's support for local governments and enterprises contributing to the development of smart cities across Asia (MOFA 2016).

The most relevant MOFA-led initiative in smart-city diplomacy is, however, the "city tour". Stressing the importance of exporting a smart-city model to developing Asia, in December 2014, the MOFA organised a tour of another model smart community, Kashiwa no ha (in Kashiwa City, Chiba Prefecture) for a group of Southeast Asian ambassadors to Japan. This tour was intended to present to the diplomatic community in Japan how Japan's public and private sectors had "united" (*kanmin ittai*) in environment-friendly and low-carbon-emission urban design. At the same time the tour aimed to promote interaction between foreign dignitaries and representatives of Japanese construction

and real-estate companies. The event was realised in cooperation with Mitsui Fudōsan, Shimizu Corporation and Mitsubishi Estate. In particular, the visit to the Kashiwa no ha smart city is worth analysing, as the urban project is presented as being focused on environmental sustainability (*kankyō kyōsei*), health care for longevity (*kenkō chōju*), the creation of new industries (*shin sangyō sōzō*) and civic participation (MOFA 2014d). Since 2013, in fact, Kashiwa no ha has served as the main exhibition site of made-in-Japan solutions for smart-city technology. Here, the MOFA in collaboration with the real-estate branch of the Mitsui conglomerate and the Agency has organised annual presentations to the entire diplomatic corps aimed at circulating models of cutting-edge urban technologies realised through the cooperation between private and public actors both within and outside of Japan, and fostering awareness of the application of ICT to urban development. The first such event in 2013 was hosted inside the smart city and its programme involved a visit to the Kashiwa no ha Smart City Museum, where diplomats were instructed on Japanese smart-city initiatives with the support of virtual reality applications.

In addition to smart cities, since 2014, the "city tour" programme has also served to showcase events in high-tech infrastructure and ICT-based construction and manufacturing projects for the diplomatic community in Tokyo, with particular attention to South Asian, Southeast Asian and African diplomats. The initiative's main aim has been to promote "high-quality infrastructure" (*shitsu no takai infura*) among the representatives of Japan's ODA recipient countries (MOFA 2016b, MOFA 2018b). Apart from their declared diplomatic objectives, these showcasing events are emblematic of the "All Japan" approach – that is, uniting the efforts of the national government, businesses and local governments, with development assistance sponsored by government and LDP officials (MOFA 2014d, PMO 2018).[25]

9. Summary

This paper has analysed the emergence of a Japanese narrative against the backdrop of a global discourse on smart cities since the late 2000s. The main theoretical assumption of this paper, inspired in particular by Jessop and Sum (2006, 2013), is that the articulation of a specific narrative coincides with a specific juncture (or disjuncture) in the real world. In particular we have ana-

25 It is worth noting that the expression "All Japan" is found in diverse circumstances. In documents issued by the LDP, it is associated with the word *taisei* ("system, approach") and describes a nation-wide network that needs to be "strengthened" in preparation for international events (such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics), or in implementing energy, information and economic development and recovery strategies. See for instance LDP 2016, PMO 2018.

lysed the emergence of a specific discourse coalition revolving around the idea of a technological nation that, having gone through a traumatic event such as the 3/11 disaster, has the duty to solve global issues by providing material aid and knowledge to developing countries.

The first half of the paper has shed light on the building of a Japanese narrative on the smart city in light of global discursive developments. The largely technocratic approach and the insistence on concepts such as efficiency are revealing of the inclusion of a corporate approach to city management. Following Hollands (2015), it is possible to argue that the 2007–2008 financial crisis that originated in the US and spread to Western Europe has contributed to reshaping the global imagery of urban settlements. Recent developments in ICTs, in particular, have laid the foundations for a greater application of these technologies and for their valorisation as drivers of next-generation cities. This is a story-line around which discourse coalitions (mostly formed by government institutions and multinational tech companies' executives) have emerged at a global level, and the emergence of a smart city narrative in Japan cannot be detached from these global trends. Nevertheless, if on the one hand the Japanese discourse on smart cities is structured around key concepts such as "sustainability", "efficiency" and quality of life, on the other hand, in light of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear accident, it has assumed distinctive features.

First, as noted by DeWit (2014, 2015 and 2018) and arising from the discussions by energy-policy intellectuals of the late 2000s, the Japanese smart-city model is primarily centred on energy supply and consumption aimed at reducing the carbon footprint, rather than, for instance, crime prevention. This approach is clear in official energy policies adopted before and after 2011 and is tied to Japanese policymakers' continual efforts to find ways to secure the country's energy supply in the event of massive disruptions due to natural disasters or geopolitical events.

Second, when considered as a diplomatic tool, the smart city carries in itself traces of technological nationalism. In other words, the smart city is often no more than an occasion for showcasing technologies designed and/or manufactured in Japan that might help to advance the GOJ's foreign policy objectives, namely, advancing Japan's national interests (i.e., supporting Japanese companies abroad) and showing Japan's commitment to the international community's targets in terms of development and mitigation of the effects of climate change on human society. Specifically, Japan's foreign ministry is particularly keen on utilising the smart city model as an epitome of its "quality"-focused aid policies (centred on quality infrastructure, green technologies and human resource development) in opposition to other emerging actors in international cooperation (i.e., China) who are approaching developing countries.

In this, the convergence of state and private interests is particularly evident and elucidatory of the "distributional coalition" identified by Berndt (2018).

Lastly, the analysis has shown the general lack of consideration of social issues (such as poverty or social inequality) among all actors involved in narrative articulation when presenting the idea of the smart city. The "technocratic" approach is apparent, both domestically and in overseas projects. Despite their possible positive outcomes in reducing Japan's carbon footprint through efficient energy and space utilisation (DeWit 2013, 2015; OECD 2017) smart-city projects both on the Japanese archipelago and abroad are mostly top-down initiatives at the intersection of government, universities and industry interests. In fact, many calls for a more inclusive approach toward citizen groups, NGOs, local shop owners and so forth, right from the project design phase, have been repeated in recent years (see DeWit 2013 and in particular EY 2014). However, further research is needed to determine whether and how bottom-up counter-narratives on the smart city have been integrated or rejected in the evolution of the dominant narrative projected by the GOJ and Japanese tech companies. The absence of clear preoccupations with the social aspect of any urban projects is all the more noticeable in light of growing public concern about these issues and reports by international organisations stressing the increase in relative poverty (16 percent) and inequality (0.330 percent, above the 0.309 OECD average) in Japan in the last three decades (see OECD Economic Survey of 2012 in OECD 2017).

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An Enchanted Modern: Urban Cultivation in Shanghai

Anna Greenspan, Francesca Tarocco

Abstract

China is in the midst of the fastest and largest process of urbanisation in history. Alongside the dynamism of the region's hyperdense cities, however, are alarming levels of air pollution, recurrent stories of toxic food, contaminated waterways and intensifying popular protests concerning polluting factories and plants. Issues surrounding a sustainable urban ecology have thus become paramount in the construction of Asia's metropolitan future. This paper, which focuses particularly on the Shanghai region, suggests that the ideas and practices of "cultivation" might be of value in the creation and imagination of a future ecological metropolis. We examine self-cultivation concretely, as a set of situated embodied practices in specific places and specific historical conditions. We also explore the abstract conceptual idea, by looking at how the modern philosopher Mou Zongsan articulated the idea of "cultivation" as a guide for life. Ultimately, we are interested in how the embodied cultural practices of cultivation can be harnessed as a strategy of re-enchantment, with the power to reconfigure urban nature in the Chinese megacity of the 21st century.

Keywords: cultivation, Shanghai, modernity, practice, urbanism

1. An enchanted modern: urban cultivation

At 8am in Shanghai's Nanjing Road, the giant commercial metropolis pulses with the frenzied congestion of early morning rush hour. In a central park right outside Jing'an Temple, an altogether different urban rhythm greets the day. Inside Jing'an Park the city is alive with the practice of ritual. At the front of the central axis, where the park meets the road, half-faded Chinese charac-

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ters are melting in the sun; these are the traces left by the water calligrapher, who has already been and gone.[1] A few paces in, in the shade of a garden pavilion (*ting* 停), an elderly couple vigorously rub their ear lobes to awaken the *qi* (氣) vital energy. All along the winding path and spreading around its central pond, several other park users – by themselves, with their teachers or in groups – practise all forms of *wushu* (武術), martial arts.[2] Some stand around a tape recorder as the voice calls out the moves, others await instruction from their masters who are practising in front of them. Some remain standing still, opening their hands to the sky or placing them on a point below the navel known as *dantian* (丹田 or "elixir field"), regarded as the root of the body's *qi*.[3]

Not far from Jing'an Temple, another one of the city's downtown parks awakens to its daily practices. At Fuxing Park, a verdant enclave located in the former French Concession, early morning *wushu* practitioners are accompanied by a host of pet owners who lovingly bring their birds out for an airing. They hang their cages on a cluster of branches, while they gather below for a chat and listen to the birds' songs. Later on, choir members assemble to belt out old propaganda songs from their youth; musicians hide in the bushes to practise their scales; dancers congregate at both dawn and dusk to tap, swing and waltz amongst the trees. The afternoon brings kite-fliers, card-players and tea-drinkers, as well as the old men who skilfully manipulate diabolos, swinging them back and forth, catching them in the air and circling them around their bodies like a hula hoop.[4]

While these activities may look like mere forms of entertainment taking place in a global secular city, we want to suggest, instead, that they be treated as the everyday ritual practices of an enchanted modernity. In Maoist China, the political rituals of mass mobilisation went a long way toward suppressing and replacing religious rituals.[5] In recent years, however, there has been a strong growth of religious practices concerned with individual lives, hopes and wishes, and a growing interest in nature and the environment. In cities, there is a great and varied religious life. Religious traditions and new religions have also become the focus of cultural, tourism and heritage projects.[6] Taken together, this contemporary religious renewal suggests that, alongside the top-

1 On water calligraphy see Zito 2014.

2 On the genealogy of the Chinese martial arts see Shahar 2008.

3 The representation of the Chinese body has been the subject of many studies. Angela Zito, Tani Barlow, Judith Farquhar, Eva Kit Wah Man and Ari Larissa Heinrich, in particular, have focused on several distinct aspects, namely, aesthetics, ethics, politics, sexuality, genre, biopolitics. On the birth of modern *qigong*, see for example Kohn 2002, Penny 1993 and Palmer 2007. On the institutionalisation of Chinese medicine see Croizier 1968. For the meaning of these terms and related practices see Yokota 2014. For Daoist-inspired practices in modern China see Liu 2004.

4 These brief descriptions are based on the authors' ethnographic notes taken during several visits to the parks in downtown Shanghai during winter and spring of 2018.

5 For a sociological account of the Red Guard Movement, see Walder 2009.

6 For recent changes in the religious landscape of China see for example Chau 2005 and Tarocco 2019.

down planning and engineering of the modern metropolis, there are growing processes of re-enchantment, in which the traditions of cultivation play an important part.

Figure 1: Wushu practitioners in Jing'an Park (Anna Greenspan, 2016)

In this paper, which focuses particularly on the Shanghai region in China, we explore the continued relevance of notions and practices of self-cultivation in the urban Sinosphere and suggest that they might be of value in the imagination of a future ecological metropolis. We articulate the concepts and practices of urban cultivation by focusing on three main areas. First, we examine self-cultivation concretely, as a set of situated embodied practices in specific places and specific historical conditions. We examine the embodied practices of self-cultivation as understood in Daoist and medical traditions that are still influential today. By treating the body as a site composed by the flow and blockages of *qi*, Daoist inner alchemists cultivate a microcosmic attunement to the constitutive force within Chinese cosmology. Second, we look at self-cultivation in the context of the writings of the influential philosopher Mou Zongsan (牟宗三, 1909–1995). As did other leading Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, Mou sought to place historical Chinese cultural forms within the discourse of modernity rather than attribute the rise in the world of "modern" forms to Western powers alone. In contrast to the

Chinese discourse of modernisation embraced by the culture of the May Fourth Movement, Mou viewed the ethics of cultivation as a critical contribution to modern times. Third, we explore some physical spaces of cultivation, namely the gardens of the Jiangnan region (江 南, lit. "south of the river"). Jiangnan extends from the large metropolitan areas of Shanghai and Nanjing to the older urban centres of Suzhou, Hangzhou, Wuxi and Ningbo, all of which abound with urban gardens. The cultivation of the garden – its landscaped spaces, trees, rocks, waterways and pavilions – complicates the notion that nature in its ideal state is wild, unspoilt and opposed to cultural construction. Rather, in viewing nature (including human nature) as improved or enhanced by cultivation, the ethic embodied in the gardens of Southern China offers new ways of imagining the nature of cities. In the end, we turn from the urban gardens of Jiangnan to consider the modern urban park, focusing in particular on Shanghai's most central park in Jing'an district. While it is generally regarded as a public area shaped by the forces of secular modernity, the everyday rituals in Jing'an Park can also be seen as a form of religious re-enchantment attuned to Buddhist soteriologies and spaces of cultivation. The reanimation of the "buddhascapes" of modern Shanghai, we conclude, opens up new ways of conceptualising Chinese modernity and its approach to urban nature.

Our paper stems out of a larger research project, which questions the progressive temporal underpinnings of modernity in China. It excavates an alternative undercurrent, which challenges the divide between humans and nonhumans, nature and culture. Navigating between these dichotomies, it diffuses rigid categories into a "natureculture" (Haraway 2003) that is bound together in a web of reciprocal influence.[7] In order to do this, we engage from a philosophical, aesthetic and historical perspective with notions of self-cultivation and the disciplines of the "cultivation of life" (*yangsheng* 養生). We look at self-cultivation as a conceptual ideal and as a set of situated embodied cultural practices, which have been enabled by specific places and specific historical conditions and which are now harnessed in urban daily life. *Yangsheng*, a rich and multifaceted tradition, is alive and well in the everyday life of contemporary Chinese cities (see also Zito 2014 and Farquhar 2005). Our project examines the work of cultivation in several case studies that envision the nature of the future metropolis. We will look at urban farming and architecture; in particular the new urbanism project "Edible Cities". We will also analyse artistic practices that engage with self-cultivation, including those of Hong Lei 洪磊 and Zheng Bo 鄭波.[8] Hong Lei revisits the aesthetics of garden stones in his haunting black-and-white photographs *Taihu Stones* (太湖石, 2006). Zheng, meanwhile, inspired by the Neoconfucian thinker Wang Yangming and his

7 Our views on cultural conceptions of nature have been especially influenced by Nash 2014 and Elvin 2010.

8 For Zheng Bo's practices see http://zhengbo.org/index.html; for Hong Lei see http://www.chambersfineart.com/artists/hong-lei/cv?view=slider#13 (accessed June 2019).

practice of *gewu zhizhi* (格物致知, literally "to obtain knowledge by investigating the nature of things"), makes art that involves living with and learning from plants. Crucially, in his continuing engagement with Shanghai, Zheng's projects have been particularly focused on weeds. Perhaps, he provocatively suggests, it is the non-cultivated that can guide us towards the novel urban "gardens" of today.

Figure 2: The artist Zheng Bo (by courtesy of Zheng Bo, 2018)

2. Shanghai

With a population of more than 25 million, Shanghai is one of the largest municipalities in the world. It is also at the forefront of the most intense process of urbanisation in history.[9] The city's ongoing monumental transformation – the construction of almost twenty new subway lines, dozens of museums, skyscrapers, bridges and roads – is occurring in conjunction with an increasing mobilisation around environmental concerns. Alarming levels of air pollution, recurrent stories of toxic food and water, and predictions of serious flooding have all ensured that questions of a sustainable urban ecology have become

9 For a recent survey of Shanghai as a global city see Wasserstrom 2012, and the monumental multivolume history of Shanghai (Shanghai Tongshi 1999).

paramount in the construction of China's new cities. In the past two decades, Shanghai has sought to address these concerns by building a vast public transport system and embarking on a series of ambitious projects to clean the waterways. In keeping with its status as "National Garden City", it has continued to expand its green spaces. The Shanghai Master Plan (2017–2035) has outlined strategies for a "sponge city", to mitigate the impact of climate change.[10] Much of the discourse surrounding these modernising projects still appears to draw upon models of environmentalism based on the conception of an externalised nature. This is manifest both in the presupposition that nature can be managed and controlled by planning and infrastructure and, alternatively, in the myth of an untrammelled nature that exists in opposition to the culture of modern urban life.

It would be a mistake to think that these ecological assumptions can simply be explained away as problematic Western imports. The idea of nature as an object of cultural control is also found in the philosophies and ecologies of the Chinese world. Ruthless human interventions are part of the Chinese historical record as much as they are part of the European one. According to Mark Elvin, a certain amount of environmental degradation already took place between the tenth and fourteenth century in the context of remarkable advancement in agricultural productivity, urbanisation and mechanisation. The destruction of forests, soils and wildlife habitats reached its nadir during the population explosion of the late-imperial period, especially in the most technically advanced regions of the country (Elvin 2004: 6–7). Here, then, we are not postulating that certain specific Chinese ideas and perceptions of the natural environment can be considered a critical factor in explaining how the Chinese have actually used the resources of nature. Recognising these historical complexities, our project does not naively advocate for a return to a romanticised past.

Robert Weller confirms this scepticism towards an inherent ahistorical ecological sensitivity. He notes that both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan in the post-war period echoed Japan under the Meiji restoration of the late 19th century in that they adhered strictly to a purely utilitarian approach to the natural environment in the name of economic progress. They were indifferent to the destruction of nature by the process of industrialisation. A hallmark of the Meiji regime, this attitude also characterised both the nationalist and communist governments of China throughout the twentieth century. The slogans Maoists used to promote large-scale highly invasive infrastructure, including giant dams, best encapsulate this mentality: "Man Must Conquer Nature" and "Battling with Nature is Boundless Joy". Policy makers did not

10 See planning documents provided by the Shanghai Municipal People's Government, Shanghai Scientific and Technical Publishers, 2017. For a study on how the imagination of Shanghai contributes to reshaping our collective human futures see Greenspan 2014.

show any signs of an environmental consciousness or sensitivity to the fundamental importance of nature, Weller argues, before the middle of the 1980s. It is only then that China and Taiwan witness the creation of national parks and the rise of so-called "nature tourism".[11]

3. Embodied practices

Nevertheless, embodied practice survives. In imperial times, salvation, transcendence, longevity and the creation of an immortal body were for centuries key to practices and discourses of self-cultivation (*xiulian* 修煉, but also *xiuxing* 修行 or "individual cultivation"). The term *xiushen* 修身 refers specifically to cultivating the body in the sense of cultivating one's entire person. In Daoist inner alchemy, "nature", as it extends to the body, is the primary subject of cultivation (Pregadio 2005, Yokota 2014). In his book *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (2002), Shigehisa Kuriyama brings to our attention two images of the human body, one taken by the medical text *Routes of the Fourteen Meridians and their Functions* (*Shisijing fahui* 十四經發揮, 1341) by Hua Shou 滑壽, a Chinese physician, and the second taken by Vesalius's[12] *Fabrica* (1543). The striking distinction between a body marked by muscular structure versus one governed by the points of acupuncture that trace the flow of *qi* vividly demonstrates the difference in the perception of the human body between these two medical practices and their attending cosmologies.

Throughout his book, Kuriyama eloquently shows that one of the main reasons for this difference was that, in their understanding of the human body, Western physicians typically used a zoological model, where Chinese doctors looked instead to the world of plants. "Greek anatomy, we know, revolved around animals: not only were they the victim of most dissections, but the very idea of dissection owed much to curiosity about their organizing logic. A major inspiration for inquiry into musculature, moreover, was the desire to illuminate the secrets of animation, to clarify the wonderful capacity for self-movement which made animals, including human animals, distinct from plants" (Kuriyama 2002: 191). The Chinese science of the body, on the other hand, is rooted in an agricultural system that "has always been lopsided in favor of grain production, with animal husbandry playing a subsidiary role" (ibid.: 187). The world of vegetation rather than nonhuman animals was the preferred model for an understanding of embodiment. This vegetative per-

11 See Weller 2004: 2–12, 49–53, 64–101. On Japan see Morris-Suzuki 1991.

12 Andreas van Wessel, or Vesalius, was a Flemish anatomist and author of the famous text *De humani corporis fabrica* (*On the Fabric of the Human Body*).

spective offers a more diffuse and porous conception of corporeality, one which is not based on the rigid distinctions between organs and body parts. The genius of plants, as biologist Stefano Mancuso has written, offers a model of sensitivities and intelligence that is flat and distributed, rather than specialised and centralised (Mancuso 2017). Chinese religious practitioners had a practical orientation to their embodiment, engaging with a variety of techniques in their search for individual salvation, health and longevity. By the tenth century, their practices included meditation practices, breathing methods, ingestion of herbal and other drugs, a large variety of ritual or divinatory practices, as well as the sets of gymnastics and bodily postures known as *daoyin* (導引). Among these methods, we also find the breathing practices and alchemy known in the Daoist tradition as *waidan* (外丹 external alchemy, lit. "external elixir") and *neidan* 內丹 (internal alchemy, lit. "internal elixir"). After the Song period (960–1279), Neidan became influential outside Daoism, and in the late-imperial period, it was integrated into various aspects of Chinese culture.[13]

Both medical and Daoist texts keenly explore the basic constituents of the macrocosm and the microcosm. All natural phenomena are seen as a reverberation of *qi*, the underlying constitutive force within Chinese cosmology. *Qi* is at the centre of Chinese cosmologies and epistemologies of the body and its natural surroundings from the very beginning, and in a systematic way since the third century BCE. The body is understood as a physiological entity made up of the triad *qi*, *shen* (神, a manifestation of the "spirits") and *jing* (精, "essences", which may also refer to the refined *qi*). Other key terms include the dynamics of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) and the theory of the "five phases" (*wu xing* 五行, namely water, fire, metal, wood and earth). *Dao* (道, lit. "way") and *li* (理 or "pattern, principle") are two other key concepts. This system, in its several historical variants and reconfigurations, combines both material and metaphysical concerns. It compounds ideas on the body (*ti* 體), the "heart-mind" (*xin* 心), and the realm in which human beings exist (Pregadio 2005, Yokota 2014, Elvin 2010). The term used today as an equivalent of the English word "nature" is the older term *ziran* (自然; "that which is so of itself").

Importantly, nature is treated as humans' greater self. Historically, tombs, temples and cities were sited in relation to waters and mountains and according to the position of the sun. These geomantic practices (*fengshui* 風水) were systematised and aligned with official cosmology. Xun Liu argues in his *Daoist Modern*, a study of the already metropolitan city of Shanghai during the Republican era (1912–1949), that the Daoist inner alchemy revival movement actively participated in China's path of modernisation. Practitioners infused cultivation toward immortality with issues pertinent to their identity as Chi-

13 For Daoist ideas and practices of internal alchemy see Yokota 2014 and Pregadio 2005. For Chinese medicine see Hsu 2008; for Daoism in modern China see Liu 2009 and Chen 1995.

nese urban elites of their time. Thanks to their efforts, Daoist cultivation methods continue to be of relevance for the rest of the Chinese society (Liu 2009).

4. Alternative modernities

In the early twentieth century, the merits of cultivation were spread not only through embodied practices but also through philosophical discourse. Mou Zongsan's Buddhist-inspired New Confucianism sees conceptions of cultivation as a critical contribution to the modern thought of Immanuel Kant. His writings contain one of the most conceptually rich articulations of the concept of self-cultivation in modern times. Mou roots his ideas in a Chinese philosophical lineage – which he himself constructs – that maintains that access to the world beyond appearances, to "things as they are in themselves" is possible through practice. He elaborates this philosophical project through an engagement with transcendental philosophy. Mou translated all three of Kant's critiques, an enormously complex exercise that drove him to think through and borrow from Confucian, Daoist and, most of all, Buddhist doctrine and terminology. His response to Kant, whom he placed at the "climax of Western philosophy" (Billioud 2012: 9) was to posit a conception of human reason that went beyond transcendental limits and opened up to an exterior plane. Crucially, this access to a realm outside the boundaries of the subject occurred not through faith, as it did for Kant, but instead, through embodied practice. "The nexus of Mou Zongsan's philosophy," contends Sebastien Billioud "is the affirmation of a possible practical knowledge of the noumenal world. [… In] his vertical philosophical system," he explains, "the underlying ideal is the possibility of becoming a sage (in Confucianism), a Buddha (in Buddhism), or a divine being (in Daoism). Such an ideal is attainable by everyone through practice" (Billioud 2012: 56).

> Confucian moral cultivation (*xiuyang* 修養) is practice; Daoist cultivation (*xiulian* 修煉) is practice; Buddhist precept, concentration, and wisdom (*jie ding hui* 戒定慧) is practice […] Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism […] affirm practice as a way of becoming divine (*chengshen* 成神). (Mou 2014: 77)

Mou maintains that practical reason lies in the domain of morality. "China's Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism," he writes "all emphasize moving through practice to reach the highest good" (Mou 2014: 94). For him, morality is not determined as a universal law. Instead, it is best understood as an ethic or even an aesthetic. Practice culminates in the ideal of cultivation. "The cornerstone of Mou's moral metaphysics (which – let us repeat – is a practical and moral approach of the universe's ultimate reality)," concurs Billioud, "is

gongfu" (or the practice of self-cultivation) (Billioud 2012: 197). Like Michel Foucault's notion of the "art of life",[14] a philosophy of cultivation views thought not merely as a means of understanding the world, but as instead offering guidance on "a way to live". Cultivation does not promise theoretical knowledge. It does not represent the world. As a form of practical rather than cognitive knowledge, "*gongfu* focuses on 'life' 生命 (i.e. self-cultivation and self-transformation) rather than on 'nature' 自然 (i.e. knowledge of the world)" (Billioud 2012: 10). Mou calls this *shengming de xuewen* 生命的學問 or "existential learning", explains Clower, and contends that its fundamental concern is "how to regulate our lives, conduct our lives, and settle our lives" (Clower 2014: 9).

Mou Zongsan's new Confucianism was an important part of the countercurrent to the radical progressivism that has tended to dominate the intellectual life of modern China (Furth 1976, Makeham 2003). Yet, calling upon the philosophy of cultivation was in no way meant as an attempt to flee from the modern world. Rather, in the Chinese ideal of practice, and from the vantage point of the luxuriant urban parks of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Mou saw the possibilities of regenerating and reworking traditions that might usher in an alternative modernity.

5. From gardens to city parks: urban garden as practice

Practices of cultivation are rooted in, and inspired by, particular locales. In urban settings the primary site is the garden. Gardens have been cultivated as places of practice from at least as early as the late Ming period. Literati life centred on the garden as the locus of self-cultivation; a place that was particularly conducive to elite sociality, composing and reading poetry, playing and listening to music, drinking tea and entertaining friends. In his book *The Chinese Garden*, Joseph Wang quotes at length from the Qing scholar Chen Haozi 陈浩子 (born around 1612/1615) whose text *Huajing* (花鏡 or "Mirror of Flowers") records in exquisite detail daily life as it unfolds in each of the garden's different seasons. Wang calls it an "autobiography of a leisurely life". Here is Chen's account of a typical summer's day:

> Summer
>
> As soon as I got up early in the morning, I put on a lotus-leaf quilt as clothing and breathed the moist fresh air of the blossoming trees, at the same time singing and reciting verses of poetry as a way to teach the parrot to speak. During late morning, I casually read parts of Laozi and Zhuangzi, or practiced brush strokes patterned after famous calligraphers in the past. At noon, I took off my headscarf, hung it up over a cliff, and

14 See Foucault 1997 and Davidson 1994.

> then sat around a bamboo couch with close friends to discuss the scholarly work of *Qixie* and *Shanhai jing*. When tired, I took a nap and enjoyed a good dream. Thereafter, we had coconut and other fruit as snack and lotus flower wine as beverage. After taking a bath in the evening, I went boating and fishing amongst the wine-lined winding rivulet. (Chen Haozi in Wang 1998: 24)

This sense of a cultivated life within the garden structures all aspects of the physical landscape and guides the conception of nature that the garden is meant to evoke. In the introduction to her book *The Chinese Garden*, Maggie Keswick writes about radically differing cultural attitudes to lawns. In the West, she argues, the lawn functions as a "formalized representation of grassy meadows" that has behind it "the weight of the whole pastoral tradition" (Keswick 2003: 28). For Chinese rice growers, on the other hand, pastureland can only suggest the nomadic cattle raiser, the uncultivated barbarian. She tells of an educated Chinese gentleman visiting Europe in the 1920s who commented in amazement on a "mown and bordered lawn, which, while no doubt of interest to a cow, offers nothing to the intellect of a human being" (Keswick 2003: 28). The making of a garden can be seen as a form of practice that is based on the principle that nature is improved and enhanced by cultivation. Chinese gardens celebrate the mutual involvement of nature and culture, with bridges crossing streams, pagodas emerging from bamboo thickets and calligraphy decorating ornamental stones. The human element is integral to the garden, which is made for its visitors and organised in terms of the paths that traverse it. "The English," writes Keswick, "'plant' a garden, the Chinese 'build' one."[15]

The ideal of self-cultivation that is rooted in the construction of a garden is, as Joseph Wang notes, recorded in a variety of texts that outline the principles for the garden practitioner. Shen Fu (沈復 1708–1808) writes of the "art of deception" in garden design in his *Fusheng Liuji* (浮生六級 "Six Chapters of a Floating Life"), in the chapter entitled "The Little Pleasures of Life". Early 17th-century Qi Biaojia likens his practice as a gardener to a physician, general and painter rolled into one. He advises adding to space when it seems too empty, subtracting when it seems too full, levelling it when it seems too uneven, creating bends and unevenness when it seems too flat. "It is like a good doctor in the field curing a patient, using both nourishing and excitative medicines, or like a good general in the field, using both normal and surprise tactics," he writes. "Again, it is like a master painter at his work, not allowing a single dead stroke" (Qi Biaojia in Wang 1994: 35).

In the garden, culture and nature are seen as "naturally" interwoven. Architecture in the shape of the pavilion (*ting*), which serves to frame and focus

15 Keswick's cultural opposition is perhaps too facile. One might argue that there are plenty of "built gardens" in the European context. Nevertheless, the contrast between a garden based on a romantic ideal of an untrammelled nature that is reproduced in an urban setting versus the cultivated aesthetic of the Jiangnan garden is a powerful one.

nature, as well as offer a shelter and resting place, is an essential part of garden design. In the classical gardens of the Jiangnan region, pavilions dot the landscape – they are designed and placed so as to maximise meditation on a site that is particularly admired: a lake, the moon, the mountains. Keswick quotes the saying: "Once a place has a *ting* we can say we have a garden" (Keswick 2003: 132). Gardens are given a name and the most valued spaces are typically marked by calligraphic written interventions. "For the scholar-gardener, his most cherished goal was to be able to use his creation as a vehicle to embody and convey to beholders a specific set of *shi qing hua yi* (詩情畫意, literally "poetic sentiments and artistic conceptions", Wang 1994: 45). This sense of gardens as both an inspiration and a site for artistic creation appears also in the intimate relationship between gardens and landscape paintings. As a practice of self-cultivation, leisurely enjoyment of culture amongst the rocks, trees and plants is itself a highest good. Thus, the urban "gardenscapes" reveal the specific relation between urban nature and cultivation of Jiangnan cities, from Suzhou to Shanghai.

In the contemporary city, leisurely enjoyment of urban green space has largely shifted from private gardens to public parks. For those outside the scholar elites, this transition has resulted in greater access to urban nature. This transformation, however, has also occurred in conjunction with an ideology of secularisation. In his essay, "From Imperial Gardens to Public Parks: The Transformation of Urban Space in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing", Mingzheng Shi traces the genealogy of the public park in China. He shows how the creation of public spaces was part of a secularising dynamic through which older religious sites were appropriated in the creation of the modern city. "The concept of the public park, where common people can go for relaxation and recreation," he writes, "is purely Western and modern" (Shi 1998: 225). The early twentieth century public park movement drew on modern secular notions of leisure and entertainment to construct the notion of a park as an area "set aside for recreation, education, or for the preservation and enjoyment of natural beauty" (ibid.: 225). The Republican government embraced parks as a strategy of modernisation. "Since public parks were something modern cities had," he writes, "China should also have them" (Shi 1998: 232).

During the Qing Dynasty, Beijing had a number of imperial gardens, but all were reserved for the ruling Manchu class. The inner city spaces open to visitors were situated around temples. These were popular during regularly held temple fairs that bustled with markets, amusements and entertainment. The transformation of the sacred spaces devoted to city gods and ancestral and local deities into the modern *gongyuan* (公园) was "filtered through Meiji Japan, which incorporated it from the West for town and city planning" (Shi 1998: 226) Evidence of this lineage is written into the language. Although the Chinese

term *gongyuan* had existed in the classical Chinese lexicon, it actually referred to official gardens or land owned by the government – something altogether quite different from the Western notion of the park as a public space. In Meiji Japan, however, the character compound *gongyuan* was borrowed by the Japanese to translate the modern European term "public park", implying public access and even public ownership and was subsequently re-introduced into the modern Chinese lexicon. By incorporating gongyuan into the city space, the modernising government, argues Shi, was attempting to create a new sense of urban identity and promote "people's health and ethics" in order to "reform the lifestyles of urban residents" (ibid.: 232).[16]

6. Disenchantment?

This transformation of the city's green spaces is motivated by a cluster of ideas linking secularisation, mechanism and modernity, which was famously described by Max Weber as the "disenchantment of the world". The modern city – where people "exercise" rather than engage in ritual practice, and where public parks replaced temples and gardens – is constructed as an external environment that has been stripped of magic and "disenchanted of its gods and demons" (Weber 2013: 290). In place of a magical atmosphere, modernity constructs a rational, intellectualised cosmos, which, for the first time, is capable of being measured, quantified and understood.

Charles Taylor builds on these Weberian ideas in his work *A Secular Age*. For Taylor, the great distinction between modern times and that of our ancestors of five hundred years ago "is that they lived in an 'enchanted' world, and we do not" (Taylor 2008). He explores this distinction by way of a shift from what he calls a "porous self" in which "the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not clearly drawn" (ibid.) to a "buffered" self in which thoughts, feelings and meanings occur within us. In the enchanted world, spirits and other external nonhuman agencies impacted us from the outside, bringing meaning to the world. Modern secularisation banishes these entities, leaving us alone in a passive world of mechanistic matter, or nature, that is firmly under our control.

Recent scholarship, however, has questioned the narrative of modern secularisation. Media scholars, for example, have shown that the emergence of electric technology is deeply intertwined with the occult revival of the late nineteenth century.[17] In his book *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, Jason A. Josephson-Storm goes

16 See also Chen 1995 and Brownell 1995.

17 See Sconce 2000 and Stolow 2013.

so far as to challenge the idea that modernity is based on a disenchanted nature by arguing that disenchantment is itself a myth, which arose within a profoundly magical milieu (Josephson-Storm 2017). Most critical, for us, are the feminist "new materialists" who counter "Weber's disenchantment tale".[18] Jane Bennett makes a powerful case for an "enchanted materialism", which rejects the distinction between passive matter and vital life. By remaining attuned to the "liveliness of nonhuman matter" this philosophical orientation leaves room for a "state of wonder" and "an element of surprise". A conception of modernity, which "is always already filled with lively and enchanting, albeit non-purposive forces", Bennett argues, allows for "a contemporary world sprinkled with natural and cultural sites that have the power to 'enchant'" (Bennett 2013: 3). For Bennett this "mood of enchantment" has profound implications for an ethical life. "The very characterization of the world as disenchanted," she warns, "ignores and then discourages affective attachment to that world" (Bennett 2001: 3).

7. Chinese cities between enchantment and disenchantment

In the contemporary urban Sinosphere one can witness the continued relevance of self-cultivation. Public parks, for instance, are intended as secular spaces devoid of any enchantment. Celebrated as strategic spaces to "green the city", they are offered to citizens as places to exercise and relax with family and friends. And yet, if one looks closer, ideas related to self-cultivation shape the lives of many park users. If one visits gardens and parks in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong or Taipei during the early morning hours, one will always encounter groups of people practicing *taijiquan* or *qigong* – in the hope of improving their health, increasing their mental and physical powers and attaining to higher spiritual states. Singing, dancing, calligraphy, photography, keeping birds and fish, playing musical instruments, as well as diet and nutrition, constitute some of the practices of today's *yangsheng*. "In Beijing nowadays one sees life being cultivated wherever there is a little open space," write Farquhar and Zhang (2005: 306). Farquhar and Zhang are interested in the ways in which these everyday practices operate at a "micropolitical" level to "craft non-confrontational responses" to the power of the State. In this, they are also attentive to the "pleasures offered by *yangsheng*". In the play and friendships of practitioners, they see novel formations of civil society "emerging in the parks and vacant lots where yangsheng takes place" (Farquhar / Zhang 2005: 313). This collective culture is not directed by the politics of resistance, but is focused instead on the "collective crafting of the good life".

18 For more on New Materialism see Coole / Frost 2010.

In her documentary *Writing on Water*, Angela Zito records a group of seniors who gather in a park to practice the art and ethic of water calligraphy. In her ethnographic reflections, Zito writes of the park as a "third place", a space that is "not fundamentally organized by the state, family obligations, or new commodified forms of work and consumption" (Zito 2014: 13). Instead, the community that gathers to write in the park transforms the secular space by opening a space for the sacred. With joy, humour, beauty and enchantment, they embody a "*gongfu*, or a *yangsheng* (life cultivation) practice". Such practices, writes Zito, "entail a politics, whether they seem to or not: the art and politics of the everyday" (Zito 2014: 19).

Ethnographic evidence suggests that Chinese embodied traditions still involve, in some way or another, harnessing the cosmic powers of *qi*. From martial arts to *taijiquan* and *qigong*, and even acupuncture and herbal therapies, today's practices are based on a common set of ideas about the cosmos and the human body, one that does not postulate a clear dichotomy between the mind and the body. Crucially, we view cultivating, nurturing, but also managing and disciplining the body, as widespread forms of urban religious practice. For a committed practitioner, the signs of religious accomplishments are typically considered to be health, longevity and the ability to effortlessly perform extraordinary feats. During the so-called *qigong re* or "*qigong* fever" of the 1980s and 90s, many masters imparted their knowledge in the urban parks of Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu and many other cities.

Practitioners look for the positive effects of practice on their health. Every morning Jing'an Park in Shanghai's city centre is enlivened by this same culture of embodied practice. Like the city itself, it has for decades been subjected to a relentless process of secularisation. Importantly, however, as with other urban parks of contemporary China, it sits on land long regarded as numinous.[19] The origin of the numinosity and efficacy of Jing'an Temple can be traced back to around the third century CE and to an association with a spring named by local people "the bubbling well", or "the eye of the sea". Local people believed that the well would never dry up and thought that it was directly connected to the sea. During the period of the Republic during the 1920s, a time of religious activism that witnessed the proliferation of Buddhist-inspired activities, practitioners strongly took hold of this numinous core, thereby contributing to shaping this part of Shanghai. The Chinese Buddhist Association (中國佛教會), established in 1929, was headquartered in close proximity to Jing'an Temple, within the substantial grounds of the four-acre "Enlightenment Garden" (覺園). Many other groups used these gardens, including the Shanghai Buddhist Pure Karma Association, the Bodhi Study Society and the Buddha's Voice Radio.

19 There are many studies on Chinese sacred and numinous sites. See for example James Robson, *Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak (Nanyue 南嶽) in Medieval China*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center 2009. For Jing'an see Tarocco 2015.

Also nearby was perhaps the most aspirational and visionary garden of Shanghai, the Aili Gardens (愛麗園). The garden was destroyed and yet its memory lingers on in the landscaping practices of many contemporary sites, particularly in Taiwan.[20] Aili Garden extended for over 171 *mu* (about 11 hectares) and contained eight "scenic spots" of Buddhist inspiration, pavilions, pagodas, a stone boat, a Buddhist temple, a theatre, an artificial stream, a lake and several ponds. It combined the setting of the traditional scholar's landscape garden with an array of Buddhist-inspired modern facilities. The Bubbling Well Road Cemetery, a graveyard for Shanghai residents opened in 1898, was also located in this area and was subsequently destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

To a certain extent, one can view the creation of Jing'an Park as an attempt to mitigate the desecration and to counter its ominous potential through the magical efficacy of the cultivated spaces of Jing'an Temple (see Tarocco 2015). One should bear in mind that the Chinese belief in "efficacy" (靈 *ling*), the powers attributed to spiritual entities, is predicated on deep-seated fears that the dead are able to interfere with the living and not only in friendly ways. Spirits harbouring a vengeance will often try to do harm, inflicting illness and disaster upon the living.[21] Ultimately, the embodied cultural practices of cultivation involve deep engagement, beyond the shell of the interiorised modern subject, with unseen forces that come from outside – whether as ghosts or spirits, *qi*, the noumenon or nature as manifest in the garden.[22] We contend that the creative practices of cultivation are part of a deep undercurrent of enchanted modernity, which may have the power to forge new, alternative relations between nature and culture, external landscape and embodied interior, urban future and traditional past. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries the embodied cultural practices of cultivation are continuously harnessed as a strategy of re-enchantment. Today, they reflect the deep and lively cultural concerns of China's contemporaneity and open up the possibility of reconfiguring urban nature and the megacities of the Chinese world.

20 One can look for instance at the gardens of the Dharma Drum complex outside Taipei.

21 See for instance the essays in Watson / Rawski 1988; see also Hansen 1990 and Glahn 2003.

22 Mou's work on cultivation echoes the writings of Michel Foucault, who called for a return to thinking as a practice in the "art of life". See Foucault 1997 and Davidson 1994.

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Unpacking Cultural Heritage in Mongolia: The Image of the Mongolian Yurt (*ger*)

Ganchimeg Altangerel

Abstract

Mongolians have lived and socialised in the Mongolian *ger* (yurt) for hundreds of years, leading a life closely connected to nature and exploring vast areas as nomads. But in present-day Mongolia the *ger* is associated with air and environmental pollution and has been scapegoated as the source of failures in urban development. The negative images of the *ger* in Mongolian society pertain to ideals of socialist modernism and current pollution, while positive images relate to cultural heritage and ethnicity, considering the *ger* as an intangible heritage, as the traditional dwelling of Mongolian nomads. Such a view tacitly turns it into an object for marketing, which exoticises its inhabitants. It seems that the *ger* has experienced a loss of value in the current debate. This article presents the specifics of the Mongolian *ger* and examines the different, diverging images of this traditional dwelling by examining the recent history of Mongolia.

Keywords: Mongolia, *ger*, yurt, intangible cultural heritage, air and environmental pollution

Nomadic heritage has often been a topic in politics and society in recent years in Mongolia. In order to protect Mongolian cultural heritage and pass it on to the next generation, many events regarding Mongolian – and especially nomadic – heritage have been organised. In fact, from 2010–2013, the government started an initiative to register people who claimed to practice traditional Mongolian folk art, music and folklore dances and customs. Furthermore, the 2016 Mongolian government introduced the programme "World Mongolians", which is known for introducing and marketing Mongolian music and dance to foreign countries. For the first time, all museum artefacts were made accessible to the public to view free of cost for seven days in March 2018.

The Mongolian yurt has always been inseparable from the lives of Mongolians living in the countryside with their livestock. Before the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle gradually shifted to concepts of a more sedentary life, due to socialist ideas of modernisation starting in the 1930s, Mongolians dwelled in

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felt tents, called *gers* (yurts). These *gers* – as well as the manual labour associated with them and the lifestyle in general – are widely described by Mongolian media, tourist companies and general public opinion as expressing valuable Mongolian customs, practices and cultural history. In 1989, just before Mongolia transformed from a socialist government to a market economy, a census revealed that there were 108,100 families living in *gers* in Ulaanbaatar (see Figure 3). Even today a considerable number of families use the *ger* as a form of housing in Ulaanbaatar and other places. Its traditional importance for everyday life has turned the *ger* into a material object assigned as intangible heritage. But the picture of the *ger* as the main symbol for Mongolian culture is challenged, at least within Mongolia itself.

Ole Bruun and Li Narangoa have discussed the different meanings of the *ger* in two different cities, the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar and Hohhot, the capital of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in China.

> Both Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, and Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, have the traditional Mongolian dwelling, the yurt or *ger*. Ironically, this key Mongolian symbol has become the emblem of poverty and backwardness in Ulaanbaatar, while the few *gers* displayed in Hohhot have become a symbol of ethnicity and one of the main points that distinguish Hohhot from other cities in China (Bruun / Narangoa 2006: 12).

The *ger* is portrayed by Mongolia's politicians and most residents of central Ulaanbaatar as being associated with pollution, poverty, unemployment and crime. Yet it has also become an important symbol of the ethnicity and cultural heritage of Mongolia, of the Mongolian nomads and famous conquerors. But what exactly can be seen as nomadic cultural heritage in Mongolia and how is the *ger* intertwined with this? This paper will attempt to approach these questions.

Comprehension of cultural heritage

Over a century ago, Mongolia declared its independence from Manchu-Qing rule. In 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic was established, and the country embarked on the political path of socialism. Before the turn to socialism, many Mongolians were able to throat sing *khöömii*, could tell folktales, sing blessings and praise-songs, recite epics, play the traditional horsehead fiddle *morin khuur* and the *tsuur* (Rinchin[1] 1979: 165–74).[2] Under the socialist government some of those literary, oral and musical skills, which had been spread

1 The authors of the Mongolian-language sources are listed by their first names, as is the case in Mongolia.

2 On this topic, see Rinchin's fieldwork results on the range of Mongolian epics inside the region until 1930 in Rinchin 1979: 165–74. For the historical meaning of the old Mongolian folk long song, overtone song, horsehead fiddle, fairy tale and epic, etc. see Pegg 2001. She conducted extended fieldwork for almost ten years and studied folk and musical heritage in depth, especially among the Western Mongolians.

particularly by the nobility, came to be viewed negatively as backward and as relics of feudalism – as part of a culture belonging to the exploiters of the people. The government intended to create a new society exposed to progressive high culture and restricted the playing of traditional music and songs, particularly in the 1930s. In the 1950s literary scholar and linguist Ts. Damdinsüren argued against two perspectives. He was against labelling all ancient Mongolian literature and oral history as feudal, but also against nationalist perspectives that glorified all ancient works (Damdinsüren 1987: 15). According to the ethnomusicologist Carole Pegg, new revolutionary thinking began and working classes were created around the middle of the twentieth century (Pegg 2001: 249–53).

In line with the new communist ideology and the influence of the party, people were to sing and perform theatre pieces with revolutionary and socialist content (Marsh 2006, Pegg 2001: 250–56). Within the framework of state policy, the agenda demanded the development of a national culture with socialist content. Cultural heritage that could not be expressed by socialist content was either covertly adapted or discarded. This led to some loss of the established cultural elements. According to the cultural scientist B. Khishigsükh especially songs were censored.[3] Ts. Damdinsüren (1987: 24) notes that the number of musicians who could play popular musical instruments decreased. Old Mongolian folk music instruments were no longer handmade, but instead became "factory-made musical instruments" (Marsh 2006: 297).

In the early 1990s, while doing fieldwork in the Arkhangai province, Marsh found that there was no one in that region who could play string instruments or knew popular folk dances such as *bii biilgee*. Marsh noted that people from the Arkhangai province were therefore sent to learn such skills in the Uvs province, which had already been known as "a region, long considered to be less developed and more traditional" (ibid.: 302) in socialist times. In the process of building a new socialist culture, there were different movements targeting either the eradication or the conservation of cultural elements considered to be historical. In the 1990s, the conservation movement became stronger even as socialist high culture retained its importance.

Today the Mongolian government, in particular the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport and its agencies, tries to preserve cultural heritage. In 2005, Mongolia joined the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which meant a big step forward in Mongolia's cultural heritage policy.[4] Memorandums and UNESCO conventions that serve all member countries have influenced Mongolia's cultural heritage policies. In line with the principles of UNESCO, Mongolia defines its own cultural heritage

3 Examples are the Khüree songs, mentioned at the Symposium "Kyakhta and Khüriye: From the Viewpoints of Eurasia" in Ulaanbaatar in 2018.

4 Mongolia became a UNESCO member in 1962. For the entry into the convention and the obligations to be borne by Mongolia, see Centre of Cultural Heritage 2012: 31.

in two ways, as tangible and intangible. As previously mentioned, between 2010 and 2013 the government registered musicians, singers and artisans who could still practice or play old Mongolian folklore, instruments, songs and popular customs such as the coaxing ritual for camels or felt-making for the *ger.* These and other aspects of the nomadic cultural heritage were collected and labelled as intangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage comprised 4000-year-old graves, as well as burial mounds and rock paintings from approximately 13,000 years B.C.E. (Altangerel 2014). To this day, UNESCO has registered 13 intangible Mongolian cultural heritages.

The representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity includes the traditional music of the *morin khuur* (2008), the *urtiin duu*, traditional folk long song (2008), the Naadam festival (2010), the traditional art of *khöömii* (2010), falconry (2010), traditional craftsmanship of the *ger* and its associated customs (2013) and knucklebone shooting (2014). Other examples of intangible cultural heritage that are in need of urgent safeguarding are listed as: the Mongolian epic (2009), the *bii biilgee* traditional folk dance (2009), traditional music of the *tsuur* (2009), folk long song performance technique of *limbe* performances – circular breathing (2011), calligraphy (2013) and the coaxing ritual for camels (2015).[5] The UNESCO collection of world memory holds *The Golden History of Luvsandanzan* (2011), *The Mongolian Shunkhan Tanjur* (2011), *The Kanjur Written with Nine Precious Stones* (2012) and *The Sutra of the Great Deity Tara* (2014). Every year Mongolia sends additional applications to UNESCO, amongst others for art, popular music, ancient scripture, Buddhist scriptures and landscapes.[6] In 2005, Mongolia and China both claimed the long song as their intangible cultural heritage at the UNESCO. In 2009, China succeeded in claiming throat singing as a solely Chinese intangible cultural heritage,[7] which had a great impact on Mongolia and was the reason why Mongolia tried to register more cultural heritage sites and skills with UNESCO.

UNESCO aims to support its member states in conserving and promoting their cultural heritage. The Mongolian government engages in these programmes as a strategy to help Mongolian authorities to maintain and revive folk songs, musical elements, long-established customs and to protect or restore ancient literature. Yet the Mongolian government's strict adherence to the guidelines and principles of UNESCO in terms of cultural heritage policies leaves out any culturally and historically specific or shared interpretations of "heritage".

5 See Yundenbat 2011and http://www.monheritage.mn/mn/intangible/UnescoIch.aspx.

6 http://www.unesco.mn/p/230.

7 There was huge criticism and discussion in Mongolia. See B. Tüvshintögs (2010), *Shaakhaitai khyatad khöömiilj baikhyg sonsoogüi l yum baina* [*Never Seen a Chinese in Slippers Who Did Throat Singing*], on http://www.baabar.mn/article/1270.

Furthermore, UNESCO has often been criticised for interfering with their member states' policies.[8]

Over the past years, the Mongolian *ger* and all kinds of music, songs and cultural elements have been used for economic purposes, creating such terminologies as *mongol brend bolgokh* ("to become a Mongolian brand") and *soyolyn öviig brendjuulekh* ("branding cultural heritage").[9] These references seem to consider that all Mongolian cultural heritage sites on the UNESCO lists are of great importance for "branding cultural heritage" not only within the country, but also externally. The objective is to revive and regain certain cultural elements through marketing.

Today, people living in Mongolia view cultural heritage in different ways. The horsehead fiddle and the knucklebone game are definitely claimed as Mongolian cultural heritage by Khalka Mongolians, but there are over twenty ethnic minorities of Mongolians and people of Turkic descent, such as the Kazakhs and Tuvinians in Mongolia,[10] who view this differently. During visits to Mongolia in recent years, I spoke to some representatives of the different ethnic minorities in diverse regions about their own cultural heritage. In their opinion, these customs and cultural heritage, which were passed on by their ancestors over generations, are their own. They claim that cultural heritage such as folk music, language and long-established customs of the past had almost been lost, but today this heritage is being revived in daily life. In August 2016 in Buyant *sum*[11] in Khovd *aimag*, for example, an 80-year-old man[12] noted that his grandchildren are not able to speak Tuvian. In summer 2015, in Ölziit *sum* in Khentii *aimag* a 44-year-old father from one of a total of 24 Kazakh families stated that every child can speak Kazakh but no one is able to recite a Kazakh poem or song. For that reason, he sends his children to a Kazakh school in Nalaikh during school vacation.

Currently, people are worried that the younger generation is influenced too much by their surroundings and does not cherish their own cultural practices and native languages.[13] Furthermore, they worry that the people who used to

8 See Ericsen (2001), Lixinski (2013). They wrote on the UNESCO definition of cultural heritage and offered a critique of the institution and its contracts. Mongolia was not even mentioned in their works. However, it is important to study how exactly UNESCO is influencing policies pertaining to Mongolian cultural heritage.

9 In reference to Damdinsüren's seminal essay *Soyolyn öviig khamgaalye* 1987 [1956]. For current debates on the terms, see Center of Cultural Heritage 2012: 8.

10 The current total population of Mongolia is 3,308,258 (NSOM 2020, as of February 24, 2020). The census, which takes place every ten years showed that 82.4 per cent identify as Khalkhas, 3.9 per cent are Kazakhs, 2.8 per cent are Dörvöds, 2.2 per cent are Bayads, 1.8 per cent are Buryatians, 0.2 per cent are Tuvinians and 0.01 per cent are Tsaatans or Duhas (NSOM 2011).

11 Mongolia is divided into 21 *aimags* or administrative units. An *aimag* is divided into *sums* (counties) and a *sum* into several bags, which is the smallest administrative unit. The country has 330 *sums*.

12 The informants are not mentioned by name to preserve anonymity.

13 In the Western and Eastern provinces, these children of ethnic minorities are taught at school in the Khalkha dialect.

play the old music instruments or those artisans who were skilled in special crafts have not sufficiently passed on their knowledge and are now either too old or have already passed away. In the summer of 2015 in Öndörkhaan, Khentii *aimag*, a 40-year-old craftsman stated that he is practicing his craft in the fourth generation and is able to produce the special style of blacksmithing from Khan Khentii, who was called "Tojil". However, very few youth are interested in learning this from him.[14] The people who voiced these concerns were generally not interested in a UNESCO cultural heritage registry and most of them were not even aware it existed. However, current TV programmes and documentaries, which broadcast the correct performance of customs, are widely popular.

On an institutional level, cultural heritage is concerned with the ascription of ethnic specificity and the danger of losing skills, qualities and sites. People living in Mongolia participate in the discourse on loss but emphasise shared heritage, especially the Kazakhs I visited in Khentii and the Tuvinians in Khovd. They don't necessarily define themselves as non-Mongolian. My informants argued that people of different ethnic background have lived in Mongolian *gers* for a long time and when asked why they didn't prefer living in Kazakh or Tuvan *gers*, they resorted to functional explanations, stating that the Mongolian *ger* was wind-proof and stable.

Historical development of the Mongolian *ger*

The socialist historians D. Maidar and L. Darisüren described the development of the *ger,* noting that people living in the region of Mongolia started to keep domesticated wild animals such as cows, sheep and horses approximately 3000–4000 years B.C.E. This was when these people began looking for nutritious pastures, following the river streams to herd their livestock and beginning a life as nomads in dwellings called *erüke* (Maidar / Darisüren 1976: 49).

> About 50,000 years ago, people living in these *erükes* used a form of dwelling which was semi-underground. The roof was constructed out of thick branches and was the only thing that was above ground (ibid.).

From the eighth century onwards, the dwelling evolved into an *ovookhoi* (round shelter), the frame of which was made out of wood and grass. After that it became a *shovookhoi* (pointy shelter), then evolved into *teregt suuts* (a tent on wheels) and then went on to develop into "Turkic yurts" of the Hunnu (Xiongnu), until it advanced to become the *khanat ger*, which was the first real *ger* with walls of some kind (ibid.). According to Maidar and Darisüren the *khanat ger* developed in response to the environmental conditions and

14 For further reading about the artisan Tojil and his blacksmithing, see Chuluunbat 2013.

nomadic lifestyle. It flourished thanks to Mongolian artisans in the seventeenth century and found its final shape in the *ger* we know today.

In the twentieth century, the wealthy began to embellish their *gers* with different covers, designs and engravings (ibid. 93; Baatarkhüü / Odsüren 2016: 225), while the majority lived in *gers* with plain brown felt and the poor even in *urts* (huts) or *ovookhoi* (Maidar / Darisüren 1976: 95; Altangerel 2015: 193). In the 1950s, under the socialist agenda, the appearances of *gers* were rigorously unified. From that point on, due to industrialisation many people left their nomadic life and settled with their *gers* in a belt around the city or began to live in flats (Maidar 1972: 31). According to the research of the anthropologist David Sneath, people who lived in the cities of Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Erdenet and were supplied with heating, electricity, warm water, television and telephone, nevertheless still maintained a connection to a nomadic way of life:

> Social and kinship networks cross the boundaries between the rural and the urban so that virtually all pastoralists have urban relatives and friends. The speed with which urbanisation had been carried out in the 1950s–1970s meant that most urban residents at that time had been born in rural localities, and the large families usually contained rural and urban members (Sneath 2006: 157).[15]

Hence, thousands of urban migrants maintained a connection to people residing in the countryside, especially to herders. Therefore, the relation with the Mongolian *ger* and its related way of life and customs was not severed[16] – and the Mongolian *ger* did not completely disappear at the level of Mongolian daily life.

The significance of the Mongolian *ger*

No doubt Mongolians have lived and socialised in *gers* for hundreds of years. The role of the *ger* for communication between people was discussed by the anthropologist Caroline Humphrey: "The round tent was virtually the only dwelling known in Mongolia, apart from Buddhist monasteries, and it was the focus for relationships between people widely separated by daily occupations" (Humphrey 1974: 1). Inside the Mongolian *ger*, the most respected side is the north side. The other sides comprise the west, male side, the east, female side, a fireplace in the centre, and the door. Every part has an important role and,

15 For more information about relatives, brotherhood and the relationship between siblings see Humphrey / Sneath 1999: 139–47; 209–300.

16 For the dissemination of the terms *khotynkhon* ("city people") and *khödöönykhön* ("countryside people"), how those terms are used by Mongolians, what the lifestyles in urban and rural areas are like, see a comparative study by Altangerel (2015: 86–7) and Sneath (2006: 156).

in a way, represents a small universe in the social world, "a kind of microcosm of the social world of the Mongols" (ibid.).

In the 1990s, the researcher N. L. Schukowskaja found that every part in the Mongolian *ger* forms an independent little universe and that every section inside is connected and carries a symbolic meaning. Furthermore, she observed that these symbols guide the whole interior space in the *ger* and that all its separated areas secure and symbolise the relationship or the division between mine and yours, inside and outside, positive and negative. By dividing the *ger* into these areas, a kind of symbolic security is created (Schukowskaja 1996: 20). The anthropologists Baatarkhüü and Odsüren claim that the symbolic significance cannot be seen with the eye, but has existed for a longer period of time and connects the people's deep respect for nature and their surroundings, worship of heaven and the herding livestock animals (Baatarkhüü / Odsüren 2016: 47–48, 98–102).

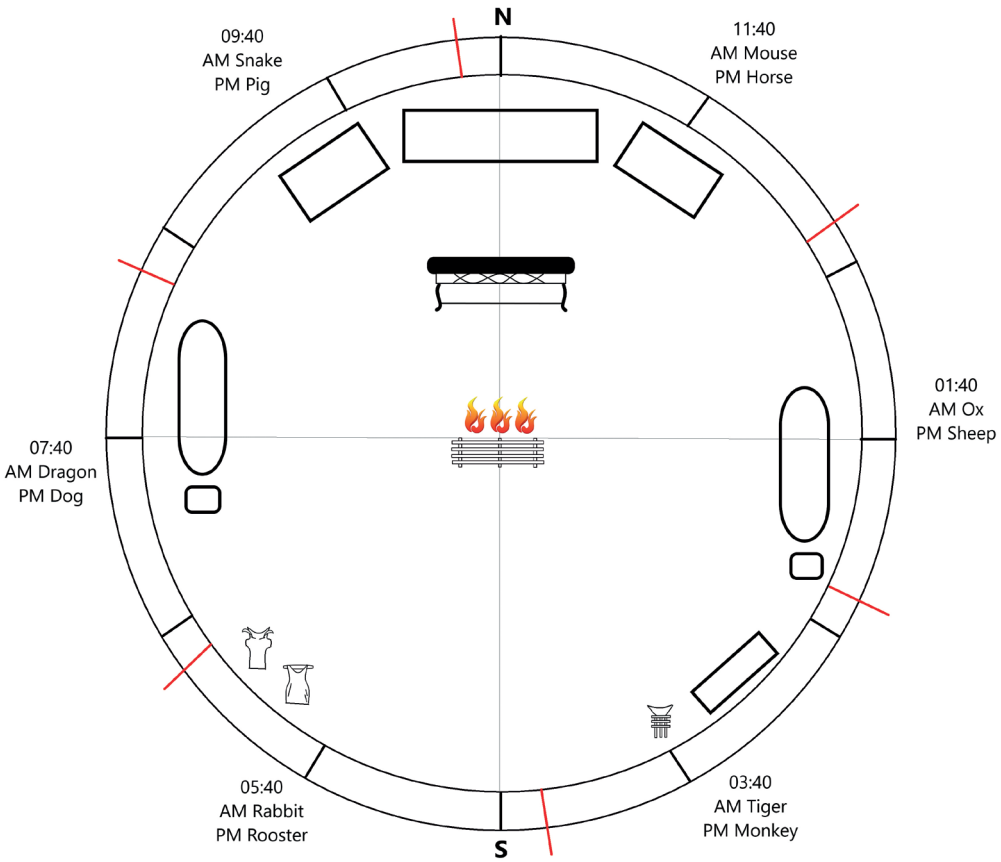
Another inseparable aspect of the *ger* is its role in astrology, its function as a calendar and as a solar calendar; for example, the two beams that connect the ceiling and the ground represent the past, the future and present (Schukowskaja 1996: 24). Furthermore, those beams are called *galyn süns* or "the soul of the fire" (Maidar / Darisüren 1976: 109–10) and symbolise husband and wife and the harmony between them because of their stability (Altangerel 2015: 84). In the centre of the *ger*, the area around the fireplace represents the origin and the cohesion of the family (Schukowskaja 1996: 20, Altangerel 2015: 68, Tserenkhand 2015: 67–72). It is a sign of respect when the elderly are seated in the north of the *ger*, the area reserved for honourable persons. The *ger* also features pictures of the family, of ancestors, gods and respected persons (Humphrey 1974: 2). Mongolians have always admired the west as the cardinal direction. This is also why they say the west side of the *ger* is the male side and why the *ikh ger* or the husband's parent's *ger*, considered the origin of the family itself, is also located to the west.[17]

Another example of the *ger*'s relation to nature is that it is possible to tell what time it is by where the sunlight enters the *ger* (Schukowskaja 1996: 34, 43). In relation to telling the time the *ger*, as illustrated below, is divided into 12 parts, which are named after the 12 animals of the zodiac.

This customary way of counting time by observing how the sunlight falls into the *ger* and telling the hours according to the 12-animal zodiac cycle played a main role in the herding of livestock and daily household chores. At the time of the horse for example, the sun enters directly into the back of the *ger*, etc. Mongolians continued to use this method of telling time in the mid-twentieth century despite an increase in urbanisation. From that time on, they had also

17 For the significance of the Mongolian *ger* and its different areas, e.g. for the symbolic meaning of *khoimor* and other objects, see Maidar / Darisüren 1976: 107–10, Schukowskaja 1996: 16–26 and Humphrey 1974.

Figure 1: Schema of the 12 animals in the Mongolian *ger* and the interspaced timing system of the winter time



Source: Compiled by Ganchimeg Altangerel based on Maidar / Darisüren 1976: 50 and Schukowskaja 1996: 43

begun to use Western manufactured clocks. Nonetheless, my observations revealed that people tending their livestock in rural areas can still be seen using this kind of sun calendar in their everyday life. Generally, political and cultural events start at the time of the horse, e.g. *Naadam*, which would start at 10 a.m.[18]

It is also worth mentioning the education and nurturing which takes place inside the *ger*. These include teaching children life skills, skills pertaining to labour and the acquisition of knowledge (Altangerel 2015: 79–82). As stated by Baatarkhüü and Odsüren, teaching children from a young age to respect their elders was one of the most important principles in upbringing (Baatarkhüü / Odsüren 2016: 57–58). Until the end of the twentieth century the spaces

18 The horse time would be 9.40–11.40am from 23 March until 22 September every year according to the summer time and in winter 11.40–13.40 from 23 September until 22 March.

inside the *ger* and their profound symbols existed in correspondence with Buddhist knowledge and played an important role in daily life. According to Humphrey, "even if an individual herdman's family is prosperous and has fitted out its tent in luxurious modernity, the time has not yet come when past arrangements can be forgotten" (Humphrey 1974: 2). In her research she wrote that after the revolution a lot of new jobs were created in Mongolia e.g. teachers, party members, veterinary surgeons, etc. and the communication between people changed, but "the rank of each social category" and the social intercourse and the meaning of respect did not change (ibid.). A clear example of this is that to this day if any guest or unknown visitors stops by, they would be treated respectfully, seated in the honoured north and be given *idee* (tidbits of food) and tea with the right hand, which is a sign of respect.

According to Maidar and Darisüren the socialist government attempted to settle herders to lead a half-sedentary life while not removing *gers* from the capital. The government nevertheless aimed at improving their construction following the latest techniques (Maidar / Darisüren 1976: 145–47, 150–52). Since the transformation to a market economy the value of the *ger* has gradually fallen further for many reasons. Baatarkhüü and Odsüren argue that the use of the *ger* is decreasing in the present time and that there has been a corresponding decline in the different types of *gers*, the traditional craftsmanship of making *gers* and all related customs. Today, Mongolian *gers* are mainly mass produced (Baatarkhüü / Odsüren 2016: 4).

In summer 2016 an old man from Khovd, who identified as a member of the ethnic minority Ööld, told me that once a young woman from Ulaanbaatar threw her used tissue into his *ger*'s fire during her visit with foreign guests – a huge taboo as it is assumed that the fire god could be polluted by this. He was astonished to find that she didn't even know that one should not leap over the rope for tethering a horse. He felt immensely uncomfortable with her behaviour and considered her just like a foreigner. Today, stories about the disgraceful behaviour of many city residents at a herder's *ger* or even at *gers* in the city, and their disregard for specific rules, are numerous. People claim that some urban residents, especially in the city centre, no longer know the most important rules of respect, such as not approaching the back area of the *ger*, the honoured place called *khoimor*, or the prohibition against walking between the two beams or throwing garbage into the fire. Customs and their meaning, which were well known by almost everyone before the social transformation, are no longer known by many city residents nowadays. However, publications about traditional customs are one of the more popular genres among urban residents. There seems to be a tacit relation between the evaluation of the *ger* and rural residents in urban contexts as "regressive" and the admiration for *ger* and rural residents in rural areas as keepers of tradition.

Herders and cultural heritage

In 1921, after the revolution, wealthy herders had to relinquish their property, which mostly consisted of livestock. This was redistributed, so that the wealthy lost their property while the poor gained some. With that, a new society was created, "the revolutionary *ard*" (Bulag 1998: 50), a class that consisted of those herders who had received animals from the government. In the 1950s the government introduced collectivisation and a great number of herders began to live a semi-settled lifestyle. With the onset of the socialist government, the herders lost their high social status, which meant that they now became "the backward *ard* class" and were categorised as "the *ajilchin* working class".

According to the anthropologist Uradyn Bulag, from that moment on the role of the herders lost its importance and the role of the workers became far more important for the new socialist state. Furthermore, he argues that through the herders' loss of reputation, the nomadic lifestyle, its connected customs and the different kinds of cultural heritage such as popular folk music were negatively affected. "This ideological upgrading [of the *ajilchin* working class] led to repeated campaigns against Mongolian customs, tradition, culture, and even the nomadic way of life, which were labeled as 'feudal remnants' contrary to the socialist way of life" (ibid.). Thus, the number of herders who live in the Mongolian *ger* and maintain established customs – the heritage of the nomadic culture – have continuously decreased over the last decades for various reasons.

In 1925, 87 per cent of all Mongolian households were pastoral households. In 1956, the number had decreased to 63 per cent and in 1989 it was only 16 per cent (Altangerel 2019: 45). In 2019, Mongolia registered 904,496 households, 171,610 of which were pastoral households, accounting for 19 per cent of the total households (NSOM 2020). Although the population is growing in Mongolia the number of herders is still decreasing. This decline has further accelerated due to loss of livestock during periods of natural disasters, economic difficulties and arduous working conditions. Moreover, there is a lack of young people willing to lead a pastoral lifestyle.[19] Nowadays, knowledge about the pastoral lifestyle – formerly passed on from relatives in the countryside to city dwellers – is set to vanish as well. Ulaanbaatar and other cities such as Darkhan and Erdenet are home to more than two generations that have barely had any exposure to the nomadic lifestyle and the keeping of livestock.

19 For further information, see Altangerel 2019.

The image of the *ger* today

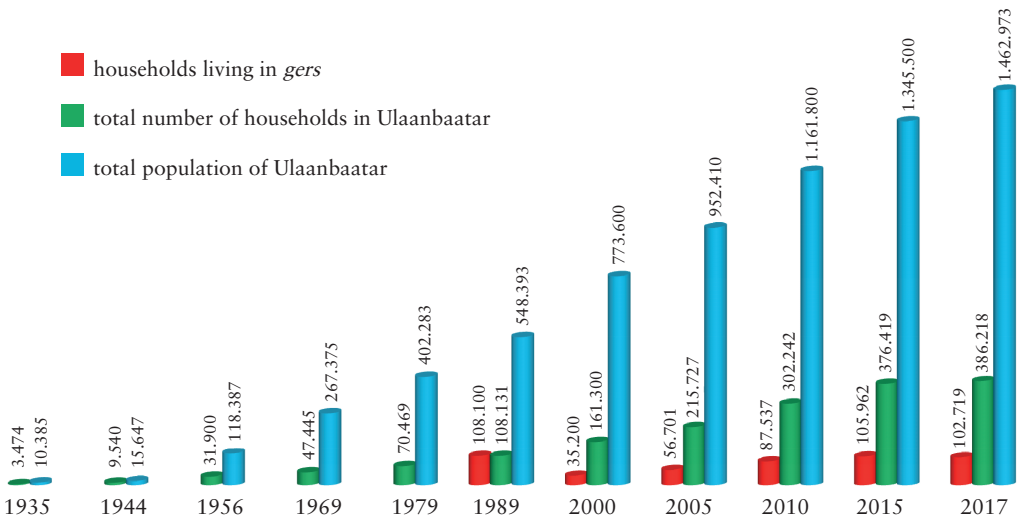
Initially, under socialist rule, it was planned that Ulaanbaatar would have a population of about 500,000 people, but today there are around 1.5 million people living in the capital, which accounts for half of the country's population. During the socialist period, rural migration to the capital city Ulaanbaatar was largely controlled by the authorities. In the 1990s, along with the social and economic transformation, as well as privatisation, everyone was granted the right to choose their place of residence. The transformation entailed hard times for the population, and many people moved from the rural areas to the cities to look for work and opportunities for a better life.

As people had previously been organised in collectives their labour was specified. Privatisation from 1992 entailed that a single owner had to be capable of managing an entire herd. In combination with natural catastrophes many herders lost all their livestock and had to move to urban areas. This mobility affected the whole country. From west to east, people moved to the industrial regions in the centre or northern parts of Mongolia, and especially to Ulaanbaatar in search of better opportunities in education and services related to health care. Herders whose livestock had died from cold and natural catastrophes[20] had to move to Ulaanbaatar, Erdenet or Darkhan without any financial security.

Figure 2: A *ger* district in the south of Erdenet (Ganchimeg Altangerel, August 2019)

20 For more information on natural catastrophes (*zud*), see Altangerel 2017: 28.

Figure 3: Ulaanbaatar's statistics on total population, total households and households living in *gers* (1935– 2017)*



Source: Compiled by Ganchimeg Altangerel based on data provided by NSOM and the Statistical Office of Ulaanbaatar 2019 (*the statistics about the households living in *gers* for the years from 1935 to 1979 are unfortunately not available)

Newly arrived people generally chose the outskirts of the cities and towns and set up their *ger* often without permission. Hence, the new settlements were unstructured. This had a severely negative impact on urban planning, especially in Ulaanbaatar. The city government failed to accommodate the migrants according to a well-developed policy or to settle them according to detailed plans. Later, many families were therefore forced to resettle. Until today this process remains ongoing. Especially when companies buy up a large quantity of land, the settlers have to move.

As a result of this rural to urban migration, *ger* districts spread on the fringes of urban areas and the population increased in these areas.[21] According to the Agency for Statistics, in 2017 Ulaanbaatar contained 386,218 households, of which only 1617 households lived in comfortable single-family houses or larger residences. 169,436 households lived in apartment buildings, 2045 households lived in so-called *tokhilog baishin* (mud brick houses) in the *ger* district, 110,220 households in *jijig baishin* (small houses) inside *khashaa* (wooden fences) and 102,719 households still lived in *gers* (Uchral 2018). Homeless households are not registered in these statistics.

As a result of the unplanned *ger* districts, many issues have arisen. Parallel to the growth of *ger* areas and the number of their inhabitants, there has been an increase in air pollution and smoke in Ulaanbaatar during the winter months.

21 For the expansion of ***ger*** districts in Ulaanbaatar, their population and living conditions, see Taraschewski 2008.

Families living in *gers* mostly use cheap, untreated coal for heating and cooking.[22] As Ulaanbaatar is situated relatively low in a valley enclosed by four mountains, the air scarcely circulates for fresh air to come in. Thus, polluted air caused by the emissions from the chimneys of the *gers* hovers over the city for quite a long time.

Another reason for pollution is the poor connection of the *ger* households to the sewage system. Because appropriate infrastructure is lacking, people in the *ger* districts simply dig holes and use outhouses. Research papers often conclude that the soil in Ulaanbaatar is strongly contaminated (Byambasüren et al. 2017: 32). This is not only the case in Ulaanbaatar, but also in the *aimag* centres. Especially in the winter season, the emissions from the *ger* districts, e.g. in Darkhan, highly increase air pollution (Schaller 2015: 35).

For these reasons, the Mongolian *ger* is now also often associated with air and environmental pollution and has become a symbol of the failure of modern development. However, this situation is not the fault of the families living in *ger* districts. Inconsistent policies and governments that have changed repeatedly since the 1990s have resulted in misguided political decisions (Schaller 2015: 39, 41). There has scarcely been any development in rural areas as the government has failed to create enough workplaces or comfortable living conditions there. Had there been better infrastructure available in rural areas, not as many people would have migrated to the cities. A well-managed system of registration and settlement planning would then have helped to organise the new city dwellers and avoid the growth of unstructured *ger* districts with all the related infrastructural and environmental problems.

In additional to the heating practices in the *ger* districts, huge heat and power stations in the centre of Ulaanbaatar also use coal when temperatures drop, which also contributes to the high level of air pollution. In February 2018, the government passed a resolution to ban the use of raw coal as fuel from 15 May 2019. This prohibition affected private households, public institutions and private providers in the central six districts of Ulaanbaatar, all of whom must now heat with coal briquettes. However, the prohibition did not apply to state-owned heat and power stations.[23] According to the observations of some city dwellers, air pollution in the winters of 2019 and 2020 seemed to have improved somewhat compared to previous years.

Another factor in air quality is the fact that most of the vehicles and buses in the country are old imported models, which cause more pollution than the newer ones. Hard statistics are difficult to obtain, however, as – through the influence of political and government authorities – some sources of information have spread unreliable statements, casting doubt on the results of many studies.

22 Impoverished residents use trash, old car wheels and other such things as fuel to heat their *ger* (see Schaller 2015: 35, 37).

23 For the ban on raw coal, see Jargal 2018.

The latest study on air pollution in Ulaanbaatar, for example, showed that 80 per cent of the air pollution was estimated to have been caused by households in the *ger* districts, 13 per cent from vehicles and 7 per cent from coal-fired steam boilers and power plants (Ragchaa 2018). However, according to the research of Peter Schaller, 88 per cent of Ulaanbaatar's air pollution comes from three main sources: 42 per cent from all type of fuels used by *ger* residents, 27 per cent from coal-fired power plants and 19 per cent from the coal-fired steam boilers used to heat large buildings and industrial enterprises. The remaining pollution is attributed to vehicle exhaust, street particles and the open burning of waste (Schaller 2015: 37). Taken all together, the massive air pollution, daily traffic jams, and lack of space and water supplies make life difficult for Ulaanbaatar's residents. They have therefore given a new nickname to their city: "Utaanbaatar", meaning "Smoke Hero".

In a simplification of the difficult issues facing Mongolian cities, the *ger* has become the scapegoat for all the problems of urban development. Baatarkhüü and Odsüren argue that the *ger* is perceived increasingly negatively, as it is equated with the *ger* districts and the associated problems of urban development. This view brings a negative image not only to the *ger* itself, but also to the traditional Mongolian way of life and its centuries-old popular customs (Baatarkhüü / Odsüren 2016: 4).

When one compares this image of the *ger* in Ulaanbaatar to its positive image in Hohhot as a representation of Mongolian traditions in China,[24] it becomes apparent that the negative images of the *ger* in Mongolia pertain to ideals of socialist modernism and current pollution, while positive images relate to cultural heritage and ethnicity. The Mongolian government is trying hard to preserve the image of Mongolian *gers* by branding them as *Mongol Ulsyn gal golomt* (the "Mongolian State's hearth"). A large white Mongolian *ger* was built as a State Residential Palace in the government building, where a traditional Mongolian craftsmanship workshop was held. The president welcomes high-ranking political foreign guests there and the state's highest awards are also bestowed there. This State Residential Palace is placed within the current parliament building and a new custom of lighting a fire in the *ger* every year in honour of the 29 December, the anniversary of the victory of the National Liberation in 1911, was recently established.

The *ger* is now increasingly used as an object for promotional purposes and viewed from an economic vantage point. This development particularly pertains to the tourism sector. The *ger* is intentionally employed as a national

24 During my last stay in Hohhot in September 2019, it was stated by scientists of the Inner Mongolia University that the Mongol population is approximately 6.5 million in the People's Republic of China. According to the census from 2000, there were around 4 million registered Mongols. For demographics of Inner Mongolia, see New World Encyclopedia 2018.

symbol with the use of slogans such as "Nomadic by Nature"[25] at exhibitions in foreign countries. In this context it is also possible to advertise *ger* camps in the countryside established for tourists. Interestingly, for purposes of tourism, *gers* have been changed to fit Western living standards by joining two or three *gers* via gangways, dividing them into a living room, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom with permanently installed heating, while maintaining the *ger*'s shape. Through the increasing economic benefits provided by travel agencies,[26] surrounding communities may receive additional employment opportunities in the lower service sectors. However, the marketing of the *ger* also exoticises its inhabitants. Thus, the *ger* is shifting from a traditional dwelling to a symbol of cultural heritage and identity. The herders who live in the *gers* in the countryside are considered as keepers of Mongolian nomadic cultural heritage and are advertised by some politicians as the only people in the world who live in *gers* and still follow a nomadic way of life. At this point, it should be mentioned that Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and other places also have their own traditional yurts. During official visits to foreign countries, certain politicians from Mongolia claim to have grown up themselves as children of herders – in other words, in *gers*. In general, this is a problematic tendency in that the *ger* seems to have become "privatised" as cultural heritage, against the notion of shared culture.

Nonetheless, the government of Mongolia takes numerous measures to preserve and market the historical and cultural treasures of the country, with the *ger* and the associated nomadic life of its inhabitants serving as the flagship. This representation of the *ger* as intangible heritage is contradictory, however, as the same *ger* is scapegoated as being harmful to the environment, particularly with regard to air pollution, and is seen as a regressive form of dwelling, as noted previously.

Finally, as a concluding remark, it should be pointed out that in this entire discussion of the *ger* as either the main symbol of Mongolian cultural treasures or as failed urban development and environmental politics, the opinion of the many *ger* dwellers and herders has never really been included. Of course, there are still people who deliberately move from a city apartment to a *ger* district or into a *ger* to escape the traffic, overpopulation and stress of the city. A 70-year-old woman in Erdenet, for example, decided to live in a *ger* because she thinks that "the air in there is fresher than between the multistorey buildings in the city and it is therefore easier to breathe". In an interview in August

25 With this slogan, Mongolia, as the exhibition's partner country, represented itself for example at the ITB Berlin in 2016.

26 Over the last years, since the economic crisis, the Mongolian government has decided to diversify its economy and to reduce its dependence on the mining sector. It intends to concentrate on the development of different economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism. According to the Mongolian Tourism Association, 577,262 foreign tourists came to the country in 2019 (see, Tourism Department of City Governor 2019). In 2020, the government planned to receive up to 1 million tourists.

2019, she told me that she was raised in a *ger*. After a long time in a city apartment, she found that by moving back into a *ger* in the *ger* district her life has become "much more pleasant" again. This is one example of how a *ger* can have deep meaning in the daily lives of many Mongolians and can therefore accomplish a variety of functions today. Hence, it is preferable that Mongolian politics consider the *ger* from multiple perspectives, taking into account ecological, socio-cultural and economic aspects.

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Gender and the Urban Commons in India
An Overview of Scientific Literature and the Relevance of a Feminist Political Ecology Perspective

Research Note

Manisha Rao

Abstract

Traditionally, the concept of the commons implied a rural commons, an area of common usage for agricultural or pastoral purposes. As increasing numbers of people migrate to cities, however, sociological studies have focused on urban issues, of which the urban commons is one area of emerging research. In crowded, underdeveloped cities, residents must often rely on these shared public areas for their livelihoods or basic needs. This paper provides an overview of the literature on the urban commons in India, illustrating the relevance of a feminist political ecology perspective to sharpen its critical edge. The article begins with an overview of the commons debate and then moves on to analyse the question of the urban commons. After mapping the research on the urban commons in India, it analyses the issue of the urban commons within the context of the gender and environment debate that emerged in the 1980s. This is followed by alternative conceptualisations of gender and the environment as put forward by feminists in the Global South. Finally, a plea is made to engage in the study of the urban commons through the lens of feminist political ecology.

Keywords: India, urban commons, gender, literature, feminist political ecology

Defining the commons

If one were to look at the idea of the commons, one would invariably look at the rural commons, be it common ponds, lakes, forests, grazing lands, wastelands, meadows and so on. However, in recent years with the migration of large numbers of people to cities, the focus of research has shifted to cities and the urban commons is one area of emerging research. For the first time in human history, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas (UN 2003). Within the city, the lack of infrastructural facilities and the need to

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economise force people to depend on common areas or spaces that are available to all. Hence the urban commons – including the parks/gardens, *maidan* (open areas used for games or protest marches or just for leisure), lakes and ponds, as well as the civic commons, i.e., footpaths, railways, bridges, garbage dumps and so on – are at the centre of intense use and contestation. This paper provides an overview of the literature on urban commons in India, illustrating the relevance of a feminist political ecology perspective to sharpen its critical edge.

The commons can be defined as a resource belonging equally to all members of a community, who share it to ensure their own survival and well-being. David Bollier (2014) argues that the commons follows certain broad, general principles, including democratic participation in its management, transparency, fairness and use for personal need. The way these principles are translated into practice is highly contextual: it evolves within the given environmental context and adapts to local contingencies. Critical to the creation and management of the commons is the existence of a community that endorses certain social practices in relation to the maintenance of resources for the benefit of all. As historian and commons scholar Peter Linebaugh (2008) emphasises, the commons is not only about shared resources, but also about the social practices of managing the commons for the benefit of all. Hence, the commons is defined variously and quite similarly as consisting of (a) *a common resource* which could consist of material or immaterial resources; (b) *institutions or practices* of commoning, or processes of negotiating the use of commons; and (c) *communities or commoners* who use and reproduce the commons (De Angelis 2007). Commons are not things that can be pointed to, but are a part of social structures and processes that are constantly being shaped and enacted (Bollier / Helfriche 2015).

Garett Hardin's thesis in his famous article the "Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin 1968) is that disaster would ensue from the free use of the commons by commoners, who would deplete resources in maximising their own benefit. According to Hardin, this problem can be overcome by mutually agreed upon coercion by the majority of the affected people. Moreover, Hardin believed that in order to avoid total ruin of the commons, the best approach would be to introduce state management or private property, along with legal inheritance. This argument remained popular for decades. However, it was contested in the 1990s by the Nobel Prize winner in economics, Elinor Ostrom, in her work titled "Governing the Commons" (Ostrom 1990). Through her empirical field research among Indonesian fishermen, lobster catchers in Maine, communal landholders in Ethiopia and rubber tappers in the Amazon, she pointed out that these communities used common resources in a sustained manner. She outlined "eight design principles" which made this possible. First, the commons should have "clearly defined boundaries", delimiting both the

resources and the community of users. The remaining rules identified by Ostrom relate to commoning practices, such as "appropriation and provision rules", "collective choice arrangement", "monitoring and graduated sanctions", "collective mechanisms for resolution", as well as rules relevant to the multi-scalar governance of the commons across the local, regional, national and global levels. Ostrom thus focused mainly on institutional aspects.

Another important contribution to the definition of commons is provided by David Bollier, whose work focuses on the characteristics of resources and the way they influence the governing of the commons. For Bollier, the commons are characterised by "depletability", "excludability", "rivalrous use" and "regulation" (Bollier 2009).[1] These various understandings of the commons therefore encompass different dimensions: the *nature* of the commons, the *institutions* and practices involved, and the *commoners* or the communities or groups of users of the commons.

Urban commons

Given that large numbers of people now live in urban areas, the issue of the urban commons calls for attention. It resonates with the "right to the city" as put forward by Lefebvre, who questioned the enclosures by the state and private capital. For him, the city is a space of dynamism – a space that is created, used, shaped and reshaped by the various people who live in it and make it their home. For David Harvey (2012), too, the city is made and remade by its inhabitants, who belong to various classes and who together produce a common experience of an ever-changing city life.

In their work on the urban commons, Dellenbaugh et al. (2015) look at various dimensions of the urban – from the physical to the cultural – in the ordinary context of both the Global North and the Global South. By privileging the perspective of everyday experiences by citizens, rather than top-down planning, they identify a few challenges that the urban commons / commoners may face according to the given urban condition. These challenges include the negotiations and constant re-articulations of the commoner "we", i.e. the collective interests and identities of the urban commoners. They also entail the iterative re-definition of the boundaries of collective action. Another challenge

1 The nature of the commons and the specific community are major determinants in the governing of the commons. For example, natural resources tend to be depletable but digital information expands with users' participation. Further, certain resources are by default open to everyone – for example, watching sunsets or breathing air – and these are also non-competitive, as one person's enjoyment of the resource does not impact another's. Thus while depletable commons require commoners to establish limits on the usage of shared resources, others do not. The digital commons, for example, is more about regulating social relationships (Bollier 2009).

is to be alert to potential takeovers of the urban commons by the state and/or the market, under the guise of providing new ways of exploiting and controlling the creative and reproductive potential of the urban commons.

Against this background, Ostrom's guidelines for a clear boundary for commoners and their communities need to be rethought in an urban environment. Urban commoners are engaged in constant boundary negotiation. The urban commons institutions have to deal with governance issues across scales, given the different identities and mobilities of commoners but also the scarcity of face-to-face relations characteristic of urban communities. Furthermore, in terms of resources, the diversity and mobility across scales of the urban commoners means that interests and identities may develop in different directions, leading to different modes of production and consumption of the same urban commons, such as diverse usage of a public park, for example.

While some scholars argue for the need to move beyond the state and the market to deal with challenges posed by the urban commons, others such as Ramos (2016) believe that it is important to work within civic-state alliances and acknowledge the state's critical role in commoning strategies. All the while they do not look at the commoners as passive beneficiaries of the state or private technocratic systems. Rather, commoners are seen as being actively involved in the development and care of their cities, representing a new system of values and novel visions of their city and its future. Still others argue that it is during periods of "regulatory slippage" (Foster 2013: 66–68), that is to say, when the local governance is not strict and there is overuse by competing claims that lead to resource degradation, that the "tragedy of the commons" occurs. However, instead of tending towards more centralised government rule or resource privatisation, there are a number of cases where a more "enabling" collective action can be observed. Here, the local people / communities manage the collective resource with support from the local government in terms of incentives. These communities supplement – rather than supplant – the functions traditionally provided by the government. Another aspect of the urban commons is that it often emerges in urban spaces saturated with people, conflicting uses of resources and capitalist investment. This process is triggered by people who were once strangers, who come together to reclaim the commons and struggle to maintain it in the long term (Huron 2015). Having briefly looked at the trajectory of the commons and then the shift in focus to the urban commons in general, we can now turn to the emerging literature on India's urban commons.

An overview on urban commons research in India

The emergence of the topic

Research on the emerging field of the urban commons in India has largely focused on the ecological commons and the civic commons. Much of the focus has been on large cities such as Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and, to a certain extent Pune city, while communal experiences in smaller cities have been largely neglected by researchers.

The emergence of the commons as a field of urban research in India was stimulated by the publication of the December 2011 issue of the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), "Review of Urban Affairs". In the introductory article to the issue, Vinay Gidwani and Amita Baviskar pointed out that up until then, the concept of the commons was associated largely with rural life. In recent years, however, the focus had expanded to include the collective practices that sustain communities in urban areas as well. According to the authors, these practices were erased by the capitalist expansion that had led to the colonisation, appropriation and destruction of the commons on which the poor depended, both in rural and urban areas. In the urban context, the authors highlight two major types of commons: the ecological commons and the civic commons.[2] They outline a wide ranging typology of urban commons that exist, ranging from the immaterial commons, such as the air one breathes, to the material commons such as infrastructure – public parks, gardens, schools, sidewalks, transport systems or garbage dumps (that provide sources of livelihood for waste pickers) – to inherited commons such as bodies of water, riverbeds, lakes and so on. These urban commons are slowly but surely being erased or enclosed as cities fall for the capitalist trap of ostensible improvement that actually only transforms the commons into urban showcases. As a result, the contribution and collective practices of the commoners are slowly being erased and their sources of vitality put in jeopardy.

River and lake basins as commons

In her work on the city of Delhi, Baviskar (2011) maps the changes that have occurred along the Yamuna river banks, which were transformed from an economically unimportant "non-place" occupied by very poor "non-people" to that of a commodified, anesthetised riverfront during the liberalisation period, starting in 1991. Under the pretext of creating a public space, it was actually transformed into a "terra nullius" or an uninhabited place that now invites

2 The ecological commons are constituted by the natural environment, such as bodies of water, riverbeds, lakes, etc. while the civic commons are based on maintained infrastructure such as parks, gardens, schools, sidewalks, transport systems, garbage dumps, etc.

investments from corporate capital, in order to create spaces similar to those in other world-class cities for private and elite consumption. As the author poignantly stresses, recurrent floods are nonetheless a reminder that there exist ecological limits to economic capital and that the river defies domestication.

Along with riverfronts, bodies of water such as lakes, ponds and seashores are a notable area of research on urban commons in India. An increasing number of studies have been conducted on the increasing urbanisation and the resultant conversion of bodies of water to private or public use within cities and in peri-urban areas. Here, works by Sundaresan (2011), Maringanti (2011) and D'Souza and Nagendra (2011), among others, are of note. In a paper on the lake commons of Bangalore (officially called Bengaluru), Sundaresan (2011) looks at the transformations over time of a lake and of its relationship with the communities living around it under modern bureaucratic systems of management. He argues that instead of examining the struggle towards the commoning of the lake through the lens of "bourgeois environmentalism",[3] one needs to define the commons in terms of the changing landscape of the communities involved in the struggle. The transformation of the commons often occurs at the inter-phase where democratic struggles and bureaucratic planning systems meet, which can lead to the transformation of the commons and the communities themselves. Claiming the planning process is thus fundamental. The production of the commons in Bangalore was channelled through the public sphere of urban governance, and it was through claiming the planning process that a new community of concern for the lake emerged.

In his article on Hyderabad, Maringati explores the right to the city through the struggles for access to lakes as urban commons. He analyses the tactics employed by an insurgent citizenship to establish their claims to the commons, through processes of occupation and legitimation. He argues that unlike the rural areas where one has to fight against the might of private corporate capital overtaking the commons, forests or mines, in urban areas this struggle involves as much a fight against government power as against the social power that gets played out through various privileges defined by caste, gender and other categories. Hence, exercising a right to the city as a right to the commons requires processes of collaborative knowledge production, which empower people to acknowledge and reject previous and existing discriminations. The author finds that in this context the control over information and knowledge plays an important role in creating new communities, which in turn generate information for a new ethics of the commons.

3 Bourgeois environmentalism" refers to environmental concerns of the upper class that are mainly centred around aesthetics, open green leisure spaces, clean air, etc. even at the cost of the requirements of the poor. It reflects the contradictory logic of the increasingly affluent lifestyle of the middle-class, which results in environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity and is rooted primarily in middle-class-rooted conservation agendas.

A related article on the lake commons is the one by D'Souza and Nagendra (2011), who focus on changes in public commons due to urbanisation in the Agara Lake basin, located in Bangalore. They argue that urbanisation brought about a shift in the management and governance of lakes from the community level to the state level. The discharge of wastewater from nearby households and small industrial units has polluted lakes and thereby altered ecological dynamics. This has also led to the depletion of ground water sources. With water now being brought into the city of Bangalore from the river Cauvery, the maintenance of the lakes has deteriorated and the lakes have been put to other uses. A shift occurred in terms of the needs that the lakes fulfilled. Earlier on, the community managed lakes with an eye to the holistic fulfilment of local needs, including both water and food security (fishing, grazing cattle, domestic water usage), as well as cultural and spiritual needs, in ways that were inclusive of the people belonging to the lower income group. Against this background, the system is now governed by governmental agencies through private-public partnerships, which exclude lower income users and fulfil urban recreational and leisure needs such as jogging, walking and cycling tracks, bird watching zones, and so on. These are now considered an oasis of nature in the city.

In further work published by Nagendra[4] on the lake commons of Bangalore city, she and Ostrom use a social-ecological system framework to understand why within the context of urbanisation certain lake commons have been successful in negotiating the shift from community-based systems of management to state management (Nagendra / Ostrom 2014). Debunking the idea that people will not organise efforts to deal with issues related to commonly pooled resources, they highlight success stories of collective action and their positive ecological impacts. Furthermore, they emphasise the need to explore government-community partnerships to provide inclusive, equitable and sustainable alternatives to privatisation. On this note, assessing the impact of Private-Public-Partnership (PPP) in the governance of Bangalore lake commons, Unnikrishnan and Nagendra (2014) point out the negative effects on social equality brought about by PPPs. The authors find that in comparison to the state management of lakes that support greater diversity in terms of traditional livelihoods, non-commercial uses and cultural services, the PPP model of lake governance tends to exacerbate inequities. By the imposition of entry fees and the shift in focus to promoting recreation (for joggers, walkers) rather than traditional usage (grazing, washing), the marginal groups are excluded from accessing the lake commons. They therefore urge a reconsideration of this model of governance.

4 See Nagendra / Ostrom 2014, Unnikrishnan / Nagendra 2014 and Unnikrishnan et al. 2016.

In another article, Unnikrishnan et al. (2016) look at the changing notions of the urban commons in the wake of increased urbanisation, migration and change in landscapes. They call for more historical research on the urban commons to help understand the contemporary trends and develop policies for the management of the commons. In so doing, they also emphasise that with growing urbanisation and migration, the usage of the urban commons reflects the requirements of the wealthy citizenry for recreation rather than the need for ecosystem services required by the traditional users who are often pushed out of the area. Mapping the transition of a lake in Bangalore to a sports stadium through the use of historical records, maps and oral histories, they highlight this transformation of a lake commons.

Highlighting the ways in which the less privileged eke out a living from the ecological commons, Parthasarathy's paper (2011) focuses on Mumbai city. The paper examines the invisible commoning practices of the city's hunters, gatherers and foragers: the marginalised tribal communities and the artisanal fishers, the salt pan workers who perform primary sector activities using the publicly owned bodies of water such as the sea, the rivers or parks – like the Sanjay Gandhi National Park – to eke out a living. Although these still remain publicly owned spaces, these marginalised communities are displaced as Mumbai increasingly emerges as a "global city".

Urban waste as a common good

In Indian cities, the emphasis on the city–nature relationship reflects a middle- and upper-class preoccupation with urban environmental aesthetics and notions of leisure, safety and health that Baviskar terms as "bourgeois environmentalism" (Baviskar 2003). Mawdsley (2004), exploring the rise of the middle classes and their active involvement in environment debates, argues that this has been due to their rising power as consumers and their control over the media, NGOs, bureaucracy and legal establishments. Along with this comes the rise of an environmental consciousness among the middle classes. They attribute the destruction of the urban environment to the rising numbers of people migrating to the cities, especially the poor. This, she argues, may have negative consequences for the poor. Ghertner (2011), referring to the "Clean Delhi, Green Delhi" campaign, points out that the discourse was built around the removal of slums that were considered a "nuisance" in legal terms. The slums were equated with filth and unruliness and seen as being responsible for destruction of the environment. The environment was reduced to matters of aesthetics. Hence the study of the urban commons – be it the ecological commons of lakes, rivers, water bodies or the civic commons of parks, *maidans*, footpaths or garbage dumps – is the focus of research in India.

In fact, the state of public sanitation, filth and lack of hygiene in India's cities has long been an issue of debate. Since the 1990s there has been a steady increase in the quantity of disposable consumer goods in urban India. One of the rising issues of modern-day urban life and its consumption lifestyle is the daily generation of tonnes of waste that is dumped out of sight in distant dump sites. The waste generated entails work of various kinds, at various levels, and provides a livelihood to waste pickers. In his photo essay on waste, Gidwani (2013) highlights the vital yet invisible work of waste pickers in the city of Delhi, whose everyday work is woven into the very fabric and working of the city. Referring to Walter Benjamin's "cultural-historical dialectic", he highlights the positive in that which has been rejected and marginalised, the political economy of the commons, waste and value. Through his photographs he argues that at certain moments in history, the waste is seen as a commons and subsumed under "capitalist discipline". The waste constitutes a commons that is used by a diverse community of waste pickers who, through practices of commoning, create value and return the detritus of the city to circuits of value. Further he argues that waste has now come to mark the capital's external as well as internal frontier, the "unruly other" that time and again escapes the capital's discipline.

In 2014, the issue of waste disposal acquired an important place in the government agenda, with the launch of the Swachh Bharat ("Clean India") Mission by Prime Minister Modi in October (which symbolically falls on the birth anniversary of Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, who fought relentlessly for a clean India). This programme has pushed towards the enclosure/privatisation of waste, against the interest of waste pickers. In Pune, however, they have resisted it by establishing collectives, based on the notion of waste as a common good.

In the face of the challenge of enclosure and privatisation of waste, the waste pickers of Pune city, in West India, organised themselves into a worker's collective that has ensured that their work space gets recognised as legitimate, improving their working conditions and contributing to public health and the environment. Among the informal waste pickers women constitute 90 per cent, largely belonging to the erstwhile scheduled castes. They are largely illiterate, work for more than 9–12 hours daily and walk more than 5 kilometres to reach the waste dumps (Chikarmane 2012). At the first convention of the waste-pickers' collective in Pune – the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP)[5] – in 1993, women informal workers protested against harassment

5 At the first convention of waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers in Pune city in 1993, the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat ("Trade Union of Waste-pickers") was formed after the passing of a resolution. The process of organising waste-pickers into a critical mass began much earlier and was an outcome of the implementation of the National Adult Education Programme of the SNDT Women's University in 1990. The collective was formed under the leadership of Dr Adhav, by the SNDT activists and Mohan Nanavre, the son of a waste-picker. The over 800 people assembled at the 1st convention asserted their ownership

and for the right to work with dignity, staking their claim on the collection of recyclables (Chikarmane 2012).[6] The KKPKP argued that sites of the waste pickers' work – public spaces such as streets, garbage dumps, etc. – should be recognised as "new" workplaces. However, with the capture of public spaces by the market and the elite, the voices of the informal workers have often been made invisible. The waste pickers realised that the "scavenging" they did was also "work" and that it was crucial, economically, socially and environmentally to the solid waste management of the city and to environment conservation.

In 2007 their activities led to the birth of SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection Handling, and at the same time meaning "clean" in Marathi), a fully worker-owned cooperative, 78 per cent of its members being women.[7] This example shows how commoners – here the waste pickers – as a counter-model to "bourgeois environmentalism" can successfully defend their right to livelihood and form alternatives that are transformative for the workers as well as for the general public, by organising into a collective to stake their claims to waste as a commons and articulating an area of citizen power and self-governance.

Access of women to public spaces as urban commons

Another strain of research on urban commons in India is relevant to the public spaces accessible to women. As illustrated by Ranade, Phadke and Khan (2009a), the city of Mumbai has hardly any parks, *maidans* and public spaces that are conducive and accessible to women for recreation. The existing ones are often badly maintained and/or policed and tend to exclude rather than include women (the poor, lower castes, minority communities – both religious and sexual, and the elderly). This is especially so in the post-liberalisation period of the growth of paid and privately managed public parks by local resident groups that have aesthetically improved and maintained the spaces but have in turn excluded certain groups of people from its use. This enclosure of public spaces privileges access to the public spaces to certain women, while at the same time denying others the same, based on intersections of caste, class and religion. This prevents women from participating in shaping the city (Ranade et al. 2009a). It is argued that only when women are able to access the city without having to demonstrate a purpose or reason for being outside can the city truly belong to all (ibid.: 436–438). The book *Why Loiter*? by the

over waste. The collective was joined by villagers living on the outskirts of Pune city, who were protesting against the dumping of urban wastes onto their lands. The waste pickers have agitated to be integrated into the value chains of waste disposal and against the indiscriminate dumping that was destroying their way of life, the environment and health.

6 As one of the organisers of the KKPKP, Chikarmane has worked amongst the waste pickers of Pune city using a Freirean conscientisation method and dialogue to mobilise the workers to realise the economic importance of their work of waste recycling not only to the city but to the larger global environment.

7 SWaCH entered into a memorandum of understanding in 2007 with the Pune Municipal Corporation to provide front-end waste management services for the city.

same authors has led to a campaign by women to reclaim public spaces in some cities in India as well as Pakistan. It is a small but growing movement started by a group of women who deliberately loiter in the city and explore the city by foot at night. It attempts to question the societal restrictions on the movement of women in public spaces.

Engendering the urban commons: A Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) perspective

The question of the urban commons is often – as the above examples show – a question especially relevant for women, particularly in India. We will thus review how ecofeminism in the Global South (cf. Shiva 1989, Mies / Shiva 1993) as a foundation for a feminist political ecology perspective can provide useful input on the debate on urban commons research.

Ecofeminism points out the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature in a capitalist-patriarchal world. It argues that women see themselves as being closer to nature, as they share reproductive experiences with nature and also similar experiences of domination and subjugation. The oppression and exploitation of women and nature, they point out, reflects a dichotomy between man and nature.[8] This approach has roots in the Western Cartesian concept of natural environments as a resource, detached from human beings.[9] This shift in perspective was generated in Europe by the male-dominated scientific revolution, capitalism and colonialism, which showed how women and nature share a close relationship, feminising nature (Merchant 1990). The dualisms of nature-culture, feminine-masculine, and emotion-reason are traced back to Western patriarchal thought that juxtaposes the relations between the human and natural world. Oppression underlies these dualisms. The human capacity for reason and thought is considered to be hierarchically above wild and unreasonable nature (Plumwood 1993).

Ecofeminist scholars like Vandana Shiva (1988) have criticised Western ecofeminists for their narrow focus on the conceptual world and for ignoring the lived realities of postcolonial societies. Bina Agarwal (1992) similarly pointed out the importance of the concrete reality of women's lives in the Global South, putting forward the idea of "feminist environmentalism". Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) endorses these critiques, by looking at the intersections of gender, race, class and caste in shaping environmental relations. The FPE perspective emerged in the 1990s to redress the negative, essentialist colour

8 On ecofeminism see e.g. Merchant 1980; Warren 1987, 1990; Plumwood 1993; Gaard 1993, 2011.

9 Cf. the concepts of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. On the powerful mindshift brought about by Descartes, see Capra / Mattei 2016.

that was related to the feminist analysis of environment issues. It is an offshoot of political ecology and questions the way power influences people's access and control of resources at different scales, from the local to the global. It focuses on the links between environment and society, as they co-produce each other (Castree / Braun 2001). FPE draws on ecofeminism, feminist science studies and feminist critiques of development. The idea that women can also be creators, knowers and producers of knowledge is a core aspect of FPE.[10] By endorsing situated knowledge (Haraway 1991), i.e. knowledge that emerges in relation to social locations and partial objectivities (Harding 1986) and that incorporates the potential of local knowledge, FPE develops more responsible ways of knowledge production. Consistent with the feminist critique of development, FPE has pointed out the adverse consequences on women caused by neglecting gender differences in development and conservation projects. It emphasises women as actors who are actively engaged in embodied practices of everyday environmental engagement. Like other strains of political ecology research, FPE emphasises the issues of social equity and social justice in line with feminism, taking as its focus the imbalances in power relations. This framework sustains a gendered analysis of the way knowledge is produced and the way power and politics influence the use, access and distribution of resources. It also resonates with a gendered analysis of grassroots environmental action.

To sum up, FPE encompasses (a) an intersectional analysis of human-nature relations; (b) a multi scalar analysis of power differentials and the way these translate into embodied experiences of environmental degradation and dispossession; and (c) an analysis of knowledge production and decision-making processes that shape environmental governance. Analysing the Urban Commons using this perspective would be highly relevant, especially because it integrates power and power relationships. While feminists have long analysed the commons, we find today an emphasis on the study of commoning as providing a radical alternative to marketisation and neoliberal practices. As Sylvia Federici (2019) points out, commoning brings to light the importance of the everyday processes of social reproduction, done mainly by women through processes of sharing and caring. In part, these practices originate from the fact that women depend on access to the commons – firewood, water, etc. – as part of their reproductive work, both historically and in the present times. Privatisation and enclosure of the commons have affected women the most, and they are often the ones who have come to the defence of the commons (Mies / Benholdt-Thomsen 1999). Hence, a feminist perspective is key to the task of

10 For FPE gender is treated as a critical variable that shapes resource access and control while taking into account the intersections of caste, class, gender, culture and ethnicity in shaping the processes of environmental change. It treats women as participants and partners in the preservation of the environment while at the same time looking after their livelihood issues. Hence the FPE perspective is a novel form of knowledge production.

reconstructing the commons with a community that is inclusive, based on cooperation and responsibility to one another and to the environment. It adopts an intersectional approach in which gender is but one of the various axes on which the community is formed. It also argues for an understanding of gendered subjectivities in collective action in the management of the commons, and emphasises the study of commoning practices rather than the commons themselves (Clement et al 2019).

In the review of the emerging work on the urban commons in India, we can see that the focus has been largely on large cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi and Hyderabad and the burgeoning second-tier city of Pune. The research reviewed in this paper has covered a variety of aspects in the ecological and civic commons, including (a) the change in land use, commodification, and the enclosure of river and lake basins; (b) processes of planning and policy making incorporated as a part of the process of commoning along with the creation of new communities of concern; (c) commoning processes sustained by marginalised communities that make their livelihoods through primary sector activities in the face of privatisation and transformation of the city into a global city; (d) access to parks and *maidans*; and (e) the collective mobilisations over waste as commons.

Overall, the research reviewed here shows that the commons are resources that are shared through practices of commoning by people whose livelihood needs are fulfilled through the commons. This is done by communities who are dependent on these commons and who follow certain unwritten practices in order to maintain them. The invisible commoning practices of the local communities, particularly of women, in maintaining and using the commons for their livelihood are gradually being erased. Corporate capital and neoliberal state policies are wilfully erasing the commons as well as the practices of the commoners and their contributions to city making. Since women are important maintainers of these commons, in so doing these interests are also invisibilising and marginalising their practices.

This provides a first, important rationale to employing the lens of a feminist political ecology perspective. Indeed, an FPE perspective makes it possible to explore the contestations that play out over the access and use of the urban commons within a neoliberal context of increasing privatisation, appropriation and commodification of ecological and civic commons. Moreover, FPE helps to interrogate the intersections of gender with caste, class, ethnicity, religion and age, to produce a gendered analysis of power relationships and processes in practices of commoning. This would provide deeper insights into the core nature of the collective practices of the commoning that sustains urban communities. FPE can also sustain our knowledge of socio-ecological interac-

tions. In fact, feminist political ecology emphasises the need to pay attention to the gendered nature of ecological degradation and conservation.

Finally, employing the lens of FPE in the research on the Urban Commons may sustain processes of societal change. In fact, this approach may broaden our understanding of ways in which women commoners question and negotiate practices of oppression and participate in collective action for social justice and empowerment, striving for a better world. Understanding the embodied experiences of women and men in their relation to nature may provide solutions that are other than techno-scientific in nature. This may prove to be an important contribution to finding environmentally sustainable and socially just solutions to civilisational challenges in the current era.

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Michael Spies, *Northern Pakistan: High Mountain Farming and Socionatures*. Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2019. 416 pages, 27 figures, 36 photos, 10 tables, $12.88. ISBN 9789694026091

In Michael Spies's book, northern Pakistan is represented by Nagar, a rural district in the Karakoram range that has received far less attention than the better known and more thoroughly researched Hunza district to the north. Nagar was a semi-autonomous principality until 1972, before it was integrated into the political system of Pakistan. Another major change was the completion of the Karakoram Highway in 1978, which connects this formerly remote and isolated entity with downcountry Pakistan and with China. The author explores how these and other changes have shaped farming, especially crop farming, in Nagar over the past 30–40 years, and what actors and factors have been responsible for these changes and in what way.

The book is informed chiefly by Michael Spies's aversion to one-dimensional or reductionist explanations and by his emphasis on empirical research, which is epitomised in the statement that "this book is, above all, an empirical study of agricultural change in Nagar" (p. 9). The title of Chapter 1 "Climate change, among others: attempting an integrated analysis of agricultural change in Nagar" sets the scene. While conceding that climate change exists and that it does have an effect on local farming (Chapter 11 deals specifically with climate change and other environmental changes), he distances himself from the current fixation on climate change, which he describes as a new form of environmental reductionism, and argues for an approach that does better justice to the complexity of factors that have influenced crop farming in Nagar.

The author has chosen the assemblage approach for his research rather than other research approaches in the fields of human-environmental relations and agricultural change, which he presents in Chapter 2, because he considers it less prone to conceptual bias. The assemblage approach is explained in detail in Chapter 3 along with the concept of socionature, which figures in the book title and which views nature and culture not as two different spheres but as closely intertwined within the one sphere of "socionature". Socionature encompasses such concepts as, for instance, irrigation agriculture – considered as a complex and dynamic assemblage of human and non-human components that generate changes by interacting and overlapping with each other in often unpredictable ways. The assemblage approach refrains from explaining such changes through theories and allows an open and unbiased perspective for

empirical observations on the agency of the various components and on their interrelations with one another.

The book is based on the doctoral thesis of Michael Spies and on a total of four years of research, including eleven months of fieldwork between 2014 and 2016. During these months, he carried out interviews and informal discussions and collected observations during "innumerable walks around the villages and their environs" (p. 55). Intensive exposure to the field site, thorough and careful attention to detail, checking and cross-checking observations against each other and against other sources of information are characteristic features of Michael Spies's style of empirical research and render the chapters on agricultural changes in Nagar into repositories of a stunning wealth of facts and insights. Moreover, due to the remarkable ability of Spies to guide the reader along the multiple and interconnecting threads of his narrative, the reader does not get mired in detail.

The changes that Michael Spies has detected and analysed can be summarised as follows. The most prominent is the shift from subsistence cropping to the production of cash crops, in particular potatoes, apricots, cherries and apples. At the same time agriculture has lost much of its appeal and importance as a livelihood as new income opportunities have emerged. The resulting shortage of agricultural labour has led or contributed to a decline in certain agricultural activities, such as animal husbandry involving transhumance. That the decline in livestock numbers is also due to an increase in commercial potato production, which has contributed to a shortage of winter fodder, is just one example of the co-occurrence of changes that influence each other in complex ways. Declining livestock numbers have reduced the availability of manure for crop production, which is compensated for by the introduction of chemical fertilisers, as just one of many technological innovations.

Key events in bringing about these changes were, as mentioned above, the incorporation of Nagar into Pakistan in 1972, and the opening in 1978 of the Karakoram Highway, which provided access to markets and facilitated interventions by development organisations such as FAO/UNDP and AKRSP (Aga Khan Rural Support Programme) as well as other actors, including the government. The impact of changes in the biophysical environment seems somewhat less significant. Changes in the climate have prolonged the growing season and made double cropping possible, but on the other hand have increased the vulnerability of villages in exposed locations to the effects of glacier melting or erosion.

The book is written in excellent English (not least because of the absence of jargon). From among the numerous illustrations, the maps of land use in Hopar, 1986 and 2014, and the repeat photographs of the same locations in the mid-1980s and 2014/15 stand out as very instructive examples of some changes in Nagar.

My concerns are few. As one example, Michael Spies employs novel terms such as "socionatures", "actants", or "symbioses", but at the same time seems somewhat ill at ease using them. His comment in footnote 2 on page 38 – "to avoid unnecessary jargon, I will continue to use the terms 'social' and 'society', but they should be understood in the sense of 'socionatural' and 'socionature'" – makes one wonder why he uses jargon, which he considers unnecessary, in the first place. I personally find the use of the term "symbioses" to denote turning points in the development of agricultural systems particularly confusing. "Symbiosis" as an established term in biology for alliances between organisms for mutual benefits should, in my view, be used only in this sense and not with any other meaning. Finally, the book title and subtitle suggest that Michael Spies considers Nagar as representative of northern Pakistan. It would have been good if he had added some explanation as to why he believes this to be the case.

Nevertheless, I read Michael Spies's book with immense pleasure. He comes across as a solid and devoted empiricist with a genuine desire to do justice to the complexities of human-environment relations in particular settings and with little patience for approaches that are driven by the agenda of a particular discipline. This is one of the best books on human-environment relations that I have read thus far and a prime example of what geography can achieve when understood and practiced as a holistic science.

Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt

Siegfried O. Wolf, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative. Concept, Context and Assessment*. (Contemporary South Asian Studies). Cham: Springer, 2020. Xvii, 395 pages. €71.68, ISBN 978-3-030-16198-9 (eBook) / €88.39, ISBN 978-3-030-16197-2 (Hardcover)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become the best-known project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or One Belt One Road (OBOR), popularly known as the New Silk Road, i.e. China's programme to reconnect to Southwest Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. The CPEC, as the author lays out, does far more than improve connectivity and ease transport from Western China across the Karakoram to the Arabian Sea, complemented by a host of projects in almost all sectors of the economy, especially energy. China has more in mind than safeguarding its energy supply lines and economically reviving its less developed and political restive western regions. Therefore the author asks, "is the CPEC part of Beijing's alleged goal

to build a new world-order that would serve China's national interests?" (p. 271). Carefully and with thorough documentation he outlines the many shortcomings of the project and concludes that the "CPEC will not become any kind of a 'game changer' as regards social-economic development and political progress" (p. 327).

Unlike Pakistan, where people expect the CPEC to become the solution to the country's many economic and social ills, "China holds a more open and critical debate on the BRI and CPEC" (p. 325). While some in Pakistan fear a new dependency, even evoking the rule of a colonial power (p. 222), the Chinese seem to have underestimated the substantial structural problems of Pakistan's economy and society. As the author puts it, "there is also a concrete threat that overall Sino-Pakistan relations will cool down, even turn bitter in a middle- to long-term perspective. The so called 'all-weather friendship' could be transformed into a new relationship in which Pakistan will serve as an 'economic colony'" (p. 317).

As a political scientist and Director of Research of the South Asian Democratic Forum, a think tank based in Brussels, the author concentrates on the political aspects. For him "corruption is the biggest threat for the sustainability of CPEC projects, turning the whole development initiative into a 'sand castle' [... as] there is an obvious mismatch between official statements and the real situation in the country" (p. 260). His assessment is based on the monitoring of Pakistan's qualification for preferential treatment from the European Union under the GSP+ (see chapter 7, "The GSP+ conundrum and the CPEC's impact on EU-Pakistan economic and trade relations"), which "grants full removal of tariff on over 66% of the EU tariff lines" (see https://trade.ec.europa.eu/tradehelp/gsp). To be eligible, the applicants have to fulfil vulnerability and sustainable development conditions, on top of Standard GSP conditions.

In the first place, however, describing and assessing a project like the CPEC would require detailed and up-to-date information. Unfortunately, although whole libraries can be filled with studies written on the topic, there is no clear answer to what the CPEC actually is, where it is located, who is running it and who is to pay for it. It is not exactly clear what the corridor is and along which route it should develop, so that the author finally concludes that "we can declare the entire area of Pakistan as part of the CEPC" (p. 126). The CPEC is expected to develop the less developed and thinly populated areas in the west of Pakistan and at the same time to benefit all provinces, including the more advanced and more populous areas in the east (see also the book review in this IQAS issue on Tilak Devasher, *Pakistan. The Balochistan Conundrum*. Noida: Harper Collins, 2019). The problem of balancing regional development is not CPEC-specific and has been discussed extensively in development economics, but not in the case of Pakistan, a highly centralized state

despite being legally a federal republic. After the violent secession of the eastern "wing", now Bangladesh, there was no place for location and space theory and regional development economics: "On the Pakistan side, state authorities are emphasising that the CPEC is a national endeavour which includes all provinces and areas under Pakistan administration. But due to the asymmetry in the allocation of [...] projects and uncertainties regarding [...] funds, severe doubts regarding the concrete geographical framework persist" (p. 126).

Readers will benefit from some prior knowledge of geography and history. It all goes back to the painful birth of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of (undivided) India and the still unresolved status of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. (For the Pakistan government, at least, the status remains unresolved; according to the Indian constitution, all of Jammu and Kashmir is part of India.) Since the Karakoram Highway, the northernmost section of the CPEC, runs over parts of Kashmir that India claims as her own territory, it always will be a stumbling block in China-Indian relations. Immediately after achieving independence in 1947 the new countries of India and Pakistan began the first Kashmir war and "the military came to control national defence and military policy" (p. 302), developing into the mighty military-industrial complex that controls the country's CPEC interests (pp. 281–306 and passim).

The book covers developments until 2018. It is richly annotated, has a list of abbreviations, a long bibliography and an index. The author concentrates on the socio-political, international and security aspects and provides ample good advice for decision makers in Pakistan. There is little on western China other than the Uyghur problem and hardly any comparison to other Chinese economic corridors. Attempts at determining winners and losers show often contradictory objectives. Still, to the reviewer's knowledge it is the most encompassing study on the subject available and, thus, required reading for all interested in the political economy of economic corridors and Pakistan-China relations.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

Tilak Devasher, *Pakistan. The Balochistan Conundrum*. Noida: Harper Collins, 2019. Xxxi, 359 pages, INR 899.00. ISBN 978-93-5357-070-5

Balochistan is the largest but least populated province of Pakistan. Historically, it extended into Iran and Afghanistan. Balochi tribes also live in other provinces of Pakistan, such as Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province). The northern part of the Province of Balochistan is mainly inhabited by Pakhtuns; Quetta – the capital and largest city – also

houses Punjabi and refugees from Afghanistan. Among them lives a large contingent of Hazara, members of the Shia community, whereas most others are Sunni. A coastal strip around the small fishing harbour of Gwadar was under the Sultanate of Oman for 174 years before Pakistan bought it in 1958 (p. 158). That Oman is still an important destination for migrant workers (including military personnel) from Balochistan, however, is not mentioned in this book.

In 1838, the East India Company sent its army down the Indus and up the Bolan pass and "signed a safe passage agreement with Mehrab Khan, the Khan of Kalat, who guaranteed the safety of the British army" (p. 65). However, the famous lease contract that gave the colonial power control of the corridor from the Indus to the Afghan border was only signed in March 1839 (Mir Ahmad Yar Khan Baluch: *Inside Baluchistan*. Karachi: Royal Book, 1995, pp. 219–221). The western and southern parts of (present) Balochistan were under the Khan of Kalat and became a British protectorate, but never, as Baloch nationalists proudly note, an Indian princely state. When the colonial power left, the Khan claimed independence. In 1946, Jinnah, the Qaid-i-Azam ("Great Leader") and at that time the legal adviser to the Khan, stated "it is my personal belief if any State wants to remain aloof, it may do so without any pressure from any quarter, whether it be the British Parliament or any political organization in the country" (p. 76). After the British had left, however, Kalat was forced to accede to Pakistan by Jinnah himself, now the first Governor-General of Pakistan.

Today we are witnessing the fifth "insurgency" in Balochistan, after 1948, 1958, 1962 and 1973–77 (p. xxvii). It is marked by unprecedented violence, sectarian terrorism, "enforced disappearances" and "missing" persons (p. xviii). The region has gained economic and strategic importance, especially since the governments of Pakistan and China agreed on a Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) linking Western China with Gwadar (see also the book review in this IQAS issue on Siegfried O. Wolf, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative*. Cham: Springer, 2020). For good reason the Balochi fear to suffer rather than to benefit from the project, which might bring investment, but most likely little employment, unwelcome immigration and a heavy drain on its natural resources. Obviously there are several "foreign hands" involved in the game: not only Pakistan, China, Iran and Afghanistan, but also India, Arab states and out-of-region stakeholders.

The author of the book under review, a retired Indian bureaucrat, has already presented two books on Pakistan in the previous years (*Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*, Noida: Harper Collins, 2016, and *Pakistan: At the Helm*, Noida: Harper Collins, 2018). Currently, Tilak Devasher is a member of the Indian National Security Advisory Board and a consultant with the Vivekananda International Foundation, an Indian public policy think tank, considered to be closely aligned with the Government of India and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Given the sorry state of relations between India and Pakistan, India's

interest in the area should be no surprise, even more so because India feels threatened by a corridor that gives its rival to the north a direct link to the Arabian Sea, severing all possible land links between India and western Asia and beyond.

The book is well researched and documented and more or less in line with other works on the area. It moves from geography ("An ancient civilization") and history ("Times gone by") to "The roots of alienation", the "Chinese gambit", "Relentless persecution" and finally "Enduring insurrection". The author plays down any role India might play in the present upsurge of violence – India is even not listed in the index. It may want a weak neighbour, but certainly not chaos beyond the border. The author thus wishes and warns: "For the long term, the Pakistani state will have to compromise with the Baloch. Continuing to seek a military solution to a political problem may make sense tactically in softening the opposition. But it can never be the long term solution. One of the key factors for the future development of Pakistan would be [...] a solution that puts the Baloch in the centre rather than the resources of the province. Failure to do so will slowly but inexorably exacerbate the crisis in Balochistan till it explodes with dire consequences for Pakistan" (pp. 291–292).

While politics and history are well covered, there is much less on economy and ecology, and the sections dealing with these issues somehow sound quite bookish, giving the impression that the author never had the opportunity to visit the area himself. In the chapter on Gwadar, the harbour on the Gulf of Oman near the Iranian border and the terminus of the Economic Corridor, he mentions the extreme scarcity of water and writes on the prospects of this fundamental cornerstone of the CPEC: "Failure to supply water may expose Gwadar to the same fate as Fatehpur Sikri or Myanmar's famed capital Bagan" (p. 168). However, while Fatehpur Sikri, founded by Emperor Akbar as the capital of his Mughal Empire in 1571, famously had to be abandoned because of the scarcity of drinkable water, Bagan, situated on the banks of the mighty Irrawaddy, lost its importance due to the onslaught of the Mongols, not because of a lack of water. Unfortunately, despite his well-argued reservations about the future of Gwadar, the author shuns any judgement on the prospects of the Iranian port of Chabahar across the border, built with Indian assistance as a gateway to Afghanistan and beyond (pp. 172–174).

To the reviewer's knowledge this book is the most up-to-date and comprehensive work on Balochistan. It explains the many contradictions of the centrally ruled federal republic. It also reveals why and how the much-touted Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor may not only disappoint Pakistan, but also China. The book is highly recommended to all who want to know more about the conundrum not just of Balochistan but the region as a whole.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

Carmen Schmidt / Ralf Kleinfeld (eds), *The Crisis of Democracy? Chances, Risks and Challenges in Japan (Asia) and Germany (Europe)*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2020. 499 pages, £87.99. ISBN 978-1-5275-4108-5

This volume is the outcome of a conference by the German-Japanese Society for Social Sciences in March 2018 at the University of Osnabrück. It contains 25 contributions as well as the preface and the introduction. The scope of Europe comprises Italy and Spain as well as the host country Germany, and also one piece on the Netherlands. With regard to Asia, both the People's Republic of China and South Korea are represented in addition to Japan. There are nine articles on Germany, twelve on Japan and numerous helpful figures and tables.

The book is divided into five chapters: 1) Theoretical Considerations: Democracy and Social Change; 2) Democracy, Citizenship, Values, and Citizen Participation; 3) National, Sub-National, and Global Democracy; 4) Education, Social Order, and Democracy; and 5) Democracy, Public Policies, and Consensus Building. As can be imagined, the boundaries between these divisions are sometimes blurred. Interestingly, only four articles are concerned with a direct comparison between Germany and Japan: those written by Hans-Joachim Kornadt, Yoshinori Nishijima, Takashi Namba and Bernhard Mann. A selection of a few of the contributions in the volume will be presented below.

Without a doubt the question of the crisis of democracy is highly relevant not only to Germany and Japan. The number of publications on this topic over the last several years – covering various aspects and diverse countries – is nearly uncountable. But the crisis of democracy is as old as democracy herself: Athenian democracy, which is regarded as the mother of all democracies and actually gave us the original term, itself lasted only one century. In 1975 a book with the same title as this volume – though without the question mark – was published by Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki. And as Huntington elaborated in his 1991 book, *The Third Wave*, there were as many failures in democracy as there were success stories over the preceding decades all over the world: while some twenty dictatorships were transformed into more or less democratic governments, just as many democracies became authoritarian governments over the same period. Further developments have confirmed this result. It becomes evident that there is not a binary structure but rather a continuum from full democracy to dictatorship and vice versa. Elections are just one indicator out of many. Recent research on mass dictatorships confirms this finding (see e.g. Paul Corner / Jie-Hyun Lim (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Mass Dictatorship*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; or György Széll, Mass Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century. *Sozialwissenschaftliche Literatur Rundschau* 77, 2018, pp. 83–94).

But let us have a brief look at today's situation of democracy worldwide. According to the Democracy Index 2019 by The Economist Intelligence Unit there exist only 22 full democracies out of 167 surveyed states; among them Germany ranks at the 13th position, with the top places occupied by the Scandinavian countries and New Zealand. Japan, in contrast, is ranked at number 24, categorised as a "flawed democracy". Both Germany and Japan managed to rise like phoenixes out of the ashes after World War II and to achieve recognition as stable democracies. The structural democratic deficits in Japan – especially the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party and a high level of corruption – are examined in several articles, such as in the introduction by the editors or in the contributions of Carmen Schmidt, Shujiro Yazawa and Momoyo Hüstebeck. But Germany as well, especially when considering the recent successes of the extreme right-wing party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), has faced more or less successful neo-fascist groups throughout the entire history of the Federal Republic of Germany and has encountered destabilising tendencies.

Japan and Germany are confronted with quite different challenges, despite numerous parallel developments. Though the environmental crisis – particularly since the catastrophe of Fukushima – is of highest importance for both countries, their reactions have been quite different (cf. the article by Akira Tokuyasu). Germany decided to close down all nuclear power stations by 2022 at the latest, whereas Japan tries to continue as before. The so-called refugee crisis, especially since 2015, fragilises a great number of European democracies. Nothing comparable can be found in Japan, although the permanent frictions in North East Asia are very risky for all nations concerned. Valuable contributions in this regard are those from South Korea (Kwang-Yeong Shin) and China (Chung Huang and Dinghong Yi). Mototaki Mori and Hiroshi Murakami arrive in separate contributions at the same conclusion: that the on-going political crises have led to a further strengthening of conservative forces in Japan. The articles of Takemitsu Morikawa and Akira Tokuyasu both extensively cite Niklas Luhmann – a questionable choice, given his lack of published scholarship in the field of democracy research.

The definitely interesting article by Yuichiro Minami on the independence movement in Okinawa starts with a misunderstanding in regard to the modernisation of Japan. The author argues that Japan "is an exceptional country which achieved government-led modernization rapidly and without being colonized (p. 237)". However, Prussia started before Japan its top-down modernization, sticking to traditional values and structures, and by that became the model to follow for Japan. In this context it might by recalled that Lorenz von Stein played an important role in both countries with regard to establishing a strong state.

Wolfgang Pape in his article "From Pure Quantity to Broader Quality in Multi-Level Governance" pleads with good reason for more quality within multi-level governance and with regard to referenda on very specific and limited issues in general. The Federal Republic of Germany – against the background of the experiences during the Republic of Weimar – had drawn the conclusion that referenda at the federal level should be prohibited. On the other hand, in his argumentation for a participatory democracy the experience of the participative budget, as practiced quite successfully in many places, fits quite well all over the world. The participatory budget, invented in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, permits the citizens on the local and regional level to decide about priorities within the budget. Therefore it is a useful tool for basic democracy. Finally, Matthias Pilz and Peter-Jörg Alexander give a good assessment of the Japanese vocational training system, yet neglect the subcontractors that employ the majority of the workforce. As the vocational training has no direct link to democratic decision-making, the reader may wonder what this has to do with democracy.

Altogether the volume offers beyond Germany and Japan a broad and useful overview of the discussion concerning the future of democracy in its divergent facets and can thus be recommended without any reservations for academic specialists as well as for the larger public.

György Széll

Jemma Purdey / Antje Missbach / Dave McRae, *Indonesia: State and Society in Transition*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2020. 261 pages, $29.95. ISBN 978-1-62637-852-0

Indonesia: State and Society in Transition offers a dense and refreshing new perspective on a topic that has already received a great deal of scholarly attention: Indonesia's history, politics and society. Indonesia's shift from authoritarianism under the former president Suharto to democracy started some two decades ago. However, Indonesia, a nation with 270 million people and the world's largest Muslim population, remains a country in transition even now, which is the main focus of the book. Jemma Purdey, Antje Missbach and Dave McRae argue that in the Reformation period new spaces evolved where the public could formulate criticism against the political and economic elite and exert pressure. However, the nepotism, cronyism and corruption that emerged under Suharto still permeate business and politics, and despite rapid economic growth the gap between rich and poor is widening instead of shrinking. The authors also examine the failure of the state to deal with past crimes against

humanity under Suharto, revealing a persistent inability to break with suppression. Moreover, increasing attacks on human rights organisations show new levels of intolerance. These examples show that political reforms have stagnated rather than progressed. However, as the authors rightly emphasise, compared to its Southeast Asian neighbours such as the Philippines, Thailand and Myanmar, Indonesia "has consistently maintained democratic status since the year 2000" (p. 2). In order to comprehend Indonesia's transition and better predict the country's future, this book contributes to a clearer understanding of the context of current events. In the first half of the book, the authors bring together insights into pre-independence Indonesia, the establishment of the authoritarian Suharto regime, political reforms after 1998 and today's democratic-era politics. In the second half of their monograph, they dive deeper into issues of health, education and work, looking at human rights as well as the media and popular culture. To this end, they draw a comprehensive picture of the complex history-politics-society nexus of the country.

The authors Jemma Purdey, Antje Missbach and Dave McRae have visited and observed Indonesia closely for decades and are renowned for their work on the country's historical and political processes. In compiling the book, they have drawn on their own rich experience and research expertise as well as an analysis of the literature. Thus it is very much appreciated that they have joined forces to share their knowledge with a broader audience.

With regard to health, education and work, the authors argue that inequality is not only pervasive but on the rise. At the same time, basic inequality of opportunities from early childhood impacts on nutrition, sanitation and education. Despite the expansion of the education system, schools seem not to prepare young adults for the labour market, where skilled workers are needed. Another hurdle in Indonesia's transition to democracy examined by the authors is the continuing prevalence of human rights abuses and discrimination. The authors argue that "[t]he experience of transitional justice in Indonesia illustrates some of the larger continuing problems of governance in post-Suharto Indonesia, where the rules of the game may have changed but many of the players have not" (p. 164). Many of the old political and military elites are still in power and have little interest in reform, democratic control or the separation of powers. This affects also the media sector. Generally, according to the authors, Indonesia's media sector enjoys greater freedom. However, powerful media oligarchies control and steer the print media and television, pursuing their own political and economic interests. The high use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter by Indonesians might therefore be one attempt to escape tendentious and manipulated information and media coverage. In fact, some examples of protest against injustice, such as the success of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in the so-called gecko versus crocodile case in 2009 show that through social media, protest and criticism

can be strengthened and reinforced. However, as the authors argue, social media can also be highly influential in election campaigns, where political smear campaigns on social media, such as the so-called Ahok case in the gubernatorial election campaign in 2016, are driven by political and economic interests.

The book's greatest strength lies in the detailed up-to-date analysis of state and society in Indonesia. It is informative and precise, enriches existing knowledge, links loose ends and is a real treasure trove of knowledge. Reflecting the broad range of current issues covered in this book, it will be of great interest for academics working in the fields of social sciences, political sciences, economics, development studies, Southeast Asian studies and Asian studies. It should not be missing in any library. As the book is written in an accessible language and style, it could also greatly benefit non-academic practitioners engaged with issues of politics and society in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, such as civil society organisations, journalists, policymakers and interested laypersons.

Kristina Großmann

Azmil Tayeb, *Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia: Shaping Minds, Saving Souls*. (Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series). Abingdon / New York: Routledge, 2018. 250 pages, £100.00. ISBN 978-0-815-36120-6

This book by Azmil Tayeb provides a comparative political study of Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia. What is most compelling about the book is its highly processual nature and historically embedded research. Two main questions are at the centre of the work. The first question, as explained by the author, is comprised of three parts: To what extent and under what conditions do the states in Indonesia and Malaysia functionalise Islamic education for their political ends? How do the two countries engage in such functionalisation? To what extent have such efforts of functionalisation been successful? As a second focus the author analyses why the state in Malaysia has been more triumphant in materialising a centralised control over Islamic education than the state in Indonesia.

The main thrust of the argument is that the post-colonial state in Malaysia has been more successful in centralising its control over Islamic education, and more focused on the promotion of a restrictive kind of Islamic orthodoxy, compared to the post-colonial state in Indonesia. The author argues that this is due to three factors. First, there is the control of resources by the central

government that influences centre-periphery relations. Second, patterns of Islamisation in society have evoked different responses from governments. And third, there is the ideological composition of the state organisations that administer Islamic education.

As a sociologist who primarily works on knowledge and health policy, but also on comparative studies, the author does not treat individuals or organisations as the units of analysis, in the strictest sense, in his approach. Instead, the analysis borrows heavily from case studies. The theoretical engagements that shape the overall study are derived from historical institutionalism and Joel Migdal's state-in-society relations. Quite intriguingly, the book has a highly processual nature, which is quite distinctive, owing to historical institutionalism. As alluded to by the author, "historical institutionalism focuses on the role of timing, sequencing and interactions between various socio-political-economic forces (endogenous and exogenous) that lead to the creation of a particular type of institution" (p. 33).

For this theoretical engagement, it is not clear how Migdal's analytical lens takes up the idea of infrastructural power and hierarchy of norms. Infrastructural power is the capacity of a state to enforce its policy throughout its territory – a concept introduced by Michael Mann – whereas hierarchy of norms, a very Kelsenian idea, looks at why and how a *Grundnorm* holds sway compared to an institution, say, at a local level. The state-in-society approach is not responsive to the two notions, and thus it can be limited. This limitation, or any limitation of the state-in-society approach, is not acknowledged in the book. A methodological note regards access to the field of research. According to my own experience as an ethnographer who has published on comparative studies across Asia, religion plays an important role in accessing the field, much more so in Southeast Asia then in e.g. Central Asia. Questions that are not to be ignored in the capacity of the ethnographer are, for example: Does research on the theme of Islamic orthodoxy and Islamic education in a Muslim minority field setting – or, conversely, in a Muslim majority setting – impede access to data collection? Does the author's gender play an inhibiting or neutral role in this regard? The book does not reflect on questions such as these.

Apart from these shortcomings the reader is rewarded with an impressively detailed book, which at times takes on more of a comparative-political historical study. The 250 pages are divided into six chapters, the last of which provides a conclusion. The first chapter serves as an introduction and presents the functionalisation of Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia. Here, the author provides justifications for the case studies employed in the study: Aceh, Nusa Tenggara Timur and West Java in Indonesia and Kelantan, Sarawak and Selangor in Malaysia. These justifications cover the issue of Muslims as a social group in a minority vis-à-vis majority setting.

Chapter One starts with a theoretical discussion on why and how states wish to control national education systems – in this case, in particular Islamic education systems. In the first part, the author contrasts states' normative notions of what they expect to achieve versus ideological hegemony in everyday practice. The book gauges, with "everyday practice", the way in which the state imposes its values on a society. "Everyday practice" in political sociology does not always connote an imposition of values. A cultural practice could also be exhibited by state apparatuses even without social consciousness of these apparatuses. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* is a study by Clifford Geertz (1980, Princeton University Press) that showed how symbolism and cultural practices are enacted as an organised spectacle. In the first part of Tayeb's book, the author mentions, amongst others, Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Berstein – although, in my view, for clarity, their views should have been discussed and discerned in particular regarding their conceptualisations of how the hidden curriculum functions as a subtle way to promote dominant cultural and economic values. It is very considerate and timely, however, that the author cites and discusses Henry Giroux's *Theory and Resistance in Education* (South Hadley, M.A.: Bergin and Garvey, 1983).

"Functionalisation" is defined as the functionalisation of Islamic education by several Muslim majority states, orchestrated with the aim of following specific political aims despite the fact that the efforts do not create the intended results. The author does not provide further explanation as to why and how these efforts, subject to the available data, fail to meet the intended results; is this due to the failure to embed a certain degree of centralisation and bureaucratisation of Islam in state institutions? States' normative ideas in Malaysia and Indonesia are contrasted with regard to what they hope to achieve vis-à-vis ideological hegemony over everyday practice, which occurs when a state imposes its values on society, in this case through a national education system. In the next part, Tayeb discusses how and why state institutions may form their own identities and objectives, with the result that the general structure of a state becomes incoherent and fragmented. The last section of this chapter then dives into the theories of state, institutionalism and orthodoxy and how they are well suited to the arguments of the book.

A conceptual lens inspired by comparative historical institutionalism is used extensively in the second chapter. It provides an overview of state functionalisation of national education in Indonesia and Malaysia from the late 1800s to the present. "Functionalisation" of national education in general and Islamic education in particular, as defined by the author, incorporates two inseparable and related aspects, namely nationalisation and standardisation. Nationalisation of education involves efforts by the state to establish more national public schools and incorporate more privately-run schools into the national education system; whereas standardisation refers to the streamlining and homogenising of national education based on one single standard set by

the central government in Indonesia or federal government in Malaysia. The chapter begins by discussing Islamic education in the late colonial period (1880–1945). The author aptly points out that the curriculum in the Dutch public schools for the natives in the Dutch East Indies remained secular and exempted from religious instruction, which led to the schools' deep unpopularity among Muslim society. One direct consequence of this was that the Dutch education system was not influential, and thus had limited capacity as a form of social control in Indonesian society.

When turning to Malaysia, the study pinpoints the high level of centralisation of the Malaysian education system and gives an overview of educational policies during the late colonial years in British Malaya (late 1800s to 1957). Compared to the Dutch in Indonesia, the British included Islamic education in the curriculum for national Malay vernacular schools in the late 1800s as a means to increase student enrolment. The post-colonial governments of both Indonesia and Malaysia have undertaken serious efforts since the 1950s to standardise and nationalise education, including Islamic education, as a way to inculcate the idea of nationhood among the population and to create an educated workforce that is able to satisfy the country's development needs.

The third chapter, "The two verandahs of Mecca: Islamic education in Aceh and Kelantan" looks at the legacy of Islamic learning. Further, it depicts how, despite this shared legacy, Aceh has been able to retain the uniqueness of its traditions in Islamic education, whereas the government in Putrajaya is centralising Islamic education in Kelantan. This is owing to the control of resources by the central government of Jakarta and Putrajaya, patterns of Islamisation, and the ideological orientation of the government administration that manages Islamic education. To pursue this contention, the author traces, in chapter three, the formative trajectory of institutional identity of institutions dealing with Islamic education in Aceh and Kelantan and the rationales for different institutional identities, as well as how they have managed to become embedded in these two locations. Tayeb demonstrates how the current nature of Islamic education in Aceh and Kelantan is linked most profoundly with the historical dynamics between key socio-political groups at the local level and the oft-contentious centre-periphery relations in the post-independence era. The comparative historical institutionalist approach is again put to use to gauge how particular institutional identity is shaped by local institutions in the two case studies.

The case of Kelantan exhibits a top-down approach due to the increasing bureaucratisation of Islamic affairs in the state of Kelantan from the early 19th century. Islamic education in Kelantan is flourishing but its functions are slowly being taken over by the federal government in Putrajaya. An interesting finding is that the changes within Islamic education in Kelantan indicate that it is class, and not religion, that shapes the oppositional dimension of the Kelantanese Islamic identity in the form of the Islamic opposition, led by the

PAS (Partai Islam Se-Malaysia). The case study on Aceh illuminates how the institutional identity found in Aceh is much more resilient, reflecting the aspirations as well as interests of Acehnese society and the role of the reformist ulama in Aceh in moulding and reforming the local institutional identity.

The question of Muslims as a minority in Islamic education is a subject of inquiry in the fourth chapter. Titled as "On the image of tolerance: Islamic education in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) and Sarawak", this chapter investigates how Islamic schools in NTT and Sarawak have managed to keep going from the colonial era up to the present. Notably, there is a marked difference in the influence of the Muslim minority in local politics in the two regions. In Sarawak, Muslims have played a leading role by enjoying the backing of the Putrajaya federal government, whereas in NTT such a leading role for Muslims is largely absent in the politics at the provincial level. It is this difference that elucidates why Islamic schools have flourished in Sarawak, whereas the dwindling conditions of Islamic schools in NTT provide a pale comparison. Both regions exhibit similar factors, such as the institutional frameworks that oversee Islamic education, patterns of Islamisation and control of resources by the central government. The last factor allows the state in Malaysia better leverage as regards Islamic education, compared to the state in Indonesia. The lack of funding from the Ministry of Religious Affairs has propelled the *Kanwil Agama* (religious affairs local office) in NTT to be more self-reliant and search for further sources of funding. This is a determining factor in the formation of a localised institutional identity in NTT.

Ethnic group identity in NTT, however, is not discussed. It would be intriguing if the inquiry on the formation of institutional identity also looked at ethnic group identity. Are the Javanese the most influential ethnic group in NTT? Another methodological note for this chapter is the fact that confidentiality and anonymity should have been thoroughly ensured, especially with regard to principals in local schools. In a vigorously historical and richly nuanced tone, the author argues that the poor state of Islamic education in NTT is a consequence of the politically weak position of the Muslim community in the province. The Muslim community in NTT is unable to attain a certain political advantage and challenge the Christian-centric policies and values promulgated by the provincial government and local society. It is evident that the much healthier state of Islamic education in Sarawak is mainly due to the politically dominant position of the Malay-Muslims in the state, which is in turn supported by the federal government in Putrajaya. The author rightly points out how for the case of Sarawak, patronage assumes a more decisive role for Malay-Muslim politicians than for non-Malays, ensuring Malay-Muslim political dominance despite their minority status. Moreover, the politicians selectively take advantage of money from the federal government to garner support in various constituencies. This includes redressing grievances from among the Christian majority.

Integrated Islamic Schools in Malaysia and Indonesia are the focus of chapter five. Notwithstanding the diverging ways in which Malaysia and Indonesia manage differences in their Islamic education system, integrated Islamic schools continue to flourish as regards popularity. In so doing, these schools persist in their ideological indoctrination unhindered by the state. The origins of the schools can be traced back to Islamic propagation (*dakwah*) that was largely campus-based and stimulated by the Islamisation surge that commenced in the late 1970s (p. 176). Much later in the book, the author notes that the integrated Islamic schools serve their original purpose: to lay the groundwork for the Muslim cadres and citizens who will be able to initiate these *dakwah* transformations. Two explanations are given for the different qualities of integrated Islamic education in the two countries. To begin with, it is the pluralist nature of state Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia that tolerates the diversity of religious ideologies in Islamic schools, including in SIT (Sekolah Islam Terpadu, "Integrated Islamic School"), whereas in Malaysia the admittedly conservative curriculum in integrated Islamic schools is aligned with state Islamic orthodoxy. Financial autonomy allows integrated Islamic schools to function in much more stable circumstances than other kinds of Islamic schools that rely on the state.

I do not necessarily agree that with the opening of the Indonesian political system since the *reformasi* era in 1998, there has been a "marketplace of Islamic parties" bringing an assortment of varied ideologies. Indonesia's democracy may well be called "an illiberal democracy", a term used by Eve Warburton and Edward Aspinall (Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression: Structure, Agency and Popular Opinion. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 41(2), 2019, pp. 255–285). In this category, "a regime is described as one in which free and fair elections persist alongside denial of substantive and political rights, such as freedom of speech or freedom to choose and practise one's religion" (Warburton / Aspinall 2019: 280). One might argue that, in such a scenario, the "marketplace for Islamic parties" might well be restrained, if not limited in terms of pluralist ideas and or the pluralist nature of the political parties bringing ideologies of Islamic orthodoxy, despite the seeming democratic nature of the regime.

All in all, the book would have benefitted from more theoretical recommendations. However, it can well be recommended for readers who are keen on area studies on Southeast Asia. To sum up, the book is energetic in its narrative prose as well as historically and processually oriented, which will shed light on what sociologists refer to as "social change". Last and not least, it shows how it is possible to compare two countries without being too positivistic about methods.

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