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CURRENT HISTORY

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CHINA AND EAST ASIA

New Era?

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CURRENT HISTORY

September 2019

“The feud not only has precipitated an economic decoupling of the United States and China, but also has pushed the overall bilateral relationship to its lowest point in half a century.”

The Lose-Lose Trade War

XIANGFENG YANG

It was a high-stakes race on the high seas. Carrying 70,000 tons of American soybeans, the container ship *Peak Pegasus* sped to China, seeking to deliver its cargo before the trade war was due to formally begin on July 6, 2018. The vessel unfortunately arrived hours too late, and had to lie idle off the northeastern Chinese port of Dalian for two months. Docking, unloading, and clearing customs came at an extra \$6 million cost in punitive import duties, paid by the Chinese buyer to the Chinese customs authorities.

This is just one snapshot in the lose-lose outcome of the ongoing trade war between China and the United States, which has shattered the once-popular liberal idea that economic interdependence would foster more harmonious relations between the two great powers. As they exchange tit-for-tat tariffs, vast numbers of importers, exporters, manufacturers—and, ultimately, consumers—bear the brunt of the fallout. American farmers are suffering their worst slump in decades, and some have been forced into bankruptcy. At the same time, Chinese consumers are paying more for pork and soybean products; inflation has been creeping up.

But this is about more than a battle of wills over a trade imbalance. The feud not only has precipitated an economic decoupling of the United States and China, but also has pushed the overall bilateral relationship to its lowest point in half a century. Unnerving as it is, this new norm was years in the making.

After the 2008 global financial crisis, and especially after Xi Jinping took power in 2012, China abandoned its modus operandi of lying low and biding its time—a strategy dictated by Deng

Xiaoping in the 1980s—and became more assertive in its pursuit of power and influence abroad. Its clashes with the Obama administration on a range of issues—not least Taiwan, the East and South China Seas, and cybersecurity—provoked a fundamental rethinking among American scholars and practitioners of the engagement paradigm that had underpinned Washington’s China policy since the Nixon era. A more adversarial US-China relationship was taking shape. The trade war might have begun in 2017 had President Donald Trump not decided he needed China’s help to contain North Korea first.

Now, though, basking in the glow of a booming US economy, the Trump administration has resorted to draconian means to punish China. Chinese leaders have viewed some of the American demands as an assault on their nation’s political system, sovereignty, and dignity—and resisted them ferociously.

A year after the trade war began, it has turned far worse than most expected and dampened the growth prospects of the global economy. Even if it is officially declared over soon, the geopolitical and strategic rivalry between Beijing and Washington will persist and may well intensify. Considering the size and power of these two giants, the downward spiral in their relations has far-reaching implications for the whole world.

A KOREAN HONEYMOON

Trump has been consistent in his economic nationalism. Railing against America’s perennial trade deficit was a mainstay for him on the campaign trail. He found a perfect piñata in China. Alleging that the United States had been “raped by China,” he promised to slap tariffs as high as 45 percent on Chinese goods.

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No sooner was he elected than Trump broke decades of precedent by taking a congratulatory call from the president of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen. But before he could convert his anti-China rhetoric into actual US policy, he was persuaded that the more pressing national security imperative was tackling North Korea's nuclear weapons program—and even asked for Tsai's assistance on that matter. That was a rookie mistake in diplomacy, since it has long been assumed that the road to Pyongyang goes through Beijing first. Upon realizing that Chinese cooperation would be indispensable to implementing his “maximum pressure” strategy against North Korea, Trump made a U-turn on Taiwan by reaffirming the longtime US “one China” policy, which avoids directly challenging Beijing's claim that Taiwan belongs to China.

Long exasperated with North Korea's provocations, which were destabilizing the region and complicating Beijing's relations with South Korea, Xi consented to and executed fresh rounds of United Nations Security Council sanctions targeting North Korea's exports and imports, most of which went through China. Trump had flattering words for his Chinese counterpart, calling Xi his “dear friend.” Even as his administration was brandishing tariffs against other trade partners, Trump dangled the prospect of a favorable trade deal with Beijing if Xi could solve the “North Korean problem” for him.

TARIFF MAN

In November 2017, Trump paid his maiden visit to Beijing and was given a personal tour of the Forbidden City by Xi and his wife. American business leaders accompanying Trump garnered deals worth \$250 billion, but many of them were in the form of memoranda of understanding rather than formal contracts—a prize that was symbolic at best.

For the time being, though, the Trump administration was stretched thin by vacancies in key positions and was busy negotiating revisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the US trade pact with South Korea. In an opening salvo in his trade wars, Trump imposed tariffs of 30 to 50 percent on foreign solar panels and washing machines in January 2018. Two months later came tariffs on imported steel and aluminum. But Chinese producers were largely unscathed due to a lack of exposure to the US market.

US-China negotiations to address the bilateral trade imbalance began in earnest in late February

2018. The two sides quickly staked out positions poles apart. Soon, as a negotiating tactic, each side began publicizing lists of goods to be targeted for tariffs. Once again, though, North Korea burst onto the scene when Trump announced his impromptu decision to meet with Kim Jong-un in Singapore. Xi reportedly was taken by surprise, like everyone else. When Kim showed up two weeks later in Beijing, however, it was Trump's turn to be blindsided. A second Xi–Kim meeting ensued six weeks later.

Trump began to bristle over North Korea's increasing demands for US concessions as a precondition for the Singapore summit. He accused Xi of double-dealing and called off his rendezvous with Kim. Only after entreaties by South Korean President Moon Jae-in did Trump agree to go through with the meeting. Trump left his inconclusive summit with Kim claiming that “there is no longer a nuclear threat” from North Korea.

Before going to Singapore, Trump had ordered—as a “personal favor” to Xi—the lifting of an export ban on ZTE, a state-owned Chinese telecommunications firm in Washington's crosshairs for violating the US embargo on Iran. But he was still dissatisfied that the trade talks had yielded no firm Chinese commitment except meager offers to buy up to \$70 billion in energy, agricultural, and manufactured products.

On July 6, 2018, the trade war officially began as the Trump administration followed through with its threat to impose a 25-percent tariff on Chinese products valued at \$34 billion and Beijing returned fire, dollar for dollar. As Trump continued to blame China for undermining his efforts to denuclearize North Korea, two more rounds of tariffs were implemented in August and September, bringing the total value of affected Chinese goods to \$250 billion.

Over dinner in Buenos Aires on December 1, on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit, Xi and Trump agreed to a truce. Both sides would refrain from increasing tariffs or imposing new ones, and they would aim for a formal agreement by March 1, 2019. As a goodwill gesture, China temporarily lowered tariffs on US car products and resumed purchases of American soybeans.

TAKEN BY SURPRISE

For all their defiance and counterpunches, Chinese leaders were caught off guard when Trump pulled the trigger on tariffs. Having played along on North Korea, they assumed that the seemingly

good chemistry between Xi and Trump had more or less stabilized the relationship. Keen to prove to their domestic audience that China under the Communist Party would never cave in to a foreign power, they felt they had no choice but to match tough rhetoric with action in the face of Trump's ultimatums. It was a matter of self-defense, Chinese officials and analysts reiterated. Left unsaid was how they had erred in their assessment of Trump and the general tenor of the bilateral relationship.

China's political class had seen Trump as the lesser of two evils in the 2016 US presidential election. Beijing was wary of Hillary Clinton, a China hawk who spearheaded the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," which was squarely aimed at counterbalancing Chinese expansionism. In Trump, Chinese officials and analysts found an atypical American politician who had no interest in lecturing them on democracy and human rights. His broadsides against the Obama-led, China-excluding Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact—and against American allies, including Japan and South Korea—were music to their ears.

Despite Trump's anti-China tirades, the prevailing belief in Beijing was that a businessman who prided himself on mastery of the "art of the deal" must be pragmatic and realistic. Therefore he would not want to upset the applecart of broader US-China ties—arguably the most important and complicated bilateral relationship in the world today.

Anchoring that relationship, in the typical Chinese analysis, is the robust economic bond that has manifested itself in two-way trade and investment worth hundreds of billions of dollars every year. It supposedly bound the two countries of disparate cultures and political systems together in a manner that rendered divorce impossible for this "bickering couple," another analogy numerous Chinese officials were prone to using.

This economic interdependence gave many of them the false impression that China had achieved parity in power with the United States, which boosted their confidence. The belief that a unilateral disruption of this "win-win relationship" would amount to mutual destruction in economic terms gave Beijing excessive assurance that the vagaries of Washington's China policy would not swing too far.

Yet the Chinese view was not entirely baseless. The last time the United States had tried to leverage access to the American market as a way of punishing China, in 1994, President Bill Clinton had to walk back his threat to link China's privileged trading status with its human rights record after the pro-China business community turned against him. Trump surely would face a similar boomerang effect should he carry out his threat to impose punitive tariffs. Beijing's retaliation would cause targeted pain for Trump's electoral underbelly, the Midwestern swing states that were pivotal in his improbable 2016 victory but dependent on the Chinese market for their agricultural exports.

So entrenched was the belief that self-interest would deter Trump from putting into practice what he preached that China's political elites failed to fully grasp his unpredictability, a trait he himself touted as a key ingredient of his business successes. Nor did many Chinese observers realize that the thriving US economy had further emboldened Trump.

It is doubtful that many Chinese officials and analysts ever seriously contemplated the outbreak of a trade war, let alone prepared for it. Some continued to publicly play down the possibility, even after

Trump had already used tariffs against traditional US allies.

The trade war came at an inopportune time for China—just as its economy was going through a rough patch, weighed down by mounting public debt, an overheating real estate market, stock market volatility, and the collapse of numerous online lending schemes. Signs of stress from the trade fight soon appeared almost everywhere: stocks slumped and the renminbi depreciated, inching close to the symbolic level of 7 to the dollar. As business confidence declined, consumer spending began to show signs of flatlining just when it was sorely needed to boost the economy.

The government cranked up its censorship machine to tamp down talk of an economic slowdown on social media. However, that could not stop the spreading news of a bad hiring season for fresh college graduates and large numbers of layoffs by previously high-flying Internet companies. In intellectual circles, murmurings of dissent and unease, and questioning of the authorities' handling of the economy and US relations, could also

*Any trade deal will be just
a temporary cease-fire in a
long-lasting economic war.*

be heard in coded language. Even Deng Xiaoping's eldest son reportedly expressed dismay at the jettisoning of his father's foreign policy strategy of keeping a low profile, as well as the broader direction the country was taking.

THE HARD BARGAIN

The restart of negotiations in December 2018 was a welcome reprieve. To appease Trump, the apparent solution for Beijing was to buy more American products. But the reality was far more complicated. Whereas mainstream US economists, trade experts, and business leaders dismissed Trump's fixations on the trade deficit and China's currency manipulation as misplaced or outdated, they were nonetheless united in their frustration over Chinese trade practices and economic policies. The list of complaints spanned restricted market access for foreign firms, state-sponsored industrial espionage, intellectual-property theft, forced technology transfers, and government subsidies for Chinese companies.

The Made in China 2025 plan, a strategic blueprint that the Chinese government unveiled in 2015, called for achieving global leadership in 10 industries, such as information technology and robotics. It fueled fears over China's ambitions. Once the trade war was in full swing, the bigger question became whether Trump should settle for a deal that would narrow the nearly \$400 billion annual US trade deficit with China, or push for more: long-term structural changes in China's economic system.

Determined not to reach a deal only to see China stonewalling or backtracking later, the Trump administration was dead set on an enforcement mechanism. Beijing resisted a US demand for a provision that would allow Trump to impose unilateral tariffs if he deemed Chinese actions in violation of the deal. After Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin announced that Washington was prepared to accept an enforcement scheme that "works in both directions," speculation was rife that a final deal was in the offing.

But then, on May 5, came bombshell tweets from Trump accusing Beijing of renegeing on prior concessions, and threatening to ramp up tariffs on Chinese goods. A visit to Washington by Vice Premier Liu He, Xi's right-hand man for economic policy, failed to break any new ground. On May

10, Trump raised punitive duties from 10 percent to 25 percent for \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods. China responded with tariff hikes on \$60 billion worth of American goods, mostly agricultural products and other raw materials.

Contradictory accounts of what had derailed the negotiations emerged. Public comments by Liu suggested that there were three main fault lines: Chinese demands that tariffs be lifted once a deal was in force, the appropriate volume of Chinese purchases of American goods to narrow the deficit, and US demands that China codify concessions in law. Perceptions and misperceptions about each other's strengths and weaknesses also played a role. Whereas Trump repeatedly boasted that Beijing was desperate because its economy was suffering, his pressure on the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates was seen by the Chinese as a sign of his eagerness to cut a deal that could boost the US economy as well as his reelection chances. Xi appeared emboldened by such perceptions to reject sweeping US demands as infringing on Chinese sovereignty.

Beyond the clash over trade, the two sides have been waging a parallel struggle over high-tech supremacy. Thanks to investment, innovation, and government protection over the years, China is fast gaining an edge in some critical industries of the future, such as artificial intelligence, self-driving automobiles, and fifth-generation (5G) mobile communications technology. This prospect of Chinese global domination in technology has prompted Washington to deploy all the powers at its disposal to limit China's reach in the United States and abroad. The administration and Congress have toughened laws and rules aimed at restricting Chinese investment and acquisitions of high-tech companies. Individual Chinese companies and businesspeople were targeted.

Right in the bull's-eye is Huawei, the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker and a leader in 5G technology. The company has been blocked from the US market for years, but American officials have grown more strident in their warnings that Huawei products could contain "back doors" designed to let Chinese intelligence agents snoop on communications or bring down networks altogether. While no concrete evidence has been presented for such claims to date, Edward Snowden's 2013 leaks of US National Security

Chinese leaders were caught off guard when Trump pulled the trigger on tariffs.

ty Agency secrets revealed that it had hacked into Huawei's servers.

In December 2018, at the behest of Washington, Canadian authorities arrested Huawei's chief financial officer (and daughter of its founder), Meng Wanzhou. Along with the company, she was indicted in January by the US Justice Department for allegedly stealing trade secrets and evading US sanctions on Iran. In the wake of the breakdown in trade talks in May, the US government effectively declared all-out war on Huawei by cutting off its access to American software and components.

In a meeting with Xi at the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, in late June, Trump promised to ease some of the restrictions on Huawei, and the two agreed to a second truce. Negotiations between top Chinese and US officials restarted a month later, but yielded little. The truce soon gave way to renewed escalation of the trade war.

Complaining that China had not purchased US farm goods in the quantity it had promised, on August 1 Trump announced that he would slap tariffs on an additional \$300 billion in Chinese goods. If this order is executed in September as scheduled, almost all Chinese imports would then be subject to Trump's tariffs. China immediately retaliated by suspending all purchases of US agricultural products. Days later, its central bank allowed the yuan to depreciate below 7 per dollar, the lowest level in 11 years, prompting the US Treasury Department to label China a "currency manipulator."

ACUTE INSECURITY

It is now apparent that any trade deal struck between Beijing and Washington in the near future will be just a temporary cease-fire in a long-lasting economic war—a conflict that stems from the US strategic recalibration on China. The old American approach, commonly known as engagement, sought to guide China's rise and integration into the global economic and security systems in a peaceful and gradual manner. This process, which notably included China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001, was predicated on the West, and especially the United States, playing a "mentoring" role to China (and ensuring it changed to their liking).

But as it turned out, China's ascent fueled an acute sense of insecurity in the United States, not least because China, under Xi, has increasingly flexed its muscles in its regional vicinity and in global forums. Beijing has plowed ahead with the massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Xi's signa-

ture foreign-policy project, designed to promote Chinese infrastructure development and investments around the world. Whereas many scholars contend that the BRI is economic in nature and chaotic in execution, American officials have characterized it as a geostrategic challenge to the US-led liberal international order. In retrospect, even before Trump's election, the writing was on the wall that a recasting of America's China strategy would be necessary.

Under Trump, suspicion, fear, and resentment have hardened into outright hostility. Such sentiments were laid bare by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim in May 2019 that China poses "a new kind of challenge, an authoritarian regime that's integrated economically into the West." Pompeo made the remark in London while lobbying European countries to boycott Huawei.

US policy makers are more prone than ever to see any Chinese activity through the prism of national security, even at the expense of other interests. Politicians on both the left and the right have warned against the purchase of seemingly innocuous rail cars made in China. In March, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States ordered the Chinese owner of Grindr, a popular gay dating app, to divest—out of concern that Chinese authorities might gain access to its user data and blackmail its American users, especially military and intelligence personnel.

In April, FBI director Christopher Wray openly championed "a whole-of-society approach" toward China. A number of Confucius Institutes, Chinese government-sponsored centers for culture and language training, have been closed on university and college campuses. Several researchers of Chinese origin have lost their jobs due to their links to China, and a much larger number of Chinese students and scholars have been denied US visas or had their existing ones voided. Such trends not only have aroused suspicions of racial profiling and stereotyping, but also risk impeding normal people-to-people exchanges of a cultural and commercial nature.

In April, the State Department's director of policy planning, Kiron Skinner, cited the fact that China is "not Caucasian" to help explain the US-China competition, seeming to invoke the controversial "clash of civilizations" thesis of the late political scientist Samuel P. Huntington. Xi, speaking at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, denounced the argument as "stupid" and "disastrous." Meanwhile, China's propaganda apparatus

“Social credit redirects the power of data away from markets and strengthens the state’s ability to comprehensively control behavior.”

China’s Social Credit System: Data-Driven Governance for a ‘New Era’

LARRY CATÁ BACKER

China’s emerging social credit system rates and rewards, or punishes, the behavior of officials, businesses, and ordinary citizens. But it is more than a social-control mechanism: it is at the heart of a new vision of governance. This vision is built on a rejection of the utility of traditional legal and administrative mechanisms for governing a society. There is a growing certainty among China’s leaders, guided by President Xi Jinping’s “New Era socialism with Chinese characteristics,” that economic vitality and social development can be best achieved through systems of ratings based on constant supervision.

Ways of Governing

First in a series

This emerging vision was driven home on July 16, 2019, when the General Office of the State Council, the chief administrative center of the People’s Republic of China, issued a set of “Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Social Credit System to Build a New Credit-Based Supervision Mechanism.” The document was directed to virtually all levels of government—national, provincial, regional, and municipal—as well as the ministries and commissions of the State Council and their respective agencies. It underlined a number of critical elements for those seeking to understand the way that China is governed.

First, it was a reminder of the central role that social credit-based governance has assumed since the State Council first embraced this new method of using data to manage behavior in its 2014 “Notice Concerning Issuance of the Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System.” Second, it emphasized the systemic character of

social credit as a mechanism of regulatory governance in China. Social credit, like law, ought to be understood as a system of governance with its own organizing principles and characteristics—yet it operates autonomously from (though in relation to) law.

Third, the Guiding Opinions made as clear as possible (given the discursive style of Chinese official pronouncements) the connection between social credit as a regulatory mechanism and the objective of supervision. As an accountability measure used to manage officials’ behavior, supervision itself has become a central element of Chinese regulatory efforts. It is also applied to foster cultures of accountability throughout the population, public administration organs, and private business enterprises, as well as civil society organizations.

Lastly, the Guiding Opinions served as a reminder of the fundamental objectives of New Era socialism. This doctrine was unveiled in its current form by Xi in his report to the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in October 2017.

What all of this means is that social credit, and the accountability culture for which it serves as a proxy, has emerged as a key element in the transformation of China’s governance structures. It is integral to the understanding and implementation of a rule-of-law based system compatible with the CCP’s fundamental political line. As such, it represents more than a mere set of “new governance” techniques, or some mad effort to develop an arbitrary Orwellian control apparatus.

Rather, it gives form to the long-term and fundamental objectives of the CCP: to detach the organization and operation of politics, economics, and society from their roots in the ideologies and practices of liberal democracy—and its economic

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expression through markets-based regulation underpinned by rule-of-law concepts. In their place, and now quite publicly under Xi's leadership, the CCP has accelerated its efforts to develop an ideology and set of practices based on a socialist re-framing of core concepts of legality, democracy, and the obligations of states.

Social credit thus is a visible manifestation of a profound political transformation. In the view of the CCP leadership, the economic success of China in the four decades of the Reform and Opening Up period that started under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping has now made it possible to refine the political model inaugurated in 1949 with the establishment of the People's Republic. The catalyst is the revolution in technology that now permits supervision through data and analytics in ways that may be more effective than the traditional reliance on law, administrative oversight, and the police power of the state.

Xi has also deemed it necessary to free the model from Western ideologies and influences. That requires the development of Leninist principles through which an understanding of key universal concepts—democracy, freedom, accountability, and the like—can be made more compatible with the governing ideology. This ideology, now guided by Xi's "New Era" concept, remains grounded in the essential role of a leadership core (the CCP) guiding the collective (the people) toward a set of social goals articulated as the CCP's Basic Line.

To understand China today, then, one has to come to terms with social credit. To understand social credit, in turn, requires situating its "system" within a larger complex of accountability and supervision principles at the heart of the project to remake fundamental conceptions of law and the role of the state. But coming to terms with these concepts also requires the suspension of belief in the unalterable quality of key organizing principles central to the self-conceptions of Western liberal democratic states—namely, free markets, with a residual role for the state in social organization.

Of course, in a country as large and complex as China, it would be ridiculous to assert that everything can be explained by a single manifestation of a particular form of governance. And yet social credit does sit near the center of, and is an important element in, a complex set of actions that

together appear to be reshaping Chinese conceptions of law, regulation, and governance.

LAW AND MEASUREMENT

Social credit predates Xi's announcement of a "New Era," but it was an instrumental element in his government's initial efforts to transform society. It was now time to put the party back at the center of national life, move Marxism-Leninism forward from its failed Soviet variations, and shift away from an essentially borrowed set of Western principles of social, political, and economic organization. They had been useful during the Reform and Opening Up era, but they kept China in a state of intellectual (and operational) dependency.

Independence required profound changes in the basic operating system of the state, the economy, and society. Once a new model was created and operationalized, it might then be exported along the corridors of trade and production that China simultaneously is building through its global Belt and Road Initiative announced at roughly the same time (in 2013) as social credit.

Social credit originated in response to two related objectives. The first was the perceived need to remake China's culture, which could be traced back at least to the 2012 unveiling of the "Core Socialist Values" at the 18th CCP Congress. Social credit was to contribute to the advancement of the national values of prosperity, civility, and harmony, along with the social values of justice and rule of law. But at first the primary focus was on individual integrity.

The second goal was reforming the socialist market economy system. That required the adoption of new management techniques that could be more effective than methods drawn from Western concepts of law. Social credit would substitute measurability (governance through measurement, assessment, and reward) for obligation to obey the command of statute, regulation, or administrative decision. Law would become a framework within which a new method of social regulation could be developed ("in accordance with law").

The term "social credit" veils the overall character of the project. The system was initially meant to be more comprehensive. It was to focus on four areas: "sincerity in government affairs," "commercial sincerity," "societal sincerity," and "judicial credibility." Sincerity in this context means integrity and trustworthiness. The system is built

The objective of social credit is to track and grade everyone's actions.

around the idea of compliance: the way one complies with law and social obligation will be as important as the fact that one complies at all.

RATING SOCIETY

Social credit systems are centered on ratings. Ratings are derived, in turn, from data generated by what is being rated—individuals, businesses, public and private institutions, and eventually even CCP members. To that end, it is as necessary to manage data production as it is to manage the analytics and consequences drawn from the data.

The Chinese Internet is increasingly populated by websites that train users in the art of attaining high credit scores. Users of Alipay Sesame Credit can improve their scores by inputting more personal information, linking bank cards to Alipay, borrowing and saving more, making donations, and engaging in public welfare projects—all through Alipay. According to a 2019 *Nikkei Asian Review* article, this scoring system operated by Alibaba Group is based on data collection throughout its online ecosystem of over 700 million users. (By comparison, Google's data harvesting across its own platforms reportedly includes over a billion users.)

Data collection is coordinated between state and private organizations, and its extent now rivals that of the more loosely coordinated systems in the West. While both systems seek to protect the integrity of their data and the confidentiality of their analytics and algorithms, privacy is understood differently—it is inherent in individual autonomy and rights in the West, but has a more public and communal character in China, where it is grounded in the responsibilities of the state. Yet the West has developed robust markets for information; Chinese social credit suggests a larger degree of central planning and coordination for generating data as well as rewards and punishments.

These two worldviews clashed in 2018, when Amnesty International condemned Apple's decision to grant its Chinese partner for iCloud services access to Chinese customer data. Amnesty called that decision a betrayal of Chinese iCloud users, since it made their data vulnerable to Chinese state supervision.

The widely publicized initial focus of the Chinese social credit system has been on the development of credit information and investigation systems in various sectors of the economy. The 2019 State Council guidance focused on government procurement and the market behavior of companies and consumers. But information collected

from CCP members and officials has contributed to data sets that eventually will be utilized under the State Supervision Law, which was enacted in 2018 to strengthen oversight of all public employees, bring about full coverage of state supervision, advance anticorruption efforts, and modernize the national governance system.

The choice of which data to collect determines what actions are rated: late payment of bills, customer satisfaction, liquor purchases, names of books bought, postings to social media, sources of purchases, and so forth. And the ratings themselves are based on the Core Socialist Values developed by the CCP leadership. Social credit thus involves data-driven analytics systems in which algorithms can determine the consequences of values-based ratings.

For example, failure to pay a minimum amount of debt on time will immediately trigger the insertion of the debtor's name on a blacklist that produces consequences: interest rate hikes, travel prohibitions, and the like. Depending on the technology available, the possibilities for data-driven analytics with consequences are as broad as the imaginations of those producing the ratings.

Here is where the connections between social credit, big data, and artificial intelligence come in. Big data is the aggregate information necessary to develop analytics that meet the objectives of those with the authority to set behavior parameters. Artificial intelligence (AI) provides the means by which vast quantities of data can be incorporated into models that can self-correct data sources and adjust algorithms.

For example, the Supreme People's Court announced in May 2019 that it is developing data platforms to help judges handle intellectual property cases. Such a system eventually could be used to evaluate individual judges by comparing their decisions against the average. One need only input the relevant data (this is a land in which data analysts and coders, not lawyers and policy experts, rule) from cases grouped into data sets. Predictive analytics could be used to determine the "average" or plausible range of decisions (self-corrected by AI systems as new cases are added). Judges whose decisions deviate from the predicted or average outcome, given the relevant key facts, would have to justify the deviation. Or judges could be rated to evaluate their performance.

In effect, these are compliance systems already quite familiar to Western enterprises—but not yet to the state. Businesses have been using crude ver-

sions of this kind of system for years in disciplining labor. What makes the Chinese system innovative is its transposition to the public sector, and its use in lieu of (and through) law to reward and punish behavior deemed worthy of attention.

CONTROLLING THE PARTY-STATE

Originally, the 2014 State Council document emphasized that integrity in governmental affairs was to be the crux of the social credit system. Social credit could be used to rate the efficiency of officials by monitoring their actions and rating them based on ideal objectives and behaviors. But it could also be used to gauge corruption or “wrong” decision making. If tied to the new Supervision Law, it could become an even more powerful tool for monitoring and controlling state and CCP officials.

However, none of this has yet reached an advanced stage of development. (It would not be surprising if there were some internal resistance.) And there appears to have been little movement toward using these measures against core leaders—a tendency that China shares with the West in the application of compliance systems. But it is likely that social-credit data sets will be developed for measuring provincial and local governments’ responsiveness to central government directives.

More importantly, perhaps, social credit was intended to direct and constrain officials’ exercise of discretion. That is, government officials were expected to act on the basis of the social credit rankings of the people affected by their decisions. The State Council noted that credit information could be applied to administrative permission requests, government procurement, labor and employment, social security, scientific research management, cadre promotion and appointment, applications for government financial support, and various other areas. It could also be used to foster the development of a credit services market.

Related to this is the idea that internal management of state-owned and private enterprises could be supervised through social credit systems. The West increasingly relies on guidelines that limit prosecutorial discretion to act against corporations in return for their development and operation of compliance systems; China appears inclined to use social credit mechanics for similar purposes. That requires the production of data, models against which analytics can be developed, and algorithms that substitute for administrative or prosecutorial discretion in evaluating behavior and imposing consequences.

To these ends, the State Council has been consistent in urging support for the creation of accurate statistics. Statistics should be harvested by the state, but also by virtually all elements of society. Everything and everyone should become both objects of social credit and generators of the data necessary for imposing algorithmically determined consequences. While all actors produce data, the state becomes the ultimate custodian of that data. Social credit redirects the power of data away from markets and strengthens the state’s ability to comprehensively control behavior.

MARKET OVERSIGHT

Given the thrust of CCP policy since the 1980s, it comes as no surprise that social credit also is poised to serve as a new mechanism of economic modernization. Social credit systems can be used to tackle what Xi’s report to the 19th CCP Congress identified as the principal contradiction facing Chinese society—that “between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life.”

Social credit has been deployed for the oversight of markets and economic production. It is envisioned as a tool for improving workers’ safety (especially in the mining and chemicals sectors) as well as the safety of food, medicine, and consumer products—scandals over defective and dangerous products have embarrassed the government in recent years. Social credit has also been extended to logistics and the oversight of wholesale and retail markets.

Separate social credit systems have been developed for the financial services sector (also plagued with scandal), public procurement, transport, and e-commerce. In February 2019, the *South China Morning Post* reported that 1,282 operators of peer-to-peer lending platforms had been placed on creditworthiness blacklists. Other areas subject to blacklisting systems include pricing and taxes.

To manage categories of conduct identified by the State Council in 2014, the CCP leadership plans to substitute social credit systems for the more cumbersome process of law- and rule-making coupled with police and judicial enforcement. Eventually, social credit in the economic sector, combined with AI, might substitute both for Leninist central planning and for capitalist markets-based allocation.

COLLECTIVE DISCIPLINE

It is in the area of “social sincerity” that social credit has the most alarming implications for

Western observers. The stated objective is to create “harmonious and amicable interpersonal relationships,” but it is difficult to avoid the political subtext. Harmony and amity are terms whose meaning is connected to orthodoxies—social in the West, political and official in China. But in both cases they can be measured. And metrics provide the basis for regulation when coupled with punishment and reward.

Social credit systems use a variety of factors as input. Zhima Credit scores can be affected by purchasing behaviors (buying diapers could increase scores; playing video games may have the opposite effect), while Alipay assesses users’ connections in the platform’s social network. Avoiding military service could result in being banned from staying at luxury hotels, while high credit scores might speed applications for travel to desirable destinations like Europe and Singapore.

In some cities, police downgrade creditworthiness for frequent traffic offenses. It was reported in May 2019 that the city of Beijing now classifies as “uncivilized behavior” eating food on trains after being asked to stop, selling goods to passengers in transit, or listening to loud music—all of which could reduce credit scores.

In other places, people can earn higher credit ratings by engaging in approved civic activities. In Rongcheng, in Shandong province, blood donations, volunteer work, and the like are rewarded with discounts on utility bills. For students, high social credit scores earn coveted job interviews.

This year, it was widely reported that almost 18 million people have been “discredited” and on that basis prohibited from purchasing plane tickets because they are on blacklists for unpaid taxes or fines, while over 5 million people were prohibited from purchasing high-speed train tickets. Over 3 million enterprises were added in the same period to official credit blacklists, banning them from bidding on projects and accessing securities markets.

Social credit is fueled by the insight that the control of social norms is the most efficient way to create cultures of individual conformity to community standards. In effect, it uses social norms like legal norms, with the state at the center. And it is only one small step from the use of social credit mechanics for behavior management to their use for larger political and state security purposes.

The situation in China’s autonomous regions—including recent events in Hong Kong—suggests a growing appetite for utilizing data-based analytics in the management and surveillance of conduct deemed harmful to the state. In May 2019, Human Rights Watch reported that police were using a mobile app to track people in the western region of Xinjiang—monitoring patterns of socializing, acquaintances abroad, and electricity use—as part of a broad set of repressive restrictions on the Uighur minority.

The objective of social credit is to track and grade everyone’s actions. Such a system raises the question: What role remains for traditional law in a context in which all actions produce near real-time consequences? It also suggests a different role for law—as a means by which the system’s own integrity is monitored.

Such developments are likely years away. Yet social credit could revolutionize the role of law in the political order, shifting it from a set of primary commands to a means for managing and structuring the system of behavioral control. Its role would resemble that of law and state intervention in markets: to protect the integrity of market functions and preserve core operating principles.

These are conclusions that might rest uneasily in the minds of people committed to the principles of liberal democracy. But China’s social credit system may well be making such introspection necessary.

RESHAPING GOVERNANCE

At its simplest and most abstract level, social credit is governance in the “New Era.” First, it furthers the idea, raised obliquely at the 19th CCP Congress, that China must find ways of setting rules that reduce reliance on culturally laden Western techniques—like law and constitutionalism. Under Xi’s “New Era” principles, China’s present stage of historical development and its mission to advance Leninism with national characteristics require an approach to law and regulation that is not corrupted by the principles and forms of incompatible systems.

Second, if law is understood as a cultural product, then the leadership core’s foundational political work must be the production of rules that are compatible with the revival and development of its own political model. As the Constitution of the

*Under the social credit
ideology, even law
becomes measurable.*

CCP declares, the “Party’s highest ideal and ultimate goal is the realization of communism.”

Third, social credit systems advance emerging Chinese conceptions of the rule of law and human rights. Social credit emphasizes collective rights grounded in individual (and institutional) conformity to collective expectations overseen by the CCP; in this context, Western-style privacy principles make little sense. (It is possible to check anyone’s social credit score by using a search engine on a Chinese government website.)

Fourth, social credit is likely to serve as the centerpiece of Chinese legality—the correct framework for imposing obligations through law. Its rollout before the 20th CCP Congress in 2022 may be intended to provide a concrete example of the autonomy of Chinese law and legal systems that can be paired with Chinese economic autonomy.

Fifth, social credit, when it matures, is expected to provide a more direct and efficient means of bringing CCP policies and the thrust of its evolving Basic Line into the daily lives and operations of Chinese individuals and institutions. It transposes the language of politics not into law but into evaluation. It changes the nature of the relationship between the individual and the state from one of obedience to law to one of compliance with expectations.

That brings us back to measurability. Under the social credit ideology, even the law can be measured. And once the law becomes measurable, it loses its moral primacy to whatever is used to measure it; rule of law becomes a function of its measure.

COMPLIANCE CULTURES

The social credit system is not well understood outside China. Coverage of the topic in the Western media tends to be alarmist and to overlook parallel developments within public and private sectors in the West. Yet the ambitions at the heart of social credit for radical transformation of the legal order merit sustained attention, especially as its techniques become more widely mimicked by Western enterprises—and as compliance culture moves to the center of governance even within Western liberal democracies.

Social credit has come to liberal democracies via a different set of routes. Western businesses have wholly embraced (in many cases in partnership with the state) compliance cultures that re-

quire not just surveillance but data-driven systems to reduce risks and compel behaviors. Surveillance techniques have become pervasive in the private sector, and the state helps itself to the data when convenient. Likewise, businesses help themselves to public information, such as census data.

From Scandinavian consumers voluntarily having microchips implanted under their skin to facilitate daily transactions, to the pervasive regulation of behaviors through consequence-bearing rankings (including credit scores, product ratings and reviews, and the like), the West does not lag far behind China in its enthusiasm for social credit systems. Nor has the West been slow to embrace the transformative potential of social credit-like systems to convert the individual from an autonomous being to a source of values-laden data. All of this, of course, is being undertaken with “Western characteristics” (driven by a fragmented private sector) to advance our own “New Era” values—values quite distinct from those of the CCP.

But like its Western analogues, Chinese social credit systems remain a work in progress. It is too early to speak of social credit as a unified system. For the moment, what passes for social credit is really the aggregation of a large number of national, provincial, and municipal experiments, each focused on different policies and issues. AI remains elusive as a means of effective implementation.

For now, social credit can be reduced to a growing practice of blacklisting and the administrative matter of matching blacklists with consequences. The 2019 State Council guidance suggests that all decision makers should make use of the blacklists, and especially that local officials use them in allocating public services. But the management of a blacklist system is a far cry from the ambitious conception of social credit envisioned by the State Council. And that gap is unlikely to narrow much by the time of the 20th Party Congress, even though the 2019 guidance calls for consolidating the “system” of social credit.

Nonetheless, the technologies of surveillance and data gathering have substantially advanced. The CCP continues to experiment, and some initiatives may be changed or abandoned. However, social credit as a new means of managing conduct is an experiment that will likely become an ever more important element of Chinese governance and the signature innovation of Chinese “New Era” ideology. ■

“[T]he government opted for piecemeal solutions that would temporarily meet domestic needs for labor while maintaining official closed-door policies.”

Japan’s Model of Immigration Without Immigrants

ERIN AERAN CHUNG

On November 27, 2018, the Diet, Japan’s parliament, passed an unprecedented bill to open the country’s borders to as many as 345,000 workers in the agriculture, construction, shipbuilding, hospitality, and nursing sectors over a five-year period. The measure, which was introduced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and took effect in April 2019, has generated considerable controversy. This is the first time in postwar Japan’s history that the country’s borders are officially open to unskilled foreign labor.

Although Japan has used *de facto* guest-worker policies to fill labor shortages since the 1980s, the state has neither recognized migrants formally as workers nor acknowledged the existence of any guest-worker program. In keeping with this history, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made clear that it does not consider migrant workers to be immigrants, and insists that the new plan is not equivalent to a full-fledged immigration policy.

Some observers nonetheless have suggested that the 2018 law represents a radical shift away from Japan’s restrictive immigration policies. However, the parameters of the guest-worker system are consistent with the incremental steps that Japan has taken over the years to satisfy demand for labor with low-skilled migrant labor schemes. Although it has endured chronic labor shortages since the 1980s and now faces an impending demographic crisis, Japan was, until now, the only advanced industrial democracy that had kept its borders officially closed to unskilled foreign labor since the end of World War II.

Since 2005, Japan has competed with a handful of other Asian countries—including Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—for the less than desirable distinction of having the world’s fastest-aging population, lowest birthrate, and most rapidly shrinking workforce. In a 2001 report on replacement migration, the United Nations Population Division estimated that Japan would have to admit approximately 647,000 immigrants annually in order to alleviate labor shortages and the fiscal burdens imposed by its booming number of elderly citizens.

The number of foreign nationals in Japan has grown in recent years—from 850,000 in 1985 to over 2.7 million last year—but they still make up only about 2 percent of the total population, despite the record pace at which the population is shrinking. Japan’s ratio of foreigners to natives is significantly lower than the average range of 8 to 25 percent in Western European countries.

Japan experienced labor shortages at earlier stages of its industrial development, but it was able to meet demand by tapping domestic sources of underutilized labor, such as rural workers and women. By the 1980s, however, domestic sources of unskilled labor were largely depleted. Rather than import foreign workers who might destabilize what politicians and pundits across the political spectrum described as Japan’s “uniquely homogeneous society,” the government opted for piecemeal solutions that would temporarily meet domestic needs for labor while maintaining official closed-door policies.

OPENING LOOPHOLES

A revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990 opened up two legal loopholes for *de facto* guest-worker policies. One provision created a skills-training program for

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“trainees” and “interns” from other Asian countries. Another established visa policies that offered unrestricted entry and employment rights in Japan for ethnic Japanese immigrants seeking to return to their ancestral homeland from overseas, mostly in Brazil and Peru.

The industrial trainee program allows employers to recruit migrant laborers—usually from other Asian countries such as China, South Korea, and Vietnam—who are not officially recognized as workers. The Immigration Control Act defines “trainees” as those who undertake activities to learn and acquire technology, skills, or knowledge at public and private organizations in Japan. Under this broad definition, people who entered Japan in the early 1990s with the one-year trainee visa were eligible only for a “trainee allowance,” which was unregulated and usually well below the minimum wage—as low as 100 yen (less than one dollar) per hour, according to an April 2005 report in the *Mainichi Shimbun*. They were not protected by labor laws, making them vulnerable to industrial accidents, unpaid wages, and abusive employers.

Several subsequent revisions sought to improve these conditions. They included extensions of trainee visas and government guidelines prohibiting employers from engaging in abusive practices. Landmark court decisions in 1993 affirmed trainees’ rights to industrial-accident compensation, back wages, and severance pay. But trainees continued to suffer poor working conditions. The program also contributed to the growth of the undocumented migrant population, as increasing numbers of trainees overstayed their visas and some sought unauthorized employment in higher-paying jobs.

In response to reports of endemic abuse, the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization, the government body tasked with supervising the trainee scheme, established the Technical Intern Training Program in 1993. It made trainees eligible for a “designated activities” visa that allowed them to extend their stay in Japan for up to three years, as long as they had an employment contract.

Among the expanded visa categories created by the 1990 legislation is the long-term residency (*teiju*) visa specifically for ethnic Japanese immigrants (popularly called *Nikkei*) whose parents or grandparents came from Japan. Its stated purpose

is to encourage them to learn Japanese, explore their cultural heritage, and visit their relatives. This became one of a handful of visa categories that provided unrestricted entry and employment rights in Japan. The *Nikkei* visas were much more generous than those issued to industrial trainees, which did not allow workers to change employers, restricted residence in Japan to a maximum of three years, and were contingent on continued employment by the sponsoring company.

The vast majority of *teiju* visa holders were recruited from Brazil and Peru to work for small- and medium-sized firms in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Already in 1991, Brazilians were the third-largest foreign national group in Japan, following Koreans and Chinese. By 2008, the combined Brazilian and Peruvian population in Japan had grown more than fivefold since the 1990 reform, to over 365,000.

UNANTICIPATED COMPLICATIONS

These two legal loopholes were established to address concerns that foreign workers from Asian countries would seek to settle permanently in Japan, just as Turkish and Yugoslav guest workers had done in Germany. To prevent that from happening, foreign workers would be subject to close monitoring, short-term visas, and employment restrictions. Proponents of the long-term residency visa, meanwhile, maintained that *Nikkei* migrant workers, who were at least partly Japanese by blood, would cause minimal disruption to social stability. And they would contribute to labor-starved industries, making it unnecessary to officially open Japan’s borders to foreign labor.

By the late 1990s, it became clear that most *Nikkei* immigrants would not automatically assimilate into Japanese society simply because they were co-ethnics. Studies conducted by the Ministry of Justice found that *Nikkei* exhibited low rates of Japanese language literacy and faced many of the same problems as other non-Japanese foreigners. The studies also concluded that the long-term settlement of *Nikkei* immigrants could contribute to social instability, citing their reliance on social welfare during periods of cyclical unemployment and their children’s low rate of school enrollment.

During the global downturn following the 2008 financial crisis, companies in Japan’s automobile, machinery, and information-technology indus-

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tries, which employed many *Nikkei*, laid off large numbers of contract workers. By the beginning of 2009, the unemployment rate among Brazilian and Peruvian workers in Japan (most of whom are ethnic Japanese) had risen as high as 40 percent. Unlike industrial trainees and technical interns, co-ethnic migrant workers were not obligated to leave Japan upon the termination of their employment. They were entitled to long-term residency and access to social welfare benefits.

Rather than roll back their blood-based rights, Justice Ministry officials sought to persuade *Nikkei* migrants to leave Japan with a “pay-to-go” program announced in April 2009. Modeled on return-migration policies in Europe, the program offered ethnic Japanese workers from Brazil and Peru a one-time payment of 300,000 yen (the equivalent of about \$3,000 at the time), plus 200,000 yen for each dependent, in exchange for their voluntary repatriation and on the condition that they would be ineligible for the same long-term visa for at least three years. The program has had its intended effect. Since 2009, the population of Brazilians and Peruvians in Japan has declined by more than 30 percent.

Meanwhile, despite perennial complaints about labor abuses, the trainee program proved effective in directing workers toward struggling small- and medium-sized businesses, making an especially notable impact in rural areas. Rather than abolish what conservative and liberal policy makers alike deemed an exploitative system, the Diet passed revisions to the Technical Intern Training Program in 2009. These streamlined the two-step trainee-to-intern sequence so that employers could recruit technical interns directly, bypassing the previous requirement that they hire industrial trainees first.

In 2016, the Diet approved further revisions that strengthened labor protections for trainees and technical interns while increasing the maximum stay from three to five years. Starting in 2015, the Ministry of Justice expanded quotas for particular categories of trainees, especially construction workers needed to help prepare for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. The 2018 law establishing an official guest-worker program has not been accompanied by legislative moves to abolish the trainee program, suggesting that the former is meant to complement rather than replace the latter (unlike a South Korean guest-worker program established in 2006, which replaced an industrial trainee program).

SIGNS OF CHANGE

Is Japan a latecomer to immigration that will, in due course, converge with other industrial democracies by liberalizing its immigration policies? Or do the trajectories of other countries that are reluctant to accept immigration provide a roadmap for Japan?

As in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, migrant workers in Japan are not recognized as potential citizens or permanent settlers by either the government or the public. Japan's lingering reluctance to open its borders to the extent necessary to alleviate labor shortages and demographic deficits suggests that policy makers are still willing to forego the significant economic gains that increased migration could bring, if that is the price to be paid to avoid the social instability they fear will result from the permanent settlement of migrants largely from the global South.

But there are signs that Japan is changing. A *Nikkei*/TV Tokyo poll conducted in October 2018 found that 54 percent of Japanese voters supported Abe's plan to admit more foreign workers to alleviate the country's labor shortages. Another poll taken at the same time by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper found that 51 percent were in favor of admitting more unskilled foreign workers, while 43 percent supported official recognition of “immigration” to Japan. The popularity of recently emerging multiracial public figures, such as the tennis star Naomi Osaka and the 2015 Miss Universe Japan, Ariana Miyamoto, also suggests that the public has grown increasingly tolerant of diversity.

In explaining what many characterized as convergence toward increasingly liberal immigration policies and expanded rights for immigrants from the early 1970s until the populist backlash against immigration in the United States and Europe of the past decade, comparative studies of international migration and citizenship have focused on the influence of domestic political elites and international norms or pressures. Scholars who emphasize the latter contend that greater acceptance of global human rights norms and the growth of institutions promoting them were pushing industrial democracies on the whole toward liberal citizenship and immigration policies characterized by relatively open borders, access to citizenship status, and generous rights for resident foreigners—until the early twenty-first century. But some studies of immigration reform in Europe and North America focused on domestic drivers such

as left-leaning parties, activist courts, and bureaucrats who have expanded rights for noncitizens in response to domestic legal rulings.

If international norms and pressure pushed Western democracies to liberalize their immigration and citizenship policies in the past, those forces have had an uneven and indeterminate impact on East Asian democracies (and in the current political climate, their influence may often seem doubtful around the globe). Japan's ratification of international conventions has led directly or indirectly to some reforms of policies pertaining to rights and citizenship. For example, in 1985, in accordance with international human rights norms, the Nationality Act was amended to allow individuals to acquire Japanese citizenship through either parent, not just the father.

In some areas, including social welfare benefits and access to public sector jobs, foreign residents have gained rights that surpass those prescribed in international human rights treaties. But in other areas, Japan has remained immune to international pressure. It continues to hold one of the worst records in the industrialized world for accepting refugees. Reforms reflecting international norms have thus been applied unevenly to different groups within Japan and inconsistently across policy domains, and they have not resulted in liberalization of immigration policies.

Most reforms to Japan's policies have reflected the government's aim of better controlling immigration, particularly the irregular kind, rather than incorporating immigrants into Japanese society. Political elites have prioritized social stability over liberal democratic principles in immigration policy. Reforms have been implemented only after considerable pressure from internal grassroots movements and international NGOs. In most cases, courts, legislatures, and political parties have responded grudgingly to grassroots demands.

Because Japan officially maintained closed-door policies throughout the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants within its borders for the most part had to return to their home countries or face expulsion. Immigration policy reform and patterns of immigrant incorporation were not the products of deliberate decision making by the state to liberalize policies according to international norms or to manage the permanent settlement of immigrants.

POSTWAR HOMOGENIZATION

The notion that recent developments reflect Japan's convergence with Western liberal democra-

cies on a path toward a liberal migration regime is based on the erroneous assumption that immigration is a new phenomenon in Japan. In fact, as a former imperial power that received its largest inflow of migrants before 1945, Japan was grappling with the challenge of incorporating newcomers well before its European counterparts encountered large-scale immigration. But neither the Japanese government nor most members of the public ever acknowledged the presence of immigrants. Rather, they have been referred to as colonial subjects, Zainichi Koreans, Chinese, foreign residents—and now, migrant workers.

Japan's immigration history as a former imperial power, coupled with its policies toward the population resulting from that legacy, have produced a number of anomalies. To begin with, former colonial subjects and their native-born descendants living in Japan still constitute one of the largest groups of foreign residents, even after the considerable growth of the immigrant community since the late 1980s. For that reason, Japan has the distinction of being the only advanced industrial democracy with a sixth-generation immigrant problem. Japan also has one of the lowest naturalization rates among industrial democracies, with less than one percent of the foreign population gaining citizenship each year.

By the end of World War II, more than two million colonial subjects, primarily from the Korean Peninsula and Formosa (as Taiwan was then known), were residing in Japan. Unlike European imperial powers that had far-flung colonies, Japan colonized nearby territories. That allowed for large numbers of migrants from those lands to enter the metropole in the early stages of colonization. In the later stages, it facilitated the forced recruitment of colonial subjects as laborers and soldiers. Approximately two-thirds of this population was repatriated during the process of decolonization.

With the help of the American occupation authorities, Japan implemented strict immigration and border controls modeled on the US Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, which set quotas based on country of origin. Irregular immigration to Japan nevertheless became a major problem in the years after the war, fueled largely by former repatriates to the Korean Peninsula who fled instability following Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945 and chaos during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. By the end of the US occupation in 1952, approximately 700,000 foreigners, mostly former colonial subjects, resided in Japan.

Whereas prewar Japanese state ideology had included ethnically diverse colonial subjects as part of the imperial “family nation,” the postwar discourse on Japanese national identity excluded them by basing citizenship on the principle of consanguinity. They were reclassified as aliens, while only those who were ethnically Japanese were declared citizens. These postwar citizenship policies—modeled on Germany’s—effectively removed former colonial subjects from the body politic. This marked Japan’s transition from a multiethnic empire to a procedurally democratic but ethnically homogeneous nation.

Postwar Japan’s policies regarding foreign residents were thus based on an American-style immigration model and a German-style citizenship model—a combination that resulted in strict border controls, immigration quotas, and descent-based citizenship policies. But Japan went a few steps farther by closing the country’s borders to unskilled foreign labor, not introducing any exceptions to citizenship based on descent (such as granting citizenship automatically to third-generation residents), and requiring both native-born descendants of immigrants and co-ethnic newcomers to undergo a formal naturalization process to gain citizenship.

NONCITIZEN RIGHTS

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Japan’s migration regime is the sequence by which its policies and programs took effect: efforts to incorporate immigrants into Japanese society, carried out largely by civil society actors and local governments, preceded immigration policy reform. That is, immigrant incorporation programs were implemented at the local level even before national-level policy makers and bureaucrats formally acknowledged the existence of immigrants within Japan’s borders.

Postwar Japan’s citizenship and immigration policies alone did not determine the anomalous status of long-term resident aliens. On the contrary, Japan’s sixth-generation immigrant problem reflects the strategic interaction between government policies and the objectives of generations of activists among Koreans in Japan—or “Zainichi Koreans,” as many in the community of former colonial subjects and their descendants call themselves. These activists have aimed to leverage their status as “foreign-

resident citizens” (*gaikokujin shimin*) of Japan to gain political visibility and power.

Unlike most historically disenfranchised communities elsewhere, instead of seeking naturalization and becoming a small section of the voting population, social movements led by Zainichi Koreans since the late 1960s have focused on their positions as permanent, contributing members of their local communities, deserving of rights equal to those enjoyed by Japanese nationals. This strategy gave birth to a noncitizen civil rights movement. At its heart was the struggle to remove the fundamental barriers that Korean residents faced in their daily lives, but without changing their legal status as foreign nationals.

Foreign residents in Japan routinely faced discrimination in employment, housing, education, and health care until the late 1970s. By the early 1980s, however, their formal legal status and rights were on par with those of immigrants in other advanced industrial democracies. In a series of struggles starting in the late 1960s, they gained

social welfare benefits, access to public-sector employment, and in some localities, the inclusion of ethnic or “multicultural” education in public school curricula, as well as the repeal of a requirement that they register their fingerprints with the government. Zainichi Koreans and

their advocates then turned their efforts to securing local voting rights, as growing numbers of new immigrants from all over the globe began to settle in communities throughout Japan.

In the absence of national programs and policies for new immigrants, institutions previously used to incorporate Zainichi Koreans in Japanese society took on the mission of incorporating new immigrants in their local communities. Instead of confronting an insular society wholly unprepared for large-scale immigration, new immigrants were assisted by hundreds of civil society organizations that offered services, support, and advocacy specifically for foreign residents.

Immigrants with secure legal status benefited from earlier gains by Zainichi Koreans that made foreign residents eligible for a range of social welfare benefits and legal protections. But the existing services and programs had been created for permanently settled, highly assimilated, and in many cases native-born but noncitizen residents, not for recently arrived migrant workers. As a result, the

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priorities of pro-immigrant advocacy groups were often determined by long-settled migrants whose interests did not necessarily align with those of the newer arrivals. For example, some civil society groups and local communities have focused their energies on campaigning for local voting rights for foreign residents. That may be a low priority for recent immigrants who lack Japanese-language fluency and are struggling just to get basic information about schools, hospitals, and health insurance.

The ideas that emerged from earlier Zainichi Korean social movements continue to shape how activists, and even some local governments, approach political empowerment for foreign residents in the Korean and non-Korean foreign-resident communities. Instead of guiding new immigrants on the path to naturalization, local institutions and civil society organizations have emphasized their rights as foreign residents and encouraged them to participate in the public sphere as noncitizen members of their local communities by joining activities such as neighborhood revitalization campaigns and cultural exchange programs.

LEADING THE WAY?

As recent developments in the United States and Europe show, immigration has lost none of its power to provoke a range of nationalistic responses. They may take the form of xenophobic demands to expel all foreigners, alarmist perceptions that immigrants from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds pose a threat to social stability and national security, or simply an effort to distinguish “us” from “them.” Recent immigration in Japan has been met with the full gamut of these responses. As a result of the more virulent strains, Japan has earned a reputation for being a society that is hostile to immigrants.

Advocates of Japan’s “closed-door” (*sakoku*) policy argue that opening its doors to foreigners would result in unmanageable psychological and biological chaos. In recent years, politicians and the popular press have sensationalized stories about foreigners and the growing crime rate, conflating visa overstayers, violent criminals, and post-9/11 terrorists. These stories have been picked up and amplified in Internet chat rooms and forums, spurring the development of what the media calls the *netto uyoku* (Internet far right). The largest Internet forum in Japan, 2channel, has

become a platform for anonymous posts expressing anti-Korean, anti-Chinese, and generally anti-foreign sentiment.

There has also been an increase in vocal anti-immigrant sentiment in the public sphere—targeting Koreans in particular—through such organizations as the Zaitoku-kai, a “citizens group” that opposes what it calls “special rights for Koreans in Japan.” During marches through neighborhoods with high concentrations of Korean residents, members of the Zaitoku-kai have waved the Rising Sun war flag of Imperial Japan, shouting slogans such as “Kill Korean residents” and calling them “cockroaches.”

But there are key differences between what is occurring in Japan and in European countries with respect to anti-immigrant movements and right-wing politics. First, the return of the conservative LDP to power in 2012—the party has ruled Japan since 1955 with only two brief interruptions in 1993–94 and 2009–12—did not resemble the rise of far-right parties in Europe. What might be

called “fringe” parties, such as the neoconservative Nippon Ishin No Kai (Japan Restoration Party), have emerged in Japan, but their popularity has proved short-lived. Second, the political establishment in Japan has not served as an instrument

through which rightist groups can articulate anti-immigrant ideologies.

By contrast, in European countries that have witnessed the rise of the far right, such as Italy, Austria, and Hungary, elected leaders and political parties in power have articulated explicit anti-immigrant ideologies. This difference may be largely attributable to the fact that far-right parties in Europe were elected on anti-immigration platforms, whereas the LDP returned to power with a mandate to oversee an economic recovery. And it was the LDP, not the more centrist opposition parties, that introduced the recent legislation to allow unskilled labor immigration for the first time since World War II.

That is perhaps the most significant difference: unlike European countries, Japan kept its borders closed to unskilled immigrants even as the working-age population steadily declined (the government forecasts it will be just over 50 percent of the total population by 2050). In Japan, anti-immigrant (and especially anti-Korean) sentiment is not a backlash against open immigra-

Japan has one of the lowest naturalization rates among industrial democracies.

tion policies; it is a reflection of the unresolved contradictions that stem from prewar policies. Japan stands out among advanced industrial democracies not for a shift to the right on immigration, but for the remarkable stability of its restrictive immigration and citizenship policies.

Far from lagging decades behind Western democracies on the path toward becoming a liberal migration state, Japan has been on a different trajectory altogether. Its approach increasingly resembles the Singaporean and Gulf state models that treat unskilled foreign workers as permanently deportable populations whose access to rights is tied to their utilitarian functions, rather than what might be expected in a mature democracy.

The new guest-worker law is one of a series of short-term measures to fill labor shortages since the 1960s, but it does not represent the liberalization of Japan's immigration policy. By creating yet another set of visa categories that prioritize some foreign workers over others, this system is likely to harden the hierarchies of noncitizens in Japan, which now range from permanent residents with quasi-dual-citizenship rights to industrial trainees who are not recognized as workers. As so-called traditional nations of immigrants such as the United States enact increasingly restrictive measures to curb both unauthorized and legal immigration, Japan's model of immigration control may soon become the norm. ■

“[T]he idea that being ‘tough on asylum’ wins elections has become one of the great enduring myths of Australian politics, and apparently both major parties have decided that the stakes are too high to try anything different.”

Australia’s Refugee Detention Regime: Offshore and Unaccountable

AMY NETHERY

In January 2019, Behrouz Boochani won the Victorian Prize for Literature, Australia’s top literary award, for his memoir *No Friend But the Mountains*. A Kurdish Iranian journalist and writer, Boochani has been detained on Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island since he attempted to reach Australia to seek asylum in 2013, so he was unable to accept the award in person. In a prerecorded acceptance speech, he declared: “I have always said I believe in words and literature. I believe that literature has the potential to make change and challenge structures of power. Literature has the power to give us freedom.” The video clearly shows the 35-year-old Boochani’s sunken cheeks and protruding shoulder bones, signs of a life of trauma; he does not smile while accepting the award.

No Friend but the Mountains is a poetic and often harrowing account of the years Boochani spent in Australia’s offshore detention center on Manus Island. As a work of prison literature it ranks with the greats. The book dissects in minute detail the interpersonal relationships within the center—between the inmates, the staff, and the authorities who govern from afar. It reveals the acute violence of incarceration, most brutally in the murder of an Iranian asylum seeker, Reza Barati, by guards who attacked detainees in February 2014, injuring scores. It shows the endless banal violence of the myriad humiliations, cruelties, and intentional neglect, embodied in the death of another Iranian asylum seeker, Hamid Khazaei, a healthy young man who died from an untreated cut on his leg. And it details the unrelenting boredom of detention and the frustrations of a life put on hold in its prime.

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The genesis of the book is an important part of the story. Boochani wrote it over five years in thousands of WhatsApp messages sent to his translator, Omid Tofghian, who translated them from Persian to English and reconstructed them into a novel. Boochani’s mobile phone itself was contraband, and his furtive use of this technology was a risky act of resistance and subversion. If it had been discovered, he would have been punished, and the phone confiscated—depriving him of his sole tool of self-expression and communication with the outside world.

POLITICAL PAYOFF

Boochani is one of more than 4,000 people who have been subjected to mandatory, indefinite, and unreviewable detention since 2012 under Australia’s current policy of offshore processing. The policy applies to all people traveling to Australia by boat without a valid entry visa—even those, like Boochani, who qualify as refugees under the 1951 United Nations Convention. These men, women, and children have been detained in poor conditions on the territory of two of Australia’s neighbors, Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Australia first began offshore processing in 2001. It was a hurried policy designed in the middle of a political crisis. Mainland detention centers had been in operation for a decade and were full to capacity. Since 1998, a new wave of people arriving by boat had created disquiet among some segments of Australian society. These asylum seekers were from the Middle East and South Asia: Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Australia had not previously received large numbers of migrants from that part of the world, so many citizens had few reference points for understanding these people and the political context from which they fled.

Meanwhile, 2001 was an election year in Australia, and the incumbent coalition government of the conservative Liberal and National parties was expected to lose power. In the previous election, in 1998, one million people had voted for a new party called One Nation, whose leader, Pauline Hanson, was elected to a seat in the federal Parliament on a racist and anti-immigration platform. Winning back those votes was Prime Minister John Howard's survival strategy.

An opportunity to do so came when a Norwegian freighter, the MV *Tampa*, rescued 433 asylum seekers from a sinking fishing vessel in international waters and requested permission to dock at Christmas Island, an Australian territory close to Indonesia, to disembark these new passengers, some of whom required urgent medical attention. During the subsequent standoff, the Australian government asked a number of neighboring states if they would detain the asylum seekers on its behalf, in exchange for substantial payment. Nauru and, later, PNG accepted the arrangement; both were in dire need of new income streams.

The policy had an immediate political payoff in Australia. By the end of 2001, the government's "tough on asylum" approach had contributed to a resounding victory and an increased parliamentary majority for Howard's coalition.

A total of 1,544 people, mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq, were sent for offshore detention and processing between 2001 and 2007. The policy was designed to deny them entry to Australia and to deter others considering similar journeys by boat. Eventually, 39 percent of the detainees were resettled in Australia, many of them after a wait of three years or more. For the rest, new homes were found in New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and Canada.

In 2002, the boats stopped. Was this because of offshore processing? Internationally, a range of factors—particularly the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and of Saddam Hussein in Iraq—meant that fewer people around the world were traveling to seek asylum. The suite of Australian policies known as the Pacific Solution, which includes offshore processing, the use of the coast guard and Navy to turn back boats, and collaboration with Indonesia to disrupt people-smuggling, certainly also contributed to the hiatus in boat arrivals. But

the extent of its impact cannot be calculated precisely.

A change of government in 2007 brought the Labor Party to power. The new prime minister, Kevin Rudd, announced the abolition of the offshoring policy, which he called "cynical, costly, and ultimately unsuccessful," but in reality it had already wound down since 2003. Altogether, detention and processing between 2001 and 2007 cost more than \$1 billion (all figures are in Australian dollars).

By 2008 the tentative peace in Afghanistan had collapsed, and unrest in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and North Africa resulted in higher levels of forced migration globally. Boats started arriving in Australian waters again, and this time the numbers were much higher: at the peak in 2013, 20,500 people arrived. Moreover, the boats were embarking all year round, including during the monsoon season when the journey was extremely dangerous, rather than waiting until the calm of the dry season.

Years of cooperation between Australia and Indonesia on countering people-smuggling operations meant that this time the players were criminal networks more unscrupulous and organized than the opportunistic groups that had operated

previously. So there were higher casualties, with an estimated 600 to 1,200 people dying at sea between 2008 and 2013. After a false start on implementing a deal to "swap" refugees with Malaysia, the Australian government sought advice from an expert panel, which recommended a range of policy measures, including offshore processing, in an August 2012 report. The centers on Nauru and Manus Island were immediately reopened.

The policy was tougher this time around. The government announced that people who traveled to Australia by boat would "never" be resettled in the country, regardless of their claim to protection under international law. The options for refugees caught up in the policy are few.

New Zealand has made a standing offer to resettle 150 refugees from Australia's offshore program per year, but Australia has persistently rejected it, arguing that doing so would only encourage more people to get on boats. At a cost of \$55 million, Cambodia has agreed to resettle refugees willing to move there: so far, only seven have taken the offer, and most have not stayed long. Other states that

*Sections of the population
perceived to be a threat were
classified and incarcerated.*

resettle refugees are focused on the crisis in Syria, and are otherwise reluctant to be seen cooperating with Australia's policy.

This leaves the United States as the only country to resettle refugees from Australia's offshore program. The arrangement was brokered between Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and President Barack Obama, and has been reluctantly implemented by Obama's successor, Donald Trump, who called it a "dumb deal." After the most recent transfer in May 2019, a total of 515 refugees, including families, have begun a new life in America. It is unclear whether the United States will resettle all of the promised 1,250, particularly the refugees who come from countries included in Trump's travel ban on people from a group of mostly Muslim nations, or those who have failed Australia's security assessment. What Australia has committed to do in return is also unclear: Anne Richard, the former US assistant secretary of state for population, refugees, and migration, suggests there was an expectation that Australia would "do more" to assist Central American refugees.

In May 2019, the incumbent Liberal-National government unexpectedly won the federal election. The debate over offshore processing was more muted than it had been in previous campaigns, but the Labor Party had promised to investigate New Zealand's offer to resettle some of the detainees. The shock election result triggered a wave of despair for the approximately 900 people still confined on Nauru and Manus Island. In the month following the election, more than 100 attempted suicide. Local hospitals, unable to cope with the unprecedented demand, have turned people away. The newly empowered conservative government, however, has reiterated that any "softening" of the policy will "weaken our borders."

THE HUMAN COST

By a number of measures, offshore processing is poor policy. It is expensive and financially inefficient, and it egregiously flouts international human rights law. It does not conform to democratic norms, such as responsibility, accountability, and transparency, or to liberal norms, like procedural fairness, equality before the law, and proportionality.

Most important, however, is the fact that the men, women, and children subject to the policy,

most of whom are found to be refugees, suffer under the conditions and the treatment they experience in detention. There is substantial evidence of systematic dehumanization, intentional neglect, and physical and sexual abuse, including of children. Self-harm and attempted suicide are common. Since 2001, 12 people have died: one from violent assault, six from suspected suicide, two from medical neglect, and three from accidents.

In mid-2018, at least 30 children were reported to be suffering "resignation syndrome" or "traumatic withdrawal syndrome," a rare and life-threatening illness in which people withdraw from walking, talking, socializing, eating, drinking, and using the toilet, while resisting offers of care or encouragement. These symptoms occur in circumstances characterized by pervasive uncertainty, lack of freedom, retraumatizing experiences, and little or no opportunity for positive emotions. Treatment requires removal from this damaging environment and hospitalization.

Despite pressure from medical professionals, the government has made a sustained effort to prevent people from receiving treatment in Australia. In 2017–18, the government fought in the Federal Court against 34 applications for transfer to Australia for medical reasons, including

many with children as the primary applicant. In 81 other cases, applicants were transferred only after a lawyer was engaged to represent them.

In some cases, alternative destinations have been arranged. In 2016, a woman seeking an abortion after being raped on Nauru was sent to PNG for the procedure, despite abortion being illegal and unsafe there. At least five people have also received treatment in Taiwan under a secret arrangement between Australia, Nauru, and Taiwan that was revealed in 2018. For its part, Taiwan is said to be keen to showcase its human rights credentials and to secure Nauru's recognition of its independence from China.

At the end of 2018, the Australian Parliament seized a rare opportunity to improve health treatment options for detainees. After the formation of a minority government, independent members of Parliament, with support from the Labor Party, passed the so-called Medevac law, which established a medical panel with the power to demand that people requiring urgent treatment be brought to Australia, and limited the government's ability

*Offshore processing
is implemented by
private companies.*

to block these requests. As of June 2019, about 40 people had been transferred to Australia under this law, but there is evidence that they are kept in poor conditions in hotels and detention centers, separated from their families, and subject to heavy-handed treatment, including body-cavity searches. Since regaining a majority in the May election, the conservative government has promised to repeal the *Medevac* law, which would once again give it the power to ignore or override medical advice.

There have been some successful legal challenges to these policies. In 2017, over 1,300 refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island filed a class-action lawsuit against the government and security companies for illegally detaining them in negligent conditions. The case was settled out of court, so the evidence was not made public, but the government agreed to pay \$70 million—Australia's largest human-rights settlement to date.

These are failings that would normally lead to the abandonment of any government policy. What explains the persistence of offshore processing?

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Australia has a long history of controlling the entry of migrants, most infamously encapsulated in its White Australia policy, which lasted from 1901 to 1972. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 was one of the first laws passed by the newly federated Australian Parliament. It was designed to restrict the entry of non-British migrants—particularly the Chinese. Australia was not alone in pursuing such policies: “drawing the color line,” as the Australian historians Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have termed it, was a practice shared by all settler colonial states at the start of the twentieth century. Australia was distinct, however, in one respect. For an island nation, the idea of controlling national borders—and by extension, national identity—was both plausible and potent.

A second, less studied aspect of Australia's history is arguably as important: the long-standing use of administrative detention as a tool for controlling certain groups of noncitizens. Aboriginal reserves and settlements, quarantine stations, and enemy-alien internment camps were all institutional predecessors to immigration detention. In each circumstance, sections of the population that were perceived to be a threat to national security, identity, or cohesion were classified and incarcerated. The longevity and broad reach of each of these forms of incarceration indicate that rather

than being an exception, administrative detention in some form has been a consistent feature of Australian social history.

There are striking similarities between these historical precedents and contemporary immigration detention. Arbitrarily assigned to an administrative category, people were incarcerated on a mandatory, indefinite, and unreviewable basis. The lack of accountability, transparency, or judicial review meant that the day-to-day conditions of these sites were largely left to the discretion of the authorities. In some instances, particularly in Aboriginal reserves, people were subject to near total control, often for their entire lives.

Unlike the White Australia policy, the point of these forms of incarceration was not necessarily exclusion—though for some, such as the Japanese detained during World War II, detention preceded deportation en masse. For other categories of people who were ultimately released, administrative detention clearly communicated the power hierarchies within Australian society and the fragility of their membership in that society.

This is not to say that these historical precedents contributed to policy makers' decisions in a conscious way, but rather that they formed an institutional memory officials could draw on when faced with asylum seekers arriving by boat. In 2001, Australian policy makers were also well aware of the US detention of Haitian refugees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in the 1990s—the world's first contemporary example of offshore processing.

This background suggests why, when faced with the arrival of refugee boats in 1989, Australian policy makers resorted to immigration detention, and why they later opted for offshore processing in 2001. But while history helps explain the genesis and form of the offshore regime, the policy's longevity must be understood within the context of Australia's domestic politics.

ANTI-ASYLUM CONSENSUS

In 2001, the government blocked the *Tampa* from docking at Christmas Island and opened detention centers offshore during a hard-fought election campaign. On first glance, the Howard coalition's “tough on asylum” approach contributed to its unexpected electoral success. The lesson to subsequent political aspirants: Being tough on asylum wins elections.

The situation was not as clear-cut as it seemed, however. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United

States occurred in the middle of the *Tampa* standoff, and these two events were conflated in the minds of many who were already concerned about the arrival of Middle Eastern refugees. The Australian Electoral Survey showed that it was the 9/11 attacks, and Australia's deployment with US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan in October 2001—not the *Tampa*—that guaranteed victory for Howard. In so-called khaki elections, held during or in the run-up to war, incumbents are usually returned to power.

Nevertheless, the idea that being “tough on asylum” wins elections has become one of the great enduring myths of Australian politics, and apparently both major parties have decided that the stakes are too high to try anything different. Opinion polling and community surveys show that Australians remain consistently divided over asylum policy: about a third of the population favors tougher restrictions on asylum seekers and refugees; a third is happy with the current restrictive policies; and another third favors more generous asylum policies. But when people in favor of strong restrictions are asked whether they are comfortable with people being treated poorly in detention, the responses are overwhelmingly negative. This raises the question of the extent to which people are aware of the harm caused by detention, or believe these accounts are fabricated by a “left-wing” media with ulterior motives.

There is a pattern of politicians and the tabloid media disregarding concerns about poor treatment. Conservatives have framed instances of self-harm as blackmail by people exploiting the country's compassion. They allege that social workers have coached asylum seekers to harm themselves in order to achieve favorable outcomes in their cases. In recent years, the conservative government has asserted that an act of compassion for a single asylum seeker—such as bringing a child who requires urgent medical attention to an Australian hospital—would cause the collapse of the whole border-protection system.

There has been sustained resistance to this bipartisan policy. The Greens, Australia's largest minor political party, advocate a more humane approach to asylum seekers. The Medical Council of Australia has highlighted the damage caused by detention and urged greater respect for medical opinion in the process for bringing detainees to Australia for treatment. The Refugee Council of Australia, an umbrella organization advocating

more liberal policies, represents 200 mainly small community-based groups.

Vocal opposition has also come from church groups, community organizations, and a network of concerned citizens who operate under the banner of Rural Australians for Refugees. An annual Palm Sunday rally calls for closing the detention centers and promotes the social media hashtag #BringThemHere.

But the protests have been muted by structural factors. Since the early 2000s, the law requires that community groups be stripped of their tax-deductible charitable status if they advocate publicly for any cause. This policy has had a dramatic silencing effect on advocacy and public debate. In the meantime, conservative media outlets have created, and capitalized on, an ongoing moral panic about boats laden with refugees.

ASYMMETRIC PARTNERSHIPS

Nauru and Papua New Guinea were Australia's only colonies. It took them over from Germany at the end of World War II. Nauru became self-governing in 1966, and PNG in 1975. Since then, both independent states have relied heavily on Australian aid.

PNG's impenetrable mountainous terrain is one reason it has a subsistence economy despite ample natural resources. Economic development is also stalled by corruption. In 2001, PNG agreed to host Australia's asylum seekers in exchange for an increase in its aid funding, which already accounted for a significant proportion of its national income. It also received assistance to improve electricity, water, sewers, and other essential services for Manus Province, plus fast-tracked applications for aid for schools and hospitals. In 2013, when Australia revived its offshoring policy, some PNG politicians touted additional funding and a promise of investment as proof of a successful bargain, while outspoken Papuan critics have labeled the arrangement a form of neocolonialism.

In 2016, in a blow to Australia's policy, the PNG Supreme Court ruled that the detention of asylum seekers contravened the constitution's protection of personal liberty and demanded that Australia and PNG find an immediate alternative. However, the center remained in operation for another 15 months. Despite refugees' ongoing protests against their incarceration, they were reluctant to leave the center, fearing violent attacks by the local population. These fears were well founded: a long history of antagonism between detainees and locals has

flared into violence on several occasions, including the 2014 riot in which the Iranian detainee Reza Barati was murdered.

Since the closure of the detention center, former detainees have continued to report encountering hostility, and some violence, from Papuan locals. Gay men are particularly vulnerable to violence in PNG, where homosexuality is illegal. But there are also positive stories: some former detainees have started families with local women. The citizenship status of their children remains uncertain, however, and fathers who are offered the opportunity to resettle in the United States without their families face a difficult decision.

Nauru, which was once the world's richest state per capita thanks to its phosphate deposits, has a scandalous history of corruption and was facing bankruptcy in 2001 when Australia asked for its assistance. The financial and political support from this arrangement has caused further democratic decline. In a dramatic few months in early 2014, Nauru's ruling party sacked the chief justice, resident magistrate, and chief of police. A group of opposition politicians called the Nauru 19 have been expelled from parliament and subjected to severe restrictions on their freedom of speech, movement, and access to medical treatment. The local media is government-controlled and does not publish opposing voices. New Zealand and other countries have condemned these developments, but Australia has insisted that Nauru remains a democracy and is therefore a suitable partner.

AVOIDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Offshore processing is implemented at Australia's behest by private companies on the territory of these democratically deficient nation-states. Multiple layers of governance complicate the usual chains of responsibility. The Australian government has argued that responsibility for the facilities lies with PNG and Nauru, despite findings by Parliament and courts to the contrary. Australia's hands-off approach to the day-to-day operation of the centers contrasts with the highly interventionist approach it takes to blocking doctors' applications to transfer detainees to Australia or elsewhere for urgent medical assistance.

Similarly, accountability is severely constrained. The for-profit multinational and Australian companies subcontracted to implement the policy are

not sufficiently accountable, and the contracts themselves are confidential. A culture of secrecy within these firms has resulted in instances of neglect, abuse, and poor recordkeeping. In 2015, a parliamentary committee heard evidence that the company responsible for employing staff regularly sent incident reports, including those containing details about the abuse of children, into "File 13," its code for the shredder.

None of these scandals, however, has prompted the government to discontinue a contract. In fact, it has unilaterally extended contracts several times despite the company's expressed wish to end the agreement.

Secrecy pervades the offshore processing regime. Since 2013, the government has refused to answer the media's questions about the policy, and has referred at least eight journalists reporting on it to the Federal Police for investigation. The 2015 Border Force Act has prevented anyone involved in implementing offshore processing from speaking about their work; those who do risk two years' imprisonment. This applies even to disclosing a case involving serious physical injury caused by the staff.

Transparency has also been a casualty of Nauru's democratic decline. In 2014, the government increased the cost of a journalistic visa from \$200 to \$8,000—and it does not refund the fee if an application is rejected. In 2016, it announced that it would no longer grant visas for Australian and New Zealand passport holders. In 2018, while hosting the Pacific Islands Forum, Nauru refused entry to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and banned journalists from speaking to refugees. A senior New Zealand journalist was arrested and had her press pass temporarily revoked after she interviewed a refugee.

PIERCING THE SILENCE

The enforced silence of offshore processing has been pierced by some remarkable communications from people caught inside the system. The most prolific voice has been that of Behrouz Boochani, the Kurdish Iranian refugee mentioned at the beginning of this essay. In addition to his award-winning book, Boochani codirected the documentary *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, contributing footage shot using his mobile phone. He has also written essays, poetry, and long-form journalism for Australian and US newspapers, and collabo-

*Antagonism between
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“There is a danger that internal power struggles may cause distractions and derail the project of reformation.”

Are Malaysia’s Reformers Up to the Task?

GAIK CHENG KHOO

Over the past few years in Malaysia, many citizens took on an active role in a campaign to “save the nation” when they feared that the state and its institutions were failing. Prominent among them was a nonagenarian former prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad. In March 2016, Mahathir, together with other opposition leaders and civil society members, issued a Citizens’ Declaration calling for the removal of incumbent Prime Minister Najib Razak through peaceful, legal means.

The declaration cited the appalling state of the national economy, scandals that had brought the country into global disrepute, and the common people’s suffering due to mismanagement, high taxation, corruption, and draconian repression. It demanded the removal of Najib and his collaborators, repeal of all recent laws and agreements that violated fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution, and restoration of the integrity of institutions. The Save Malaysia movement circulated a petition supporting those demands. Eventually it garnered over 1.2 million signatures.

The patriotic appeal of the declaration hinted at a nostalgic, idyllic vision of Malaysia as a successful “Asian tiger” economy, blessed with good governance and a peaceful, progressive, multicultural population equally benefiting from well-formed policies. The country’s most famous tourism advertisement, “Malaysia, Truly Asia,” springs to mind: a montage of costumed ethnic minorities dancing against a backdrop of natural wonders and modern iconic landmarks like the Petronas Twin Towers in the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

The drafters of the declaration expressed their hope of persuading former civil servants to defect from the long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN or Na-

tional Front) coalition, consisting of ethnic-based parties like the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association, and the Malaysian Indian Congress. This focus on winning over members of the establishment was indicative of the moderate or centrist nature of the new opposition coalition, the Pakatan Harapan (PH or Alliance of Hope), which would sweep to victory in Malaysia’s May 2018 general election. Many former and current civil servants played a part in the PH victory.

Key among former UMNO members who helped blaze the campaign trail for PH was the feisty ex-minister of International Trade and Industry, Rafidah Aziz, who boasts four decades in politics. In a campaign speech five days before the election, she likened Malaysia to a very large bungalow with a neglectful caretaker:

A new contract is drawn up every five years to manage, run, and maintain this large house. The current management contractor has not done its job because even the roof is missing, the door and window have disappeared. This is the house the contractor is supposed to take care of. But it has been burgled. The cupboard, the stove . . . all have been stolen. And worse, this beautiful house of ours called Malaysia—it is full of infestations: by rats, by snakes, insects. White ants have started eating into the pillars . . . and that is why I’m out here today.

She appealed to her audience not to renew the old contract with Barisan Nasional and to give it to PH instead. Malaysian voters listened. On May 9, 2018, after 61 years of BN rule, Malaysia finally got a change of government.

Monumental as it may sound, the change is actually a moderate one that matches the generally conservative nature of Malaysian society. After all, PH is yet another coalition of parties led by a former prime minister. The ideology of Mahathir’s new Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu)

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he assured me that he had no intention of missing out. He would be part of the silent majority and the “Malay tsunami” that turned against UMNO.

Meanwhile, not-so-silent progressive Malaysians worked to make sure that the country's 14th general election, known as GE14, was as free and fair as possible by countering the gerrymandering and other advantages meant to tilt the playing field and ensure a BN victory. Since 2008, bias displayed by the Election Commission on behalf of the ruling coalition had left Malaysians with little confidence in the institution that was supposed to uphold democracy at the polls.

Opposition party volunteers, church groups, individual activists, and civil society organizations like Bersih, INVOKE, and Tindak were galvanized into action, building on their previous efforts in the 2008 and 2013 elections. They distributed voter-education materials on social media and organized workshops to train volunteers on how to monitor the polls and spot election fraud. With the help of volunteers, Tindak produced an online electoral map to provide transparency and educate citizens about the effects of the redistricting process. Ordinary Malaysians of various generations turned up at the workshops to volunteer as polling agents representing their parties at voting locations. INVOKE claimed that it signed up over 17,500 volunteers (an estimated 20,000 were needed to monitor polls nationwide).

Having previously bowed to pressure to establish a postal-voting system for Malaysians abroad, the Election Commission sabotaged it by setting a short campaign period of 11 days. Overseas voters reported receiving their ballots just a day or two before the election. But this spurred what was dubbed “Malaysia's Amazing Race” as expatriates organized via social media networks to send their ballots back to their hometown polling stations via couriers. Civil society organizations like Global Bersih and My Overseas Vote also worked to deliver ballots in time.

On the domestic front, ordinary citizens (mainly youth) helped voters return to their hometowns with crowdfunding campaigns, carpooling services, and travel subsidies. All of these initiatives were facilitated by the power of social media.

Not least among the citizen-activists were former civil servants. As early as December 2014, a group of influential moderate ethnic Malays formed G25, a civil society organization made up mostly of senior or retired civil servants who described themselves as “concerned citizens of

Malaysia.” They raised particular concerns over religious bodies' assertion of authority beyond their jurisdiction and flouting of the constitution's protections for non-Muslims' rights. For example, top officials at the Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), a government agency, have called secularism and human rights threats to Islam. JAKIM's narrow interpretation of Islam and its opposition to any Islamic or intellectual discourse that recognizes non-Sunni perspectives sow discord in multiethnic, secular Malaysia.

G25 also worked with Patriot, a group of military and police veterans from across all ethnicities that was established in 2017. While it might have been easy to discount G25 as a band of privileged liberals whose support for a progressive agenda set them apart from the average conservative Malay, the same could not be said of Patriot. In contrast to UMNO bullies like Jamal Yunus and the Red Shirts threatening ethnic minorities with violence, Patriot members of all ethnicities had risked their lives fighting communist insurgents and deployed on overseas missions. In the months leading up to the election, Patriot worked with Bersih 2.0 and INVOKE to reach out to military and police veterans and active members of the security forces.

Patriot convinced police personnel that their ballots would be secret and that they should vote according to their consciences. The group also sent members to monitor early voting at military and police bases throughout the country. More important, Patriot issued statements calling on the police inspector-general and the armed forces chief to act responsibly in the event an emergency was declared. That may have helped to ensure a peaceful transfer of power amid speculation that Najib might suspend democracy rather than accept defeat.

DELICATE BALANCE

While the outcome of the 2018 election was historic, it was only the first step toward reforming and renewing the state. The PH government has received mixed reviews for its performance in the year since the election. A March 2019 survey by the Merdeka Center—after three by-election losses for PH—captured the mood: the euphoria was over. A majority thought the country was headed in the wrong direction; the economy was not doing well. Mahathir's public approval rating plunged from 71 percent to 46 percent. Respondents had become more concerned about bread-and-butter issues than about corruption.

In opposition, UMNO and the PAS have formed an alliance to protect Malays' special privileges. Their constant harping on the "besieged" positions of Malays, the monarchy, and Islam has fueled distrust of the PH government, frustrating progressive policy making and attempts to bring Malaysian law in line with international law. Fear of a Malay backlash, however groundless, led to U-turns on human rights as the government backed away from ratifying the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Fear of offending Muslims also sapped the political will to ban child marriage outright, despite two widely reported cases of Muslim girls being married to men thirty years their senior. Instead, the Home Ministry will require that social welfare, health, and police reports be submitted with applications for marriages involving underage children. (The legal age of consent in Malaysia is 16—but Muslim marriages fall under Shariah law, which does not set an age limit.)

The PH government has had to strike a delicate balance between seeking immediate progress toward social equity—delivering material gains that are felt on the ground—and introducing structural reforms to restore democracy and integrity to institutions over a longer term. So perhaps it is premature to gauge PH's performance after just a year. Despite sinking approval ratings, over 80 percent of those polled in the March 2019 survey agreed that the government should be given more time to fix the problems it inherited. Activists interviewed a year after the election also expressed realistic expectations that change would not occur overnight.

SLOW BUT STEADY

Overall, the PH government is taking slow but steady steps. One of the first tasks it took on was reinstating the separation of powers, restoring the independence of Parliament to check and balance the executive. Six parliamentary select committees were set up to scrutinize draft legislation and maintain oversight of government ministries.

Capable figures, including some from civil society, have been appointed to top positions to battle corruption and reform key institutions that were compromised by Najib. A respected former judge, rather than a PH member, became speaker of the

House. The veteran barrister and constitutional law expert Tommy Thomas was appointed as attorney general. Human rights lawyer and writer Art Harun now heads the Election Commission with a new board. The chief justice, the head of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), and the police inspector-general were all replaced. Some high-level posts went to ethnic minorities and women.

The problem is that these appointments, although generally progressive and meritorious, have been made through executive power. (There is no legal requirement to seek parliamentary approval for appointments, but the PH election manifesto had promised to do so.) Many are driven by the 94-year-old prime minister's urgency to get the nation back on its feet and redeem his legacy while facing the imminent question of his personal mortality.

One example is the controversial appointment of Latheefa Koya, a former Justice Party member, to head the MACC. While permitted by law, the move drew criticism because Mahathir did not consult Parliament, and Koya was regarded as a member of the anti-Anwar camp within the Justice Party.

In other areas, the new government has honored its manifesto pledges to operate in an open and democratic manner. It has solicited public feedback and engaged with civil society and other stakeholders on numerous issues at various administrative levels and across many sectors. Malaysians overseas and within the country have offered their expertise and suggestions.

The Council of Eminent Persons, established by Mahathir to advise him on socioeconomic and financial matters, met with over 350 people from more than 200 organizations in 100 days. The Institutional Reforms Committee, set up by the Council of Eminent Persons shortly after the PH came to power, reported receiving over 1,000 submissions in two months. The National Higher Education Fund Corporation, in charge of providing student loans, is conducting public consultations on how to deal with a debt of 40 billion Malaysian ringgit (nearly \$10 billion) and a high default rate, which threaten to make the fund unsustainable.

The government's efforts to reform the economy and help the B40 (as the bottom 40-percent income segment of the population is known) have not been aided by the discovery that the national

*Malaysians counted on
Mahathir to lead the country
back to its glory days.*

debt exceeds RM1 trillion. The Goods and Services Tax was abolished in June 2018 but replaced in September 2018 with a similar if narrower Sales and Services Tax.

An Economic Action Council was set up to stimulate economic growth, promote fairer distribution of wealth, and improve public well-being. The 2019 budget does seem more fairly distributed across both rural and urban populations, with funds for infrastructural development in Sabah and Sarawak, the two East Malaysian states that were often treated as vote banks while their development was neglected by the federal government. There are also specific allocations to support struggling ethnic minority communities such as Indians and Orang Asli (indigenous groups of Peninsular Malaysia).

The government has maintained social welfare payments for low-income families, and made public transport more affordable by introducing monthly bus passes, first in Kuala Lumpur, then in Penang and other states. It also increased the minimum wage—but only by a measly RM50, to RM1,100 per month, instead of the RM400 boost promised in the election manifesto. The increase was extended to the two East Malaysian states, unlike in the past.

However, these changes have yet to reach rural voters. Better communication of policies could help bridge the rural-urban divide. PH's component parties, which are largely urban-based, need an expanded presence in rural areas. Without such efforts, PH risks seeing its progressive agenda stymied by the divisive race-and-religion narrative of UMNO and PAS.

CLEANING THE STABLES

Some steps have been taken to fulfill the PH manifesto promises to put a stop to corruption. Najib himself is on trial, large infrastructure projects he initiated are under review, and investigations into abuses of state funds are underway. Mahathir negotiated with China to lower the cost of building the East Coast Rail Link by a third, to RM44 billion. Top officials in some of the most tainted ministries—immigration, police, transportation—have been replaced.

Perhaps the most obvious change under the new government is greater freedom of the press. Malaysia jumped 22 spots in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index (though it still ranks 123rd out of 180 countries). There is less self-censorship and more willingness on the part of mainstream media to

hold public debates and discussions on television. Charges of sedition against the political cartoonist Zunar were dropped; now he is free to travel abroad, and his books, once banned, can be sold in local bookstores. The BN-affiliated media has become less one-sided in its coverage and framing of local politics (though critics note that some other outlets have swung to the government's side).

But political and institutional reform has been slow. An attempt to repeal the Anti-Fake News Act that Najib introduced in April 2018, weeks before the election, stalled when the BN-dominated Dewan Negara (Senate) rejected it last September. The 1948 Sedition Act, a legacy of British colonial rule used for decades to repress dissent—and used in early 2019 to detain several people for insulting the monarchy—supposedly will be either repealed or replaced soon. A number of other repressive laws are slated for review and possibly amendment or abolition.

A proposal to form an Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission faced resistance from police associations and former officers. It took a new inspector-general, Abdul Hamid Bador, to endorse the commission as a necessary part of institutional reform, though its fate remains uncertain.

Reform and consultation are happening at various levels in other areas long in need of review. The federal government plans to propose amendments to the Aboriginal Peoples Act of 1954 to better protect indigenous ancestral land claims and to empower the Orang Asli community to appoint and dismiss its own headmen. (In the past, chiefs were selected by the government.) In an unprecedented move, the federal government is suing the Kelantan state government for failing to uphold the land rights of the Temiar tribe against developers, logging companies, and durian plantations.

Meanwhile, environmentalists have pushed the government to do more to safeguard biodiversity, provide states with incentives to preserve their forests, and reform laws like the National Forestry Act to promote sustainable development and environmental justice.

With so much attention devoted to rejuvenating the economy and improving social equity and human rights, one area that seems to be neglected is the nexus between politicians and state-owned enterprises. Critics have called for requiring greater transparency and accountability of government-linked corporations. The political economist Edmund Terence Gomez has argued that these firms

are routinely used by parties in power for political financing, the 1MDB scandal being a prime example. Under the PH government, the heads of these firms continue to be political appointees.

KEEPING THE FAITH

Despite high hopes for the new government, activists often have been disappointed by a lack of follow-up on promising initiatives and insufficient public accountability. The report of the Institutional Reforms Committee (with 233 recommendations), submitted in July 2018 to the prime minister, has not been made public. Similarly, the Council of Eminent Persons' 100-day report was kept sealed under the Official Secrets Act, another law that was used in the past to prevent oversight and transparency.

Many progressive reforms are being discussed and planned; over a hundred laws are scheduled for enactment, amendment, or repeal. But this work is done quietly behind the scenes—and legislation takes time to be drafted and passed. The work of reform and social change is slow, given the resistance the government faces from an opposition that continues to wield the race-and-religion card—and other obstacles within.

There is a danger that internal power struggles may cause distractions and derail the project of reformation. Uncertainty persists as to when—or whether—Mahathir will hand over power to An-

war. A new scandal over sodomy allegations—the same charge used against Anwar in the past—surrounds Economy Minister Mohamed Azmin Ali, a potential rival to Anwar for the succession.

The new ruling coalition includes both idealists and pragmatists—some who prioritize economic growth, others with an inclusive social agenda, and still others concerned that a focus on inclusion of minorities could alienate Malay voters—many of whom buy into the ideology of Malay hegemony and entitlement that pits them against other citizens. The racial divide may worsen if the government does not effectively communicate its policies or make them relevant to the everyday lives of rural Malays. Together with progressive civil society organizations (which are mostly urban-based, like the parties in the coalition), PH needs to develop counternarratives to rebut the messages spread by right-wing Islamist groups that tap into the fears and resentments of the rural poor.

Facing such hurdles, civil society and citizen-activists cannot afford to be complacent if they are serious about realizing their vision of a democratic Malaysia with better governance. The task of rebuilding a nation after six decades of rule by an increasingly authoritarian, neglectful, and self-serving steward will require the same faith and dedication that ordinary citizens, former and current civil servants, and civil society groups put into the GE14 election campaign. ■

“The lack of planning can be understood as an art of governing, for it ensures the operation of informality.”

Escape from Jakarta?

ABIDIN KUSNO

On April 30, 2019, soon after an election in which he won a second term, President Joko (Jokowi) Widodo announced a plan to move Indonesia’s capital city away from Jakarta and the main island of Java. The reasons he gave were not surprising to anyone who has lived in Jakarta: its afflictions of flooding and subsidence (it is one of the fastest-sinking cities in the world), overcrowding, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and the associated problems of governing such a megacity.

Neighboring countries have recently built new capitals: Myanmar’s military regime relocated from Yangon to Naypyidaw in 2005, and Malaysia’s administrative offices moved from Kuala Lumpur to Putrajaya in 1999. But Indonesia has a longer history of such visions of moving the capital. And it has a profound ambivalence about Jakarta.

Jakarta is not only a capital city; it is a post-colonial city, one of the oldest in Southeast Asia. Known since the ninth century as Sunda Kelapa, the main port of the Sundanese kingdom, the city was substantially built up by the Dutch in the seventeenth century as a fortified military depot and a hub for the trading operations of the world’s largest multinational corporation at the time, the United East India Company (VOC). Being a colony, the city—known then as Batavia—was not planned along the lines of Dutch ports like Amsterdam or Rotterdam.

The colonial state was mainly interested in profits, and lacked the political will to design a capital city. Attention to planning was limited to certain areas occupied by Europeans. The parts of Batavia where Indonesians lived were left alone. A considerable section of the population was made up of slaves divided into different ethnic groups.

When environmental problems in the coastal sections of Batavia led to deadly epidemics, the colonial regime simply abandoned that quarter and moved the capital city inland to a more spacious and healthful area. The ruins of Batavia were used to build a new governmental complex. Yet the move was again marked by a piecemeal planning process that prioritized European concerns. The country villas of the Dutch enclaves were constructed with modern sanitary arrangements, but most of the population lived in poor conditions with no basic infrastructure.

The patchwork of “planned” European areas was interspersed with or surrounded by a vast expanse of farmland and “unplanned” neighborhoods (*kampungs*) where the majority of Indonesians lived. This geography of colonial space tells us that the city was never built for Indonesian people. Instead, it was built by and for those who owned the warehouses—the barons who served as government officials and were interested only in short-term economic gains.

Like other colonial cities, Batavia was designed to serve the needs of the European metropole for natural resources and plantation crops. This displaced the local connection between the city and its hinterland and increased the unevenness of development between Java and other islands, since most facilities (from hospitals to schools and other services) were concentrated in Batavia.

Urban development in Batavia was generated by a system of free enterprise; individual initiatives superseded collective will. That aggravated problems caused by the lack of land regulation and town planning. Reports on Indonesian towns in the colonial era were filled with words such as “untidiness,” “disorder,” and “disintegration.”

The postcolonial national elites were fully aware of this fragmented society and colonial neglect when they inherited Batavia in 1950. They wanted the city to become a central site for build-

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ing up a collective “national” entity. They changed its name from Batavia to Jakarta and took over some governmental buildings while demolishing many edifices in the name of decolonization. They also discussed the possibility of moving the capital city elsewhere, someplace outside Java, to promote equality in the nation’s socioeconomic development.

TURMOIL IN THE REALM

Moving the capital city would hardly have been unprecedented in Javanese history. In 1745, a Javanese king called Pakubuwana II moved from his fallen palace of Kartasura to the nearby village of Surakarta. The old palace was in shambles as a result of internal royal conflict, rebellion, wars, and political intrigues involving Javanese and Chinese populations and the VOC.

The *Babad Giyanti*, an eighteenth-century chronicle, refers to this time of disaster with the term *daharuning praja*: “the turmoil in the realm.” It describes in detail the king’s procession to the new capital. The king brought with him not only his family, religious officials, and servants, but also the Dutch company commandant and troops on horseback. Most important were the king’s grand carriage, named Kyai Garuda after a mythical bird, his collection of heirlooms, and a banyan tree, all of which were believed to channel sacred forces that would strengthen the king’s authority. Only then could he restore his position as “the nail of the universe” (the literal meaning of Pakubuwana).

The ritualistic move was needed to transform the reality of defeat into an expression of progress. Moving the capital elsewhere and leaving the old ruins behind was a means of overcoming the “turmoil in the realm.” But this wasn’t a revolutionary attempt to construct a new society. It was a restoration of an old, declining kingdom that was forced to accommodate the rising power of Dutch colonialism.

In Indonesian studies, Pakubuwana’s procession is known as an enactment of what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz called an “exemplary center,” a spectacle designed to provide reassurance that the universe was still in the king’s hands. Today, this legendary move is considered the key to the establishment of Surakarta—which happens to be Jokowi’s birthplace and the city where he served as mayor before moving up to Jakarta.

Why have the four most noted Javanese presidents—Sukarno, Suharto, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and now Jokowi—all considered the idea

of moving the capital from Jakarta? Did their interest stem from perceived crises of their time and the need for a new “exemplary center” to restore their power? In any case, the idea of building a new capital city has long been an important part of Indonesian political culture, even if such plans rarely come to fruition.

For Jokowi’s supporters and the Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas), today’s reasons for moving the capital elsewhere stem from constant “turmoil in the realm.” In an interview in May, Bambang Bodjonegoro, the head of Bappenas, proclaimed: “Java is overburdened, Jakarta is exhausted.”

SUKARNO’S DREAM

In 1957 and again in 1965, Sukarno, the first president of independent Indonesia, formed a committee to plan a future capital city on the island of Borneo, to be named Palangkaraya. The site, a small Dayak village, was located at the center of the Indonesian archipelago, in an earthquake-free zone, whereas Jakarta signified for many Java’s exploitation of other islands. But Sukarno’s aspiration was never fulfilled.

By the end of the 1950s, after securing funds from the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as a war reparations grant from Japan, he put aside his Palangkaraya dream and instead launched construction of a series of monumental structures designed to make over Jakarta as a new “exemplary center” in time for hosting the 1962 Asian Games. Sukarno wanted Indonesia to be seen as modern now, not later. After hosting the 1955 Bandung Conference of Asian and African nations, he decided to “build up Jakarta as beautifully as possible . . . as spectacularly as possible” so that it would be “an inspiration and beacon to the whole of struggling mankind.”

Sukarno’s plan was part of a nation-building project. It embodied the dream of a new future in a country devastated by years of colonial occupation, war, and revolution. It expressed determination to overcome the colonial past, but it was also a response to the immediate political environment of the early independence period, in which Jakarta had become an arena of conflict between communists, Islamic groups, and the US-backed military.

Sukarno’s reconstruction of Jakarta thus was an attempt to quell turmoil in the realm in the context of decolonization. But unlike the eighteenth-century restoration of Pakubuwana’s kingdom, the refashioning of Jakarta was meant to be revolu-

tionary. The city was conceived as the site for both the symbolic construction of the nation and the enactment of Third World liberation.

Sukarno believed that architecture was capable of revolutionizing culture. The state also intended the spectacle of a new exemplary center to legitimize its power. Yet despite the effort to rebuild Jakarta as a beacon of modernity, inflation, poverty, and unplanned urbanization reached alarming levels by the time Sukarno was forced to resign in 1966.

MARKETING FANTASIES

In the 1980s, proposals emerged to move the capital city to Jonggol, a subdistrict of Bogor Regency in West Java, 40 kilometers from Jakarta. Suharto (who held power from 1966 to 1998) had dispatched his sons to work with private developers to acquire or grab some 30,000 hectares of land for building new towns in the area. He sought opportunities for expanding political patronage at the frontier.

By the mid-1990s, Jakarta was showing signs of environmental crisis. It was nicknamed “the project city” in a nod to development driven by profit-making calculations. Class disparity was increasingly visible in the cityscape. Devastating floods and paralyzing daily traffic jams contributed to the deepening sense of trouble in the realm, compounded by negative media coverage emphasizing crime and disorder.

This atmosphere of uncertainty and fear suited Suharto’s military regime. Public and private security measures multiplied. Businesses and new towns favored gates, security guards, and local *preman* (thugs). This security boom came in tandem with the privatization of urban space.

Over time, these patterns of exploitative urban development and environmental crisis have proliferated. Social unrest has also become more evident. There is no easy fix for Jakarta—it is probably too late. But it is still possible to squeeze every remaining opportunity, extracting profit from disaster.

The best indication of this is how the real-estate industry markets developments in greater Jakarta. Since the 2000s, advertising themes have been organized around the idea that Jakarta is deteriorating, and the only recourse is to “escape” from the city to privately run garden estates on the outskirts. They promise self-contained, gated new

towns or “superblocks” built on elevated ground to avoid flooding.

This is not primarily about excluding the underclass (who can enter the enclaves as workers and service providers), but rather about creating an illusion of distance from environmental disaster. Superblocks are touted as having all the required facilities for upper-middle-class working and living, so residents will hardly need to leave the complex and confront the problems of the sinking city. In more extreme cases, this “anti-Jakarta” tendency takes the form of land reclamation projects off the coast, or visions of moving the capital elsewhere.

By the time of Yudhoyono’s presidency, it was clear that Jakarta had gone terribly wrong. With no real improvement on the horizon, the only easy way out was to imagine, once again, an escape from the city. Toward the end of 2010, he declared that the seat of government should be moved so that it could become “the real capital, the real government center, like Canberra, Brasilia, and Ankara.”

A team of experts was convened to explore the idea of moving the capital.

Andrinof Chaniago, the most outspoken member (he later became the head of Bappenas during Jokowi’s presidency), said Jakarta was carrying “too heavy a burden.” The team’s plan, Vision Indonesia 2033,

strongly favored moving the capital to Kalimantan, a region considered relatively underdeveloped, though it has been degraded by resource exploitation. There, a “new epicentrum” could be built, which would help Kalimantan catch up with other regions.

GAMING THE GAP

Supporters of moving the capital city have pointed out that because Jakarta was built by the Dutch, it never had a visionary and comprehensive urban development plan. Indeed, Dutch colonialism produced a fragmented spatial organization with no planning processes to guide urbanization.

Yet the truth about Jakarta is that it has no lack of government policies to regulate its land, traffic, and rivers. The problem is that they have not always been implemented as planned. For instance, during Suharto’s era, there was an Urban Master Plan for long-term growth, an Urban Regional Section Plan for medium-term expansion, and Detailed Plans to control development at a local, block-by-block level. Permits were required

*Will Jakarta be
abandoned and left
to deteriorate and sink?*

for projects associated with each of those levels, but the regulations were often ignored, bargained over, or manipulated.

This gap between policy and implementation was not unintended. The loopholes in regulations and flexibility in practices were designed to allow transactions that would yield extra benefits for insiders. The gap also gave rise to a form of brokerage based on local norms and informal institutional networks that connect government officials, business groups, and military personnel with local leaders, land brokers, and thugs. Policy implementation is structured by these practices of informality. Over time, they became a way of working, a “tradition” that constitutes the politics of urban development.

The association of Jakarta with weak government or lack of planning thus is inaccurate. Law enforcement may be inadequate, but this doesn't mean that the city lacks the capacity to govern. The lack of planning can be understood as an art of governing, for it ensures the operation of informality. This form of statecraft enforces a regulation only when it is deemed necessary by a consensus of the informal network.

By the end of Suharto's rule, that tradition of urban management had been well established. The hierarchy of power was sustained by a structure of implementation that evolved informally among the government, the military, businesses, and other official and unofficial local players. The fortunes of Jakarta's commoners are shaped within these multiple layers of agency.

This tradition works to “harmonize” different social groups, ensuring mutual support and shared benefits without jeopardizing the authority of the government. And in many cases, it also helps civic organizations and commoners operate in the city. The urban poor are occasionally accommodated by the gap between policy and implementation: it allows low-income groups to develop their own capacity to build their residential areas incrementally and informally, as long as they don't undermine the interests of the ruling elites. The *kampung* dwellers are left to manage their resources and built environment with very little help from the government.

Determining who benefits most from the lack of planning (or from “policy failure”) requires a case-by-case analysis. During the Suharto era, the

National Land Agency eased the permit process to stimulate the real estate industry. Major developers secured large tracts of land for speculative urban and suburban development.

The conversion of peri-urban land changes rural livelihoods and encourages young people to seek work and opportunities in the cities. Jakarta still attracts many, despite attempts to limit migrants. But few have developed an emotional attachment that is strong enough to constitute a sense of belonging to this speculative city, where all players create roles for themselves and the powerful have great advantages.

As soon as Jokowi moved to Jakarta in 2012 to serve as governor, he observed:

Jakarta is a city that is both powerful and painful . . . all the progress in the nation can be seen here. National politics is here. Technologies begin here. New lifestyles developed here. Hedonism triumphs here. Big businesses proliferate here. And poverty also reproduces very well here.

In May 2019 Bappenas announced that Jokowi's administration was “longing for Indonesia to have an ideal city that fits with the category of most liveable city. That is the capital city we are imagining.” This is a yearning for a new “exemplary center”—one that presumably would be defined by its contrast with Jakarta.

NEW URBAN POLITICS

Jakarta never had its own formal political life. The city government has always been subsumed under the national administration (recalling the status of Batavia under the authority of the colonial state, even after the municipal government was established in 1900). And unlike other Indonesian cities, which have two tiers of government at the provincial and city levels, Jakarta has the status of a province, with one elected governor to oversee the city's five territories and one district, each of which is managed by a mayor appointed by the governor.

The central government's rationale for not holding direct elections for the mayors is to prevent local politics from destabilizing the capital city. The implication of this arrangement is that local concerns are largely unheard, or are given lower priority by the governor. Consequently, Jakarta's electoral politics is more relevant for national elites than for the inhabitants of the city.

Patterns of exploitative urban development and environmental crisis have proliferated.

However, popular politics has caught on since the collapse of Suharto's dictatorship in 1998. The experience of Lieutenant General Sutiyoso as governor of Jakarta signaled the opening of this new chapter. When he was in office under Suharto, he saw his job as simply following the orders of the president who had appointed him. But soon after Suharto stepped down, Sutiyoso was shocked by street protests that erupted almost every day. He was perhaps the most embattled governor in Jakarta's history.

A regional government law enacted in 2004 provides for the direct election of the governor. Now politicians can succeed only by winning popular support. This shift from presidential appointment to direct election has made it possible for someone with no political base among the national ruling elites to become governor.

Jokowi (before he became president) and his former deputy, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), were good illustrative examples. Their political style was populist, and their urban management approach was organized around issues of social tension and environmental degradation.

To win the heart of the *rakyat* (the ordinary, relatively poor people), Jokowi and Ahok promised cards that would provide access to the health and education systems. They pledged to build low-cost apartments and promoted a slum improvement program. They criticized the gap between City Hall and the people, and they found a way to communicate with the urban poor. In the 2007 gubernatorial election, their populist approach was successful due in large measure to the contrast they made with the incumbent governor, Fauzi Bowo, who symbolized the elite establishment.

When Ahok assumed the governorship upon Jokowi's ascent to the presidency in 2014, the two sought to further undermine the old oligarchic tradition established in the Suharto era. The ruling oligarchy combined large commercial interests with state power in a system of interlocking formal and informal relations. Jokowi asserted that these arrangements had produced only a culture of "corruption, intolerance of difference, greed, selfishness, legal violations, and opportunism." During his 2014 campaign, Jokowi called for a "mental revolution" against this system. He pushed for reforms to create a more accountable bureaucracy as a basis for carrying out their populist agenda.

The rise of Jokowi and Ahok in Jakarta showed that the majority of voters desired radical change. They were fed up with perennial problems such

as flooding, traffic congestion, and inequality. For them, such urban ills were more important than issues of ethnic and religious identity. But that soon changed.

THE FALL OF AHOK

If he had not been Jokowi's deputy, it is unlikely that Ahok could have won the governorship on his own. His rise and fall illustrates the peculiar position of the ethnic Chinese minority in the history of Jakarta—and Indonesia.

Indonesia's ethnic Chinese have long been considered "not national enough," due in no small measure to the legacy of colonial policies that endorsed racism and discrimination. Categories that separated ethnic Chinese (known then as "foreign orientals") from the indigenous population were institutionalized by the colonial regime, and lived on under the discriminatory "assimilation" policy of the postcolonial state. Suharto's regime perpetuated an idea of the Chinese as the ethnic other who controlled the nation's economy, despite the fact that many are extremely poor.

Such stereotypes resulted in a long history of violence against the ethnic Chinese, starting with the 1740 Batavia massacre. The minority nevertheless played a major role in Jakarta's urban development. Its members paid for the construction of Batavia's City Hall, built the city's wall, dug its first canals, and in modern-day Jakarta developed many megaprojects, often in collaboration with Indonesian political elites. Their contribution to the city was both accepted and resented. While some were economically powerful, all but the connected few were political pariahs.

As the first ethnic Chinese and Christian governor of Jakarta in decades, Ahok drew controversy. Being an outsider, he cared little for the old bureaucracy. He brought an image of clean, disciplined, and efficient governance to City Hall. His record of bureaucratic reform and urban development won him support from voters. Yet by undoing tradition, he also created many enemies. Resistance from the old forces took various forms, such as rejection or slow consideration of his budget plans.

Faced with this obstruction, Ahok looked for other sources of revenue that did not require approval from the city council. He negotiated with business groups, as his predecessors had done, but he openly pressured them to provide more funds that could be used to finance infrastructure such as roads, parks, and low-cost apartments. This brought him into disfavor with business leaders

Gay Marriage in Taiwan and The Struggle for Recognition

HOWARD CHIANG

On May 17, 2019, Taiwan became the first country in Asia (and the twenty-ninth in the world) to legalize same-sex marriage. This milestone offers an occasion to reflect on the stakes of Taiwan's sovereignty. Conversely, the question of Taiwan's status has implications for debates on gender and sexuality.

Is Taiwan Chinese or simply Taiwanese? And why does it matter? Internationally, the tensions surrounding these questions have only accumulated since Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1971. Domestically, they continue to divide the country across socio-demographic lines.

The chain of events that led to Taiwan's breakthrough began when the gay rights activist Chi Chia-wei tried to register a marriage with his same-sex partner but was rejected in 2013. Chi subsequently appealed to the Taipei City Government's Department of Civil Affairs, which referred the case to the Constitutional Court. The court ruled in May 2017 that the statutory ban on same-sex marriage in the Civil Code was "in violation of both the people's freedom of marriage as protected by Article 22 and the people's right to equality as guaranteed by Article 7 of the Constitution."

This was a momentous development that drew international attention. But in their reporting on the ruling, foreign news media struggled to find the right word to describe Taiwan. If they wanted to play it safe, they opted for something vague like "island" or "place." Rarely were reporters so bold as to call Taiwan a "nation" or "country."

The court gave the Legislative Yuan two years to enforce the constitutional ruling. This led to the drafting of the legalization bill, which was published by the Executive Yuan on February 20, 2019, and approved in a 66–27 vote (with 20 abstentions) by the Legislative Yuan on May 17.

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In their reports on the landmark vote, most foreign news outlets again avoided identifying Taiwan as a nation-state. With a few exceptions, they referred to this historic turning point simply as a "first in Asia." While the Taiwanese government has finally taken an important step to embrace diversity, the rest of the world seems to be content with staying in the closet.

For Taiwan, this international ambivalence over what to call it is an existential matter. Taiwan's presence continues to be overshadowed by a neighboring economic superpower that is determined to dominate it—and demands that the world recognize its claim to ownership. And this pressure from China does not stop with journalism: academia and even the arts are not spared.

TOPSY-TURVY

Just a month before the vote for marriage equality made headlines worldwide this May, mainland Chinese students at the London School of Economics demonstrated against a sculpture newly installed on campus, Mark Wallinger's *The World Turned Upside Down*. The protesters denounced the inverted globe's depiction of Taiwan as an independent nation (as well as its rendering of Tibet and the Sino-Indian border) as an insult to the PRC's territorial rights.

The university initially caved in to the Chinese students' demands and announced its intention to alter the sculpture by making Taiwan the same color as China on the globe. Following a string of counterprotests, including an open letter sent by Taiwan's foreign minister, Joseph Wu, the administration ultimately resolved the issue by simply adding an asterisk to Taiwan.

Imagine if the sculpture captured something more meaningful—let's say by shading the world map according to the level of human rights protection. That would really turn the protesters' world upside down.

Human rights can be a tricky topic to bring up in the East Asian context. This is especially so

when the discussion centers on gender and sexual injustice. In the academic world, some scholars have argued against judging Asia according to the Western liberal values promoted by international human rights groups. Columbia University professor Joseph Massad, for example, has chastised such nongovernmental organizations for acting as agents of cultural imperialism by attempting to impose the Western notion of homosexuality on the rest of the world. For all of Massad's subtlety, his argument sounds strikingly similar to the homophobia underpinning the "Asian values" discourse, a political ideology forged by some regional leaders in the 1990s, such as Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed. They insisted that certain cultural traits (collectivism, for example) are common to Southeast and East Asian nations.

What happened in May, however, shows that a democratic government like Taiwan's can make a breakthrough for human rights in the region, regardless of how it is perceived internationally. And this campaign was driven by local activism, not international NGOs. In contrast, after all the pressure it has exerted on the world to reject Taiwan's claims to independence, the Chinese Communist Party has only made itself look even worse on human rights by comparison, now that Taiwan's shift on gay rights has garnered international praise.

OPPOSITION COALITIONS

The plot thickens, though, once we look beneath Taiwan's global status. By no means are all Taiwanese content with the new marriage dispensation. Since the 2017 Constitutional Court ruling, conservative religious (especially Christian) groups in Taiwan have formed several coalitions to oppose same-sex marriage. The largest of them is called the Coalition for the Happiness of Our Next Generation. In February 2018, it proposed holding a referendum on the marriage question. In the short span of six months, the Coalition and pro-gay marriage campaigners each collected over 600,000 signatures—vetted and approved by the Central Election Commission—clearing the threshold to submit their proposals to voters.

In the November 24 referendum, voters approved the Coalition's three initiatives, while rejecting the two pro-LGBT proposals. These were only symbolic results, however: the government had announced one week before the vote that re-

gardless of the outcome, the constitutional ruling would still go into effect in May 2019. Yet as the referendum results attest, dissenting voices reign in many corners of the country.

And not all pro-LGBT groups consider the marriage equality movement a worthy cause. The most vociferous queer-friendly critics of same-sex marriage are the group of leftist intellectuals associated with the Center for the Study of Sexualities at National Central University. Long known for their radical Marxist outlook, these thinkers criticize the mainstream gay marriage movement for what they call its exclusionary blind spot.

Instead of simply extending heterosexual privileges to same-sex couples, they urge a fundamental transformation of the institution of marriage and the definition of kinship. Such meaningful redistributive justice can only be accomplished, they argue, when economic and social disparities are addressed. One of their strongest grassroots supporters is the Gender/Sexuality Rights Association Taiwan, which marched to oppose the marriage

institution in the 2012 Taipei Pride parade. Other sympathetic allies include Internet forums such as Coolloud and the New International.

Despite its incisive critique of Taiwanese society, this circle of leftist activists has its own

blind spot. They routinely fail to envision a program of sexual emancipation that addresses social inequality in countries with socialist governments, including China. This implies a highly selective deployment of their queer Marxism.

Meanwhile, their critics point out that the legalization of gay marriage can be viewed in more encouraging terms. Instead of co-opting gay people into a straight institution, the legal recognition of same-sex unions provides an opportunity to undo the traditional meaning and heterosexist baggage of marriage. A queering of the cultural status of marriage can redefine the nature of its regulation of human intimacy. And the fight for economic and material justice does not automatically preclude the social transformation of sexual citizenship.

ENTANGLED FATES

Just two weeks after same-sex marriage became legal in Taiwan, residents of Hong Kong took to the streets to protest an extradition bill that the Hong Kong government was trying to ram through. The number of protesters climbed from 1 million on

*Geopolitical factors
intersect with
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June 9 to over 2 million on June 15. The protesters feared that the extradition bill would expose residents to the mainland's criminal-justice system and further erode Hong Kong's civil liberties and autonomy. Even as the legalization of gay marriage in Taiwan was heralded as progress, the situation in Hong Kong grew increasingly dire.

This occurred right in the middle of Pride Month, which is observed every June in commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall Riots against a police raid on a gay bar in New York City, and to celebrate the modest progress toward LGBT equality all over the world. This year holds special significance, since it marks the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall.

The histories of Hong Kong and Taiwan and the history of homophobia are not easily comparable,

nor should they be; they have always evolved unevenly. But their mutual refraction offers a valuable lesson: it shows that the interwoven fabrics of political hegemony call for multidirectional struggles for minoritarian recognition. We must entertain the comparative bargains of political resistance. The celebration of pride builds on a shameful past; the promising progress Taiwan has made sits side by side with the gloomy uncertainty hanging over Hong Kong's future. When we begin to think about the way geopolitical factors intersect with sexual oppression, we might be able to start treating May 2019 as marking the inception, rather than the destination, of a new mode of coalition politics and solidarity demanded by the twenty-first century. ■

Japanese Ingredients for a Good Old Age

JASON DANELY

The Japanese term *ikigai* has become something of a buzzword in the growing cultural lexicon for living a full and meaningful life. While its simple translation as “that which makes life meaningful” or “one’s purpose in life” may be seductively elegant in itself, over the past decade medical researchers have started probing *ikigai*’s effects on our physical health and longevity. Their evidence seems to suggest that *ikigai* is not just a mystical path to happiness—a finding that might give weight to more creative, holistic, community-based “social prescriptions.” Perhaps what we need to live well is purpose, not pills.

Purpose and meaning in life, however, can be slippery. They change over the course of a lifetime as we are influenced by new people and environments and realize new capacities or vulnerabilities within ourselves. And for many, the demands of work and family seem to offer few guides and fewer moments to contemplate the “good life.”

From the standpoint of our complicated lives, we might tend to assume that older people, who treaded the path before us, would have more answers to existential questions about what matters most and how to find *ikigai*. Indeed, gerontologists know that older people tend to report more positive emotions and even better health than younger cohorts. Yet, interestingly, this is less often the case in Japan, the birthplace of the *ikigai* concept.

Older Japanese people have more negative emotions in later life; their suicide rate is the highest of any age cohort. And it is not just the elderly who are unhappy: the 2019 World Happiness Report ranks Japan 58th, or the fifth least happy country among the wealthy members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (despite ranking second in healthy life expectancy). How can we resolve this seeming contradiction

between the cultural value of *ikigai* and the dearth of happiness in Japan today?

Ikigai, it seems, is more complicated than it first appears. Not only does it bring up questions about the relations among meaning, purpose, and happiness throughout life, but it also compels us to reflect on cultural and individual diversity in what those concepts mean. These are questions of crucial importance for the future of Japan’s aging society, and the place where Iza Kavedžija’s *Making Meaningful Lives: Tales from an Aging Japan*

**Making Meaningful Lives:
Tales from an Aging Japan**
by Iza Kavedžija
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019

stands to make its biggest impact. Kavedžija, a lecturer in anthropology at the University of Exeter, previously explored questions of the “good life” more broadly in a volume she co-edited, *Values of Happiness: Toward an Anthropology of Purpose in Life*.

In her new book, Kavedžija’s rich ethnographic descriptions transport us to an Osaka neighborhood she calls Shimoichi, to meet older residents whose stories reveal the everyday worries and comforts that give weight and texture to nebulous notions of *ikigai*. For the inhabitants of Shimoichi, *ikigai* rarely coalesces in a particular project or narrative, let alone a goal or vision to work toward. Rather, *ikigai* emerges as an attitude or disposition, shimmering between people in simple acts of care and the small stories shared over a cup of tea.

One of Kavedžija’s most provocative speculations is posed in the first line of the book: “Must an anthropology about the elderly be about aging?” The way she approaches this question is to think about older people not merely as individuals who have wrapped up their narrative identities and spend their days recalling the past, but as people who are actively “crafting their own stories of life well lived” in ways that reveal ongoing vitality and creativity. In contrast to public discourses and institutional structures that frame Japan’s super-aged society in terms of decline and dependence, the lives of the older residents of Shimoichi revolve

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around caring and being cared for in ways that generate connection, belonging, and conviviality.

A PLACE TO BELONG

Shimoichi, and more specifically the local non-governmental organization that Kavedžija calls “Fureai” and the neighborhood salon it runs there, is the nucleus around which the older men and women spin their stories, anchoring them to a sense of place and social engagement outside of family and formal care settings. The salon is an *ibasho*, or a place where one belongs, situated in a shopping arcade. Its open doors invite the public to freely enter the space, even as it serves as a staging ground for the salon members to go out into the community as volunteer helpers.

Everything about the salon, from its location to its relations with public administrative bodies, seems to reflect the ambiguity that underlies sociality among older people in Shimoichi. Ambiguity can be accommodating and flexible, but it also dilutes the power of the group to form strong ties or engage in the sorts of moral or political projects associated with other kinds of Japanese organizations, such as unions, social care cooperatives, and activist groups. The very term *ibasho* indicates a cultural response to social alienation, but one that keeps a distance from formal institutions or histories; it is a place where new relationships and selves can be imagined freely with others.

The strength of the *ibasho* is its capacity for striking a balance between sociality and freedom, watchful concern and privacy, intimacy and independence. This balance and ambiguity make up a much more captivating picture of the lively plurality of everyday neighborhood life than stereotypical images of Japanese collectivist discipline. In Shimoichi, obligations and debts are kept small and distributed among the group, so no one is left out but neither is anyone a burden.

Kavedžija shows this balancing act most clearly through her descriptions of how members go about “doing things properly” (*chanto suru*): care for others is expressed by taking care with one’s own words and actions. The practice of cultivating a caring disposition takes place not only in the obvious work of helping the vulnerable, but also in the practice of taking up new hobbies, eating well, or sharing information about local social events. If we understand “doing things properly” as an ex-

pression suggesting seamless continuity between social harmony and personal well-being, then we begin to understand a whole range of behaviors, from the highly ritualized to the seemingly frivolous, as ways of taking responsibility for the maintenance of an *ibasho* where *ikigai* can flourish.

THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

As Kavedžija introduces us to more of the individuals who frequent the salon, she gradually shifts her focus to the life histories of older Shimoichi residents. Rather than attempt to place their stories into a typology, she lets them speak for themselves, revealing diversity not only of experiences but also of narrative styles. Most of these stories are brief, but each reflects a different way of organizing the things that mattered in life into some meaningful sequence, forming a “narrative identity.”

These accounts help us to appreciate that achieving one’s goals or fulfilling normative social roles does not necessarily lead to *ikigai*. Instead, meaning asserts itself most forcefully in

points of divergence from cultural models, the twists and turns that make each person’s life uniquely valuable. Shimoichi residents talk about their lives as a combination of both thoughtful planning and unexpected circumstances. If there

is a single thread that ties them together, it is care: no one makes their own meaning in solitude, and even when caring for others was difficult, it still emerges within the narrative as an event that provided meaning.

Care is also the concept that Kavedžija uses to bring together the sociality of the *ibasho*, on the one hand, and the individual narrative identities on the other. As an “attitude of orienting people toward others” that “overlaps with meaning,” care is a vital part of each person’s *ikigai*, even as it takes varied shapes. The mutual care of the Fureai salon provides a place to extend the self and *ikigai* in ways that are consistent with social values while providing some sense of security and social support. Although Kavedžija does not mention sociologist Mark Granovetter’s foundational work on the “strength of weak ties,” the Shimoichi community would no doubt provide a model case of how loose but extensive networks have more impact than we typically give them credit for.

What, then, should we make of all the unhappiness among older people in Japan? Even though

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Kavedžija makes it clear that for Shimoichi residents, happiness is just one element of *ikigai*, she is also aware that the hospitable setting and the most active members who feature in the book's core stories slant her narrative toward the positive side of aging. If the purpose of this book were to critique the failures of Japan's welfare or pension system, or to recount tales of weary caregivers looking after the frail and disabled elderly, Fureai and the salon would indeed seem an odd choice for a case study.

While Kavedžija is aware of such issues, and of the more common approach of what Ruth Behar has called "anthropology that breaks your heart,"

she has chosen instead to write an "anthropology of the good." Her fluid storytelling exudes humility and respect; her interlocutors never appear as suffering victims, but show their age with dignity and zest. While some will be inspired by this fresh approach, others may find its insights limited to the fortunate elderly who have avoided the worst indignities of aging, or to neighborhoods well endowed with resources and leaders. But if we want to look beyond familiar critiques and start to find models of care that make lives meaningful, we also need the stories of Shimoichi and places like it, where good lives quietly flourish and age does not eclipse *ikigai*. ■

April–July 2019

INTERNATIONAL

European Union

May 26—In elections across all 28 EU member nations for the European Parliament, populist and Euroskeptic parties increase their share of seats to about 25%, up from about 20% in the 2014 elections. Right-wing populists gain ground in Italy, Poland, and Hungary, where Euroskeptic parties are already in control, and in Britain, where the Brexit Party led by Nigel Farage takes over 31% of the vote. Parties on the left also increase their numbers in the EU's only directly elected body, notably in Germany, where the Greens win more than 20% of the vote.

Trade

May 10—Accusing Beijing of derailing negotiations on a bilateral trade agreement, US President Donald Trump raises tariffs from 10% to 25% on \$200 billion worth of imports from China. Trump suggests he is prepared to hike tariffs on nearly all other Chinese goods unless China accepts his terms. China sets retaliatory tariffs on \$60 billion in US goods.

WikiLeaks

April 11—WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is arrested by British police for jumping bail after he is evicted from the Ecuadoran embassy in London, which harbored him for nearly 7 years. US prosecutors in Virginia unseal an indictment charging Assange with conspiring with former US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to steal classified documents. Ecuador says it suspended Assange's citizenship after relations became strained over his behavior.

May 23—US prosecutors indict Assange on 17 counts of violating the Espionage Act for publishing classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010.

ALGERIA

April 2—Following weeks of mass protests that started in February, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigns. Bouteflika, 82, held office for 2 decades but has been incapacitated for several years. His resignation comes hours after the army chief of staff, Gen. Ahmed Gaid Salah, says he should be declared unfit and suggests he is surrounded by a corrupt inner circle. However, Bouteflika appoints an interim government led by loyalists, saying it will organize elections.

AUSTRALIA

May 18—After trailing in opinion polls, the center-right governing coalition led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison wins 77 seats in the legislature, 1 more than needed to form a majority. Morrison is known for hardline conservative policies on immigration and climate change. In 2018, he became the country's 5th prime minister in 5 years due to chronic infighting in his Liberal Party.

AUSTRIA

May 27—Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, of the conservative Austrian People's Party, is ousted by a no-confidence vote in parliament. The vote follows the release of a secretly recorded video in which his coalition partner, Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache of the far-right Freedom Party, offers to secure state contracts for a woman claiming to be a niece of a Russian oligarch.

CHINA

June 15—Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's chief executive, yields to mass protests and indefinitely suspends a bill that would allow crimi-

nal suspects to be extradited to mainland China for trial. However, she does not withdraw the measure outright as demanded by the protesters, who see it as a grave threat to Hong Kong's autonomy and civil liberties. Lam also faces criticism after police use tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters when some try to storm the Legislative Council building. Protests continue through July.

CZECH REPUBLIC

June 23—About 250,000 people join a protest in Prague calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Andrej Babiš over corruption allegations. The demonstrations are the nation's largest in the postcommunist period.

EGYPT

April 23—Election authorities announce that 89% of voters in a 3-day referendum approved constitutional reforms that will allow President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who seized power in a 2013 coup, to remain in office until 2030 with increased control over the judiciary and the legislature.

GREECE

July 7—The center-right New Democracy party wins an election with 40% of the vote and garners 158 seats in the 300-seat parliament, scoring a landslide victory over the ruling left-wing Syriza party, which takes 31%. New Democracy's leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the son of a former prime minister, will replace Prime Minister Alex Tsipras. In 2015, Tsipras came to power as a populist determined to defy austerity policies imposed by Greece's creditors—the EU and the International Monetary Fund—but then gave in to their demands. Despite a partial economic recovery, unemployment remains above 18%.

INDIA

May 23—Official results are announced for elections for the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party wins over 37% of the vote, its highest share ever, and 303 of the 543 seats, up from the 282 it won in 2014. The opposition Congress party takes just 52 seats. More than 600 million Indians cast ballots in a record-setting turnout of 67%; voting took place in 7 phases from April 11 to May 19.

INDONESIA

April 17—Voters go to the polls for a presidential election pitting incumbent Joko (Jokowi) Widodo against Prabowo Subianto (a former general and son-in-law of the late dictator Suharto), whom he defeated in the 2014 election.

May 20—Final results show Jokowi has won a 2nd term, taking 55.5% of the vote, improving on his 2014 showing.

IRAN

April 8—Trump designates Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, clearing the way for economic sanctions on the military unit and other parties linked to it. It is the 1st time the US has imposed the designation on another country's military.

June 13—Two oil tankers passing near Iran in the Gulf of Oman are disabled by explosions that US officials blame on Iran. Four tankers were attacked in the same waters in May.

June 20—Iran shoots down a high-altitude US surveillance drone that it says entered its airspace. Trump authorizes a retaliatory attack on Iranian military targets but then calls it off. He says the

next day that he canceled the strike after learning that 150 Iranians could be killed, which he deems disproportionate.

July 19—Iranian gunboats capture a British oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz, in apparent retaliation for Britain's recent seizure near Gibraltar of an Iranian tanker suspected of violating an EU embargo on Syria.

ISRAEL

April 9—In parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's conservative Likud party and the centrist Blue and White alliance led by former military chief of staff Benny Gantz each win 35 seats in the Knesset.

May 6—A truce reportedly brokered by Egypt halts the worst outbreak of violence between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza since a 2014 war. Over 2 days, Palestinian militants fired 100s of rockets into southern Israel, killing 4 Israeli civilians. Israeli airstrikes left 22 Palestinians dead, including militants and civilians.

May 30—Netanyahu announces that he has been unable to piece together a majority coalition after a dispute among smaller right-wing parties over legislation to end military draft exemptions for Orthodox Jews. A new election is set for Sept. 17.

LIBYA

April 4—The Libyan National Army, a militia commanded by Gen. Khalifa Haftar that controls most of the country's eastern territory, begins an offensive against forces loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli, the capital. The offensive soon stalls but leads to 100s of civilian casualties. Libya has been consumed by factional power struggles since the overthrow of Muammar el-Qaddafi's regime in 2011.

MEXICO

June 7—Trump announces that Mexico has agreed to take action to reduce the number of migrants crossing the country on their way to the US border. In return, he suspends his threats to impose tariffs on all Mexican exports to the US.

NORTH KOREA

June 30—Trump and North Korean ruler Kim Jong-un hold a meeting in the Demilitarized Zone. Trump briefly steps into North Korea, becoming the 1st US president to do so. The 2 agree to resume negotiations over the North Korean nuclear program. The talks collapsed at the previous Trump-Kim summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, in February.

July 26—The South Korean government says North Korea tested a new type of short-range ballistic missile in violation of UN resolutions. Another test follows on July 30.

RUSSIA

July 27—Riot police in Moscow arrest more than 1,300 participants in an unauthorized demonstration against election officials' decision to bar opposition and independent candidates from a September city council election. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny is jailed for organizing the demonstration, 1 of the country's largest in recent years. He suggests July 29 that he may have been poisoned in prison.

SOUTH AFRICA

May 8—In elections for the National Assembly, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) wins 58% percent of the vote, enough to retain power but its worst showing since apartheid ended in 1994. The ANC has been tarnished by corruption and its failure to improve conditions for many poor blacks.

SPAIN

April 28—In the 3rd general election since 2015, the Socialist Party, led by incumbent Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, wins 123 seats in the 350-seat parliament. The newly formed far-right, anti-immigrant Vox party wins 24 seats with just over 10% of the vote. In July, lawmakers reject Sanchez's bid to form a gov-

ernment after he fails to reach a coalition deal with the left-wing populist party Podemos.

SRI LANKA

April 21—More than 250 people are killed in a coordinated series of 8 bombings that include suicide attacks in Colombo, the capital, targeting 3 churches packed for Easter services and 3 international hotels. The Islamic State claims responsibility for the attacks.

June 3—All 9 Muslim cabinet ministers and 2 Muslim governors resign in protest after a Buddhist monk and member of Parliament, Athuraliye Rathana, launches a hunger strike to demand the removal of 3 of the officials, whom he accuses of being linked to the Easter bombings.

SUDAN

April 11—President Omar Hassan al-Bashir is removed from office by the military following nearly 4 months of mass protests against his authoritarian rule. The military says it will stay in power for 2 years before holding elections. Bashir came to power in a 1989 military coup. In 2009 and 2010, the International Criminal Court issued warrants for his arrest for war crimes and genocide in Sudan's Darfur region, but he was never taken into custody. He also oversaw the end of a civil war and the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

June 3—Security forces linked to the Darfur genocide attack a protest camp in Khartoum, the capital, killing at least 128 people, according to a doctors' group. Protest leaders reject a proposal by the military to hold elections in 9 months and vow to continue a civil disobedience campaign until the generals give up power.

July 5—Leaders of the protest movement announce that they have reached a power-sharing agreement with the military. The deal calls for elections in 3 years; in the interim, a general will run the country for the next 21 months, followed by a civilian leader for 18 months, along with a ruling council split between the two sides.

TURKEY

May 6—The election council annuls a narrow victory for opposition candidate Ekrem Imamoglu in the March 31 vote for Istanbul mayor after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan alleges fraud and demands a rerun.

June 23—Imamoglu wins the do-over election by a much larger margin. Erdoğan's Islamist party loses control of Istanbul for the first time in 25 years.

UKRAINE

April 21—Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a comedian and political newcomer, is elected president with 73% of the vote. The incumbent, Petro Poroshenko, takes just 24%. Zelenskyy, the country's 1st Jewish leader, campaigned on an anticorruption platform.

UNITED KINGDOM

May 24—Prime Minister Theresa May announces that she will resign after repeatedly failing to win parliamentary approval for her agreement with the EU on the terms for Britain's withdrawal from the bloc. In April, the EU agreed to extend the deadline for ratification to the end of October.

July 23—Boris Johnson, a former foreign secretary and mayor of London, and a vocal advocate of leaving the EU, is selected by Conservative Party members to replace May. He takes office the next day. Johnson vows to withdraw from the EU by the Oct. 31 deadline, even without a deal.

VENEZUELA

April 30—Opposition leader Juan Guaidó, in an appearance with a small number of troops at a military base in Caracas, calls for a popular uprising to remove President Nicolás Maduro from office. The apparent coup attempt fizzles despite expressions of support for Guaidó from the US and other countries in the region. ■

