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PROFILE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ARAB THINK TANKS¹

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Arab regional think tanks are often confronted with similar issues because of their common history, languages, and races. This paper takes the Gulf countries, the Sham region, and the North African countries (Egypt and the Maghreb) as examples to analyze the characteristics of Arab regional think tanks. The Gulf think tanks enjoy a good economic environment and rich cultural background. They give priority to building bridges between knowledge and power, playing active roles in promoting regional countries' foreign policy, in state economy, in mass media, and in education. The Sham think tanks are mostly independent institutions; they make full exchanges on the key points of the reform and unify their thoughts to optimize government decision-making processes using conferences and meetings. In North African countries, Egyptian think tanks have a high degree of internationalization, having close contacts with think tanks and research institutions in other countries. The Maghreb think tanks are always concerned with the regional situation and focus on studying it. In short, the Arab think tanks serve their governments by providing intellectual support and political suggestions for the development of their countries.

In the dynamic global structure, think tanks play an important role in global collaboration: narrowing the gap between knowledge and policymaking. Think tanks, which promote national soft power and international discourse power, are an important part of national governance. In recent years, the global think tank industry has grown in leaps. After studying the quantity, geographical distribution, and volume of these think tanks, scholars have reviewed the potential reasons:

1 This article is financed by the National Social Science Fund of China (15BGJ057), the Shanghai International Studies University Research Team "Regional Cooperation between East Asia and Middle East in the New Era," and China's Ministry of Education Program (16JJDGJW013).

- The increase in statehood formation during the period of decolonization and the subsequent increase in demand for policy advising;
- The regime changes during the post-authoritarian period, which often start from scratch;
- The increase in the number of bilateral and multilateral donors who use these think tanks to encourage better governance measures in recipient countries;
- The demand for “available knowledge” due to technological advance and social change in order to respond to new policy challenges;
- The advances in communication technologies that allow people to rapidly generate and disseminate knowledge.²

These reasons coincide with the situation in Arab countries. In the Arab world, regional think tanks are especially prominent. Because of the shared history, language, and race, they collaborate on cross-border policymaking issues.³ These networks help facilitate transnational values in policy analysis as well as professional skills. Furthermore, such networks have become a type of governance model, since they promote public-private partnership.⁴ These networks make full use of international politics, regional economics, and regional administration to advance and develop themselves, thus creating the framework of think tanks in the Gulf countries, the Sham region, and the North African countries. This essay outlines the framework of think tanks in the Arab world by analyzing the main characteristics of the three main regional think tanks, with special emphasis on the most prominent think tank in each country.

Think Tanks in the Gulf Countries

During the Middle East’s post-decolonization period, Arab think tanks built a

2 Alan J. Day, “Think Tanks in Western Europe,” in *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, eds. James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 112.

3 Diana Stone, “Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think-Tanks? Three Myths Regarding Policy Analysis Institutes,” *Public Administration* 85, no. 2 (2007): 266.

4 Stone, “Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think-Tanks,” 266.

new communication channel with the public, keeping them informed about the new measures in policy, governance, economics, and social revolution and putting forward pertinent solutions. Think tanks in the Gulf region, in particular, have grown quickly and have had far-reaching impacts in the Arab world.

The think tanks of the eight Gulf countries can be categorized into two types. One type has developed economic power—especially those in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar—in which think tanks have a royal connection through support from the king or the emir. Therefore, they have made great progress, are impactful, and enjoy a good reputation in the region.⁵ The other type values public opinion and academia, like those in Iraq, which emphasize research within college and university environments. Furthermore, some are established by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as those in Yemen, and combine public surveys and fundamental research.

Table 1 Think Tanks in Gulf Countries

Country	Characteristics	Main Think Tank
Saudi Arabia	Well-funded; focused on Islamic studies and regional development.	Gulf Research Center
United Arab Emirates	Well-funded; has royal support.	The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research
Qatar	Strong economic support; government emphasizes the construction of think tanks.	Al Jazeera Centre for Studies
Kingdom of Bahrain	With a "revolving door" mechanism to ensure exchange between the royal family and academia.	Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research; Derasat
Kuwait	Focused on the study of regional economic development and the country's civilization and history.	Arab Planning Institute
Sultanate of Oman	Think tank construction only recently started; quality and quantity are relatively underdeveloped.	Tawasul

5 Yi Li, "Arab Think Tanks: Development Trends and Characteristics," *West Asia and Africa* 4 (2016): 129–45.

Iraq	Rich cultural background; think tank construction started early through many colleges and universities.	Al Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies
Yemen	Mostly non-governmental organizations relying on public opinion surveys to carry out research.	Yemen Polling Center

Saudi Arabia

The prominence of Saudi Arabian think tanks relies on the country's connections to Islamic holy sites and developed economic status. Because two of the three Islamic holy lands are in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabian think tanks can make distinct contributions to Islamic studies and Arab historical research. Due to its strong economic development, these think tanks possess a certain level of influence in the Middle East as well as across the globe. Since the country's economic status stems from oil exports, Saudi Arabian think tanks also focus on sustainable development practices to move beyond an oil-based economy.⁶ Although they are well-funded, they need to improve upon gaining trust and appreciation in Saudi Arabian society.⁷

Independently founded in 2000, the Gulf Research Center is one of the world's top think tanks in the field of foreign policy and international affairs, ranking eighth in the Middle East and North Africa region.⁸ The Gulf Research Center principally engages in research, advocacy, and translation work, in addition to providing education, training, and consultation services.⁹ Its research covers a wide variety of topics, such as economic development, energy security, politics, international relations, national defense and security issues, environment, and technology.¹⁰ Setting up branches in

6 "Gulf Energy Program," Gulf Research Center, accessed April 29, 2017, http://www.grc.net/index.php?CAT_ID=11&set_lang=en&frm_module=&sec=Research+Programs&sec_type=h&Cat_Title=Gulf+Energy+Program&main_menu=82&override=Gulf+Energy+Program.

7 Samar Fatany, "We Need Independent Arab Think Tanks to Address our Challenges," *Saudi Gazette*, February 16, 2016, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/opinion/we-need-independent-arab-think-tanks-to-address-our-challenges/>.

8 Guang Pan, "Evolution of Qatar's Foreign Policy and the Development of China-Qatar Relations," *Arab World Studies* 2 (2015), 14–25.

9 "GCC Political Systems," Gulf Research Center, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.grc.net/index.php?sec=Research+Programs+Categories&sec_type=h&sub_opt=82&override=.

10 Ibid.

Geneva and Cambridge, the Center aims to promote scholarly exchange and to disseminate information on the Gulf region.¹¹ With its high level of public participation and extensive external connection, the Center has provided intellectual support for the sustainable development and diplomatic decision making of Gulf countries through conferences and workshops.¹² As one of the more successful think tanks in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Research Center can be a model for improving and creating think tanks in the region.

United Arab Emirates

Owing to their financial power and royal support, UAE think tanks stand out in the competitive Arab world. These think tanks focus primarily on peace and security issues in the Middle East and continuously expand their cooperation and research fields. They disseminate Arab scholars' research to the whole region through mass media, stimulating public discourse.

Established in 1994 as a semi-governmental organization and affiliated with the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs,¹³ the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research covers research topics such as politics, strategy, foreign relationships, and security issues and provides suggestions to the Ministry.¹⁴ It not only tackles the pressing challenges in the Arab region through a strategic and rational attitude but also fosters the research of political, social, and economic issues primarily in the UAE and Gulf region.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Center fosters mutual understanding in the Gulf region to boost the political and economic strength of these countries. Its publication strategy focuses on producing original research as well as translation of materials into Arabic and English to "enrich Arabic libraries" and to "promote cultural interaction across the world."¹⁶

11 "About GRC - Locations and Structures," Gulf Research Center, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.grc.net/index.php?sec_code=locationsstructure.

12 Ibid.

13 "About ECSSR - Establishment," The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr;ECSSR_COOKIE=9RS5ZGJcmB2GgQFtmKYJGvCR9bkWZxgnpZwvQ6HvX7340hG59jTl53687123!126368098?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=StaticContent&lang=en&_nfls=false.

14 "About ECSSR - Areas of Interest," The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=ECSSRPortal_portal_book_179&lang=en&_nfls=false.

15 Ibid.

16 "Publications - Overview," The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, accessed April 29, 2017, http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=PublicationsPage&_event=viewIntro&lang=en&_nfls=false.

Qatar

Qatar, ruled by the Al Thani family, enjoys the highest per capita GDP in the Middle East. Because of the country's political stability and economic strength, Qatari think tanks have developed rapidly in recent years in large part due to their durable relationship with the government. Because of this relationship, however, these think tanks have limited opportunities for critical assessment of the Qatari government itself.

Founded in 2006, the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies is an extension of the peninsula's mass media outlet and ranks fifth in the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁷ Its major focus areas include: Arab politics, security and development strategies of neighboring countries, emerging country studies, political thought, and social problems. As such, the Centre recruits various scholars and professionals from the Middle East to carry out research on regional and global affairs. Since its establishment, the Al Jazeera Centre has made efforts to maximize Arab social, political, and cultural structures and to explore solutions to the region's complex challenges. Cooperating with other Middle East research institutes, the Centre promotes dialogues to narrow the gap between different religious groups.¹⁸ Based on its academic and strategic research approach, the Centre helps to broaden the perspectives on culture and media by holding various academic conferences and strategic forums and encouraging the publication of academic journals. In the past few years, the Centre has attracted scholars from countries all over the Middle East.

Bahrain

Despite its small size, Bahrain has several think tanks because of the constant interaction between the royals and academia. The "revolving door" mechanism facilitates the transfer of personnel between these two arenas, but it also ensures royals have the final say in major decisions. Founded in 1981, the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research (BCSR) is a government institution that focused on critical issues that affect the growth

17 James G. McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," *TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports* 12 (2017): 69.

18 "Publication Archives," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/publications/archive/>.

and development of Bahrain.¹⁹ At its establishment, the Centre's goal was to become a first tier think tank in Bahrain.²⁰ Its mission was to serve Bahrain's social work by using application research, to provide consultant service to contract clients, and to supply political insight to Gulf country leaders. The Centre strived to build a research team that focused on developing national, regional, and even cross-boundary relations to actively seek solutions to Bahrain's social obstacles through assessment and analysis of public opinion and policy making on racial issues.²¹ Most importantly, the board of the Centre, including its chief executive director and chief secretary, was composed of nine members from the main departments of Bahraini government, fully embodying its political background. However, the think tank was dissolved in 2010 by royal decree without any explanation.²² Prior to its closure, the government established a new think tank, Centre for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies (Derasat).²³ Focused on the dynamic interests of Bahrain, Derasat collaborates with local organizations as well as foreign think tanks.²⁴ It publishes its own research in both Arabic and English as well as gathers other materials in an online database.²⁵ Thus, although BCSR was shutdown, the Bahraini government did not reverse its relationships with think tanks and continues to promote them.

Kuwait

Think tanks in Kuwait mainly focus on regional economic development. Their primary goals are to provide statistics and intellectual support on Kuwaiti development strategy and to foster communications among Gulf countries on key issues.²⁶ As an economic think tank, the Arab Planning Institute, composed of representatives from sixteen Arab countries, sets its main goals as follows: offering essential knowledge, technology, and

19 "Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research," Devex, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/organizations/bahrain-centre-for-studies-research-bcsr-36752>.

20 "Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research," Eldis, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=4442&type=Organisation>

21 Ibid.

22 "Bahrain Research Centre Staff Fear for Jobs," *Trade Arabia*, June 24, 2010, https://www.tradearabia.com/index.php?/news/edu_181972.html.

23 Ibid.

24 "About Us," Derasat, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.derasat.org.bh/about-us/>.

25 "Publications," Derasat, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.derasat.org.bh/publications-page/>.

26 Fei Tong, "Economic Development Strategy of the State of Kuwait and 'the Belt and Road' Initiative," *Arab World Studies* 6 (2015): 31–43.

experiences to Arab countries to maintain the region's stable development; simplifying the data matching process for political leaders and researchers; advancing economic management; cultivating talents specializing in regional economic and social development; setting up a platform for experts to discuss major economic and social issues; publishing journals on Arab economic and social development; and constructing relevant data pools.²⁷ The Institute enjoys a good reputation in the Arab world because it links its interest with Arab common culture, history, and global issues, maintains good relationships with famous historians and political analysts in Kuwait, and organizes regular panels and debates related to regional issues.²⁸

Oman

Compared to other Gulf countries, the think tanks in the Sultanate of Oman are relatively less developed due to their short history. Only founded in 2008, Tawasul is an independent and private think tank that focuses on promoting the formation and development of civil society in Oman.²⁹ The institute provides capacity building and leadership training for civil society organizations as well as guides the private sector in social responsibility and sustainable practices. It relies on its policy research papers, media outreach, seminars, and conferences to bring attention to Oman's civil society issues. Even the think tank's name conveys the message of the organization, with "Tawasul" meaning communication in Arabic and its acronym standing for (t)ransparency, (a)cceptance, (w)illingness, (a)ssertiveness, (s)ociety-based, (u)niversality, and (l)eadership. Although Oman lags in its think tank development, Tawasul's expansion, including its partnerships with twenty-one domestic units and fourteen international units, suggests a possible trend for advancement.

Iraq

As an ancient cultural capital rich in academic heritage, Baghdad has benefited from early construction of think tanks. A majority of the Iraqi think

27 "API Objectives," Arab Planning Institute, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.arab-api.org/page-withmenuoption.aspx?page_id=13&option_id=2.

28 Ibid.

29 "What is Tawasul," Tawasul, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://tawasul.co.om/abtus.html>.

tanks have an establishment background at colleges or universities. For example, the Al Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies, a noted university think tank, was founded with the help of the Iraqi NGO Cabinet Office.³⁰ The Center's research focuses on Iraqi political, economic, social, and legal aspects. It provides basic information and data, optimizes scientific research and development, establishes effective linkage mechanisms within and outside Iraq's academic institutions, develops training programs, and supports science and technology research and development projects.³¹ While Iraqi think tanks research on general Middle East issues as well, they primarily focus on Iraqi political and economic stability, nation-building, and good governance. Their academic background helps them in forming relationships with international academic institutions, think tanks, and NGOs.³²

Yemen

Because of its slow economic and social development, Yemen suffers from a limited number of advanced think tanks. Due to inadequate government funding, Yemeni think tanks are often established by independent NGOs, several of which rely on opinion polls as the basis of their research. Yemeni think tanks focus their research on domestic economic, political, and civil rights issues. Their purpose is to serve the comprehensive development of Yemen's society, to boost economic growth, and to strengthen exchange and cooperation among different cultures.

Founded in 2004 as the first polling center in Yemen, the Yemen Polling Center has a two-pronged approach of consultancy and advocacy.³³ The Center assists in the research process for national and international institutions, NGOs, enterprises, public offices, academic institutions, and expert associations by providing opinion surveys, in-depth interviews, panel discussions, program evaluations, and media studies.³⁴ In addition to playing a leading role in social science research and data collection in Yemen, its

30 "Information about the Al Furat Center," Al Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.fcdrs.com/about.html>.

31 Ibid.

32 "Overview," Middle East Research Institute, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.meri-k.org/about-us/overview/>.

33 "About YPC," Yemen Polling Center, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.yemenpolling.org/consultancy/about1>.

34 Ibid.

advocacy wing pushes for “good governance reforms” and for the “creation of communication channels between citizens and state institutions.”³⁵

Analysis

Most Gulf countries’ think tanks have close relations with the government, are supported by national foundations or royal family members, and enjoy a well-known reputation in the Arab world and further abroad. With the exception of Yemen and Oman, these tanks have operated fairly well and continue to develop rapidly due to the region’s economic strength. Attaching great importance to policy research, they attempt to provide diplomatic strategies and policy proposals to their respective governments and for regional coalition building. Furthermore, they have played an active role in promoting the foreign policy, national economy, mass media, and education of the Gulf countries. Because of their integrated relationship with governments, however, Gulf think tanks will need to strengthen their position as a reliable source of independent and diverse thinking.

Think Tanks in the Sham Region

The Sham region consists of four countries that can be separated into two categories: politically stable states and turbulent states. Politically stable countries, such as Jordan, enjoy a rich cultural background and conduct far-reaching research. They often established their think tanks earlier and focus on the study of contemporary Arab ideology, economic development, national security, and other issues. On the other hand, think tanks in turbulent states are more focused on security and political issues. For example, the think tanks in Palestine are mainly concerned about the settlement of the Palestinian question, as well as the development trends of regional peace. Some of the leaders of Syrian think tanks are important figures in the foreign opposition and focus their research on domestic political, economic, social, and security issues.

Table 2 List of Think Tanks in the Sham Region

35 “Vision and Mission,” Yemen Polling Center, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/about2>.

Country	Characteristics	Main Think Tank
Jordan	Focused on the dissemination of contemporary Arab thought.	Arab Thought Forum
Lebanon	Has several Arab branches of American think tanks; focused on studying the entire region.	Centre for Arab Unity Studies
Syria	Concerned about national strategies of politics, economy, and culture as well as the demands for human rights and justice.	Study Center of Syrian Strategies and Policies
Palestine	Concerned about Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with the main task of promoting peace in the Middle East.	Study Center of Palestinian International Affairs

Jordan

Compared with other countries in the Sham region, Jordan is relatively stable politically and economically—in which citizens are well-educated and wealthier and intellectuals and elites enjoy higher social status. Jordan began establishing think tanks early. Their major purposes are to disseminate contemporary Arab thought, promote economic development, maintain national security, and achieve personal freedom and social progress.

Founded in 1981, the Arab Thought Forum ranks thirty-first among the best think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa.³⁶ His Royal Highness Prince of Jordan personally presided over the establishment of the Forum, placing more concern about the future of Arab countries. The Forum created a platform for presenting alternative political options for the government and provided analytical support for related decision-making.³⁷ The specific objectives of the Forum include: promoting the formation and development of Arab thoughts and disseminating Arab achievements; tackling domestic issues to promote the balance and connection between traditional and modern Arabian nationalism; promoting the development of Arab thought in a scientific way; striving to restructure the world order in order to realize international justice and peace; building a bridge between ideological leaders and decision makers to realize the cooperation among Arab countries; establishing a social security system; and improving public

36 McGann, “2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report,” 69.

37 “About the Forum,” Arab Thought Forum, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.atf.org.jo/?q=en/node/1409>.

participation in policy development.³⁸

Lebanon

Benefitting from its political stability, Lebanese think tanks often go beyond domestic issues and do more research on the entire Arab world. In addition to its independently established think tanks, Lebanon retains local branches of American think tanks. Founded in 1976 as an independent think tank, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies ranks twenty-seventh among think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa region.³⁹ Initially established as an official association for the goal of “Arab unity,” the Centre publishes books and journals on human science, social science, and economics, as well as other references about Arab unity and future strategies.⁴⁰ With the main purpose of Arab society and unification research, the Centre avoids discussion on current political issues in the Arab world and refuses to adopt any direct political position.⁴¹ Its primary activities include: collecting literature, publications, writings, manuscripts, and printed copies related to Arab unification and social development; conducting academic research and publishing relevant books; and hosting academic activities under the provisions prescribed by the declaration of the Centre.⁴² As a diverse organization, the Centre’s members come from various areas all over the Arab world and enjoy permanent tenure.

Syria

Since Syria fell into a civil war in 2011, the domestic security situation has undergone considerable changes. Syrian think tanks have their own unique characteristics in which some think tank leaders are important figures within the foreign opposition. In order to avoid persecution, their headquarters are often located abroad. Besides focusing on national politics, economic

38 “Forum Objectives,” Arab Thought Forum, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.atf.org.jo/?q=en/node/1410>.

39 McGann, “2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report,” 69.

40 “Background,” Centre for Arab Unity Studies, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://caus.org.lb/Home/contents1.php?id=25>.

41 “Guiding Principles,” Centre for Arab Unity Studies, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://caus.org.lb/Home/contents1.php?id=26>.

42 Ibid.

development, social development, and other strategic issues, these think tanks strongly demand for human rights and justice. For example, the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies was an independent organization established in Washington, D.C., in 2008.⁴³ The Center guides academic and political activists to reflect on Syrian political, economic, and social strategies and conduct relevant theoretical, applied, and sociological research through academic research, meetings, publications, and sponsorship support.⁴⁴ As the head of the Center, Radwan Ziadeh is an important figure in the Syrian foreign opposition.⁴⁵ He also founded the Syrian Center for Human Rights Studies and is the executive editor of the Arab Project for Transitional Justice. As such, many of the Syrian think tanks located outside of the region focus on challenging the current Syrian regime and promoting Syrians' human rights.

Palestine

Although Palestine suffers from constant political challenges and lack of funding, the Palestinian think tank community remains vibrant. These think tanks focus on solutions and prospects of resolving the Palestinian question, illustrating the Palestinians' efforts and hardships for pursuing justice and peace. For example, the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs seeks solutions to the Palestinian statehood issue through academic research, dialogues, and publications in a domestic, regional, and international scope so that more people come to understand the substance of Palestinian question.⁴⁶ In the spirit of harmony and cooperation, the think tank keeps an open attitude towards academic communication and participates in local and international conferences.⁴⁷ A series of research projects and symposiums have been organized in a professional, scientific, and objective way to discuss the strategic research, EU policy towards the region, and democratic education.⁴⁸ In addition to

43 "Mission," Syrian Center for Political & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, http://scpss.org/en/?page_id=11.

44 Ibid.

45 "Dr. Radwan Ziadeh – Executive Director," Syrian Center for Political & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, http://scpss.org/en/?page_id=520.

46 "About PASSIA," Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, accessed April 11, 2017, http://www.passia.org/about_us/about_passia.htm#about.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

disseminating information about Palestine to an international audience, it assists Palestinian scholars in gaining access to learning materials on international issues.⁴⁹ Constrained by the nature of turbulent states, Palestinian think tanks generally concentrate on Palestinian political and security issues.

Analysis

Generally, the think tanks in the Sham region are mostly civil and independent institutions, in contrast to government-dependent think tanks in the Gulf. In politically stable countries, think tanks provide intellectual support and policy advice to governments by establishing effective communication and interaction mechanisms with government leaders. These think tanks share relevant background information for national policymaking and provide insightful advice for policy debate. For turbulent states, particularly during social transformation and political reform periods, think tanks convene symposiums, prepare working reports, and gather dissidents' opinions on key points in the reform agenda. This ensures unification of diverse opinions and presentation of a range of options to reshape policies for a rapidly changing political landscape.⁵⁰ The Sham think tanks promote innovative thinking and a constructive public discussion mechanism in order to optimize the government decision-making process and provide references for policymakers in the Arab world.

Think Tanks in Northern Africa

Think tanks in North Africa often have an international, or non-Arab, dimension due to countries' colonial history as well as geographic location. Egyptian think tanks are the most international among the Arab think tanks, with specific intent on maintaining close contacts with think tanks and research institutions all over the world. Highlighting the regional political influence of Egypt, these think tanks play a leading role in the Arab world, both in quantity and quality of research. The Maghreb coalition is made up of five countries whose think tanks focus on regional dilemmas and

49 "Publications," Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.passia.org/publications/publications.htm>.

50 Xiao Ren, *The Fifth Power: Think Tanks* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2015), 78–79.

solutions. These states share a history of French colonial subjugation and use more French than Arabic because of colonial policies that imposed French language and culture, even during the post-independence period. Although some think tanks’ websites are in French, these think tanks are still committed to national and regional strategies and forward-looking research. They are not only concerned about the sustainable development of culture and education but also attend to social transformation, political development, and regional relations.

Table 2 List of Think Tanks in the Sham Region

Country	Characteristics	Main Think Tank
Egypt	High degree of internationalization; provide intellectual support for government decision-making in economic, social, and political reform.	Al-Ahram Politics and Strategy Research Center
Morocco	Focused on national political and social development; researches on the multilateral relations between the Maghreb and the Mediterranean coast states.	Amadeus Institute
Tunisia	Concerned about Maghreb regional issues and multi-lateral relations of the Mediterranean coast states.	Tunis Strategic Institute
Algeria	Concerned about the political and economic relations and cultural ties between the Maghreb countries and the Mediterranean region of Europe.	Institute of Global Strategic Studies
Libya	Started late, with most established after the Gaddafi regime fell; committed to the process of social democratization of Libya.	Sadeq Institute
Mauritania	Limited in number; provide intellectual support to promote social transformation and national revitalization of Mauritania.	Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies

Egypt

The main task for Egyptian think tanks is to provide decision-making support on economic, social, and political reform to the government and policymakers. The Egyptian think tanks maintain close contacts with think tanks and research institutes around the world and play an important role in maintaining the leading regional status of Egypt. Established in 1968, the Al-Ahram Politics and Strategy Research Center is affiliated with the widely circulated Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, and is one of the most famous

think tanks in the Arab world.⁵¹ Since 1972, the Center has moved beyond research on Zionism, Israeli society, and the Palestinian question and pays attention to comprehensive political and strategic issues, including diplomacy, security, economics, military, society, history, internet, and other fields.⁵² The Center also focuses on regional dynamics between Egypt, the Middle East, and Africa and wants to strengthen interactions among Arab states, regional players, and international organizations. Aided by thirty-six full-time researchers, the Center maintains close relations with political leaders, policymakers, legislative institutions, political parties, government organizations, international scientific and political institutions, the media, and the public.⁵³

Morocco

Morocco's think tanks focus on both domestic political and social development as well as multilateral relations between Maghreb states and Mediterranean coastal states. On one hand, the think tanks carry out strategic research and present analyses related to country-building, providing recommendations to the Moroccan royal family and government. On the other hand, their research priorities extend from the African continent's security issues to Middle East and North Africa relations. As an independent think tank established in 2008, the Amadeus Institute (L'Institut Amadeus) was established to promote research on public issues in Morocco and the Maghreb and to improve communication of North-South and South-South cooperation.⁵⁴ The Institute focuses on Morocco's multiple memberships in regional groups, such as the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, the African continent, and the Arab world. In addition to regional dynamics, the Institute researches on issues related to Morocco's middle class and social transformation, economic growth, sustainable development, energy efficiency, conflict prevention, security issues, political management, and

51 "Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)," Devex, accessed April 11, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/organizations/al-ahram-center-for-political-and-strategic-studies-acpss-47753>.

52 Ibid.

53 "Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)," Devex, accessed April 11, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/organizations/al-ahram-center-for-political-and-strategic-studies-acpss-47753>.

54 "Vision," Institute Amadeus, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.institutamadeus.com/>.

civil education.⁵⁵

Tunisia

Tunisia maintains a large number of think tanks, which are often extensively influenced by France. The think tanks focus on improving Maghreb regional development and also emphasize interactions with the Mediterranean European states, particularly France. The Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, founded in 1993, ranks twenty-fourth among the best think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa.⁵⁶ The Institute has established cooperative relations with Arab research institutions and think tanks of non-Arab countries such as France, the United States, Italy, Switzerland, and Turkey.⁵⁷ The research covers a wide range of fields such as politics, strategy, security, economics, society, and education, including Tunisian specific issues such as relations between Tunisian society and the Arab world, water resources, sustainable development, and trade.⁵⁸

Algeria

Influenced by French colonial rule, Algerian think tanks are characterized by orientalist ideology. They often pay more attention to political and economic relations and cultural ties between countries of the Maghreb and the European Mediterranean region. Algerian think tanks are more prominent in sociological research, such as social and cultural anthropology, children's and women's rights, national population, and class development.⁵⁹ The Institute of Global Strategic Studies founded in 1985 takes the leading position and provides recommendations to policymakers in terms of international issues and strategic research.⁶⁰ Its study covers political, diplomatic, defense, military, security, international relations, and other areas involving Algeria, the Maghreb region, the European Mediterranean,

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," 69.

⁵⁷ "Our Mission," Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.ites.tn/a-propos/>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Arab Think Tanks Directory," United Nations Development Programme, accessed October 13, 2016, [http://gaportal.org/sites/default/files/Directory%20of%20Arab%20Think%20Tanks%20\(draft\)16July.pdf](http://gaportal.org/sites/default/files/Directory%20of%20Arab%20Think%20Tanks%20(draft)16July.pdf).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the Arab world, and Africa.⁶¹ Periodical publications such as *International Intersection* have significant impact in the Arab world.

Libya

The present number of think tanks in Libya is relatively limited because many of them were established after the downfall of the Gaddafi regime. Due to the long-term tensions in Libya, these think tanks pay more attention to domestic political, economic, social, and judicial reconstruction process, unlike the regional focus of other Maghreb think tanks. Although a relatively young think tank, the Sadeq Institute, which was established in 2011, has leapt to thirty-fifth place among the Middle East and North Africa's top think tanks.⁶² Specializing in Libyan issues, the Sadeq Institute is committed to Libya's social democratization process. It approaches complete social transformation by using innovative ideas to achieve social pluralism through the practice of investigation and personal involvement. Its research covers economy, security, hygiene, law, education, and governance.⁶³ The Institute also regularly publishes various policy research reports and analytical commentary articles. Setting up the Sadeq Forum with five full-time researchers, the Institute has contributed to maintaining close relations with politicians, diplomats, military experts, the media, and scholars.⁶⁴

Mauritania

Although constructed late, think tanks in Mauritania focus on social transformation, economic development, and regional security issues. Some of these think tanks also provide teaching and personnel training programs. An independent organization founded in 2008, the Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies aims to contribute to social transformation and national rejuvenation of Mauritania through academic research under the principles of "independence, rejuvenation, and neutrality."⁶⁵ The Center consists of four administrative parts: the General Assembly, the Council,

61 Ibid.

62 McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," 69.

63 "Who We Are," Sadeq Institute, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.sadeqinstitute.org/who-we-are/>.

64 Ibid.

65 "Vision and Mission," The Mauritanian Center for Researches & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.cmers.org/english>.

the Administrative Office and the Committee of Experts, as well as eight academic groups: the Political Security Research Group, the Economic and Social Research Group, the Scientific Environmental Research Group, the Educational Research Group, the Public Opinion Research Group, the Legal Advisory Group, the Historical Heritage Research Group, and the Training and Development Group.⁶⁶ Its research covers political, economic, social, educational, and linguistic fields. Project work is carried out through the annual strategic reports, academic journals, undergraduate scientific research awards, and national annual survey of public opinion.⁶⁷

Analysis

Since new problems and conflicts have arisen in the process of political reconstruction and economic and social development in Egypt and the Maghreb countries, think tanks play an increasingly important role in the political decision-making process. They can provide early warnings for medium and long-term social issues and offer international experience for countries to lift themselves from the economic crisis and move towards recovery. Recruiting a broad source of expertise and maintaining a long-term research structure, these think tanks can advise the government on policy solutions and strengthen public intellectuals' policy awareness and political stance through academic research.

Conclusion

Since the Arab Spring in 2010, the importance of Arab think tanks in the region's development has become increasingly prominent. These institutions are becoming more and more important in narrowing cognitive differences between civil and governmental organizations, influencing public opinion, and advancing public diplomacy. As an effective communication and interaction channel between think tank experts and government leaders, think tanks can provide intellectual support for policy decisions, create safe environments for democracy and dialogue advocacy, and promote revolutionary forces

66 "The CMERS Bodies," The Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.cmers.org/english>.

67 "Objectives & Methods," The Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.cmers.org/english>.

of social progress. In real politics, think tanks play a significant role as cultivator, conveyor, and provider of political party modernization, serving as a decision maker to affect political parties, public policy, and philosophical ideas and as a manufacturer of various news headlines.⁶⁸ Although they are not the only founder of “new ideas,” the efforts made by think tanks in the process of modernizing Arab countries exert considerable influence.

Compared to European and American think tanks, think tanks in Arab countries still lag in independent research and global influence because of their recent establishment and small scale. With increasing awareness and political participation by the public, scholars, and researchers, the government relies more heavily on these think tanks. Think tanks in the Gulf region—well-financed by the government—build a sturdy bridge between knowledge and power. Think tanks in the Sham region—rich with culture heritage and innovative ideas—give strong support in decision making to governments, political parties, and large enterprises. Think tanks in North Africa focus on regional situation research and provide early warnings on mid-term and long-term Arab societal issues. Despite the different research focus, they all serve state power, in domestic strategy planning, policy formulation, promotion of public governance, and participation in international affairs.

68 Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 3.

THE ROLE OF NON-DOMESTIC FACTORS IN THE PERPETUATION OF THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

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Much of the international attention about Myanmar's human rights violation has and continues to revolve around the country's treatment of her most prominent human rights activist, Aung San Suu Kyi. Comparatively, little attention has been devoted to Myanmar's abysmal treatment of its ethnic minorities, in particular, the Rohingya people in the Rakhine State, who have been collectively denied basic rights as citizens of Myanmar and as human beings since Myanmar gained independence in 1948. While the multiple Rohingya crises in 2012, 2014–15, and again in 2016–17 have revived some global interest about the mistreatment of the Rohingya people, there remains woefully insufficient action taken to alleviate the abuses the Rohingya people are suffering. This paper seeks to explore three non-domestic factors: (1) inherent inability of the Rohingya people to self-organize, (2) a paper tiger ASEAN with no bite, and (3) the strategic ignorance of the international community—which has contributed to the perpetuation of the Rohingya crisis into the twenty-first century. This paper argues that the latter two factors are intrinsic to the endurance of the issue, especially by enabling actions tantamount to genocide undertaken by the Burmese government to go unchecked.

The opening of Myanmar to the world in 2010 after decades of authoritarian military rule has earned Myanmar greater access to international society and garnered much enthusiasm about its eventual democratization. Most of the international attention on Myanmar's human rights abuse was focused on their long-term imprisonment of the prominent opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi. Her release after the November elections in 2010 and subsequent participation in the 2015 general election has led to newfound optimism that the lives of the 60 million people living there are improving. The international community soaked up Myanmar's

progress while choosing to remain inconspicuously silent and ignore the plight of their ethnic minorities, especially that of the Rohingyas, who have been subjected to systemic and institutional discrimination for over three decades. Despite knowing that the discrimination against the Rohingyas—which experts have found to be tantamount to genocide—is ongoing, the international community seems to have little intent to go beyond its current sporadic verbal castigation. The Burmese government’s abysmal treatment of the Rohingya people has continued into the twenty-first century with little signs of resolution on the horizon.

This paper seeks to explore the non-domestic factors that contribute to the perpetuation of violence and discrimination against the Rohingya people, a Muslim minority who mostly live in Myanmar’s western state of Rakhine. The three non-domestic factors which will be identified and discussed in this paper are: (1) how the Rohingya’s lack of organization and armed forces led to their being unrepresented internationally, (2) how ASEAN’s doctrine of non-interference and policy of consensus paralyzed the regional organization’s ability to pressure Myanmar into ending its discriminatory policies against the Rohingya, and (3) the international community’s strategic choice to not publicly shame Myanmar’s blatant abuse of human rights that constitutes a long, drawn out process of genocide against the Rohingyas as well as the UN’s overstretched resources in helping.

History: The Rohingya Problem

Who Are They?

The Rohingya are a predominantly Sunni Muslim minority group who live in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. The Rakhine State, formerly known as Arakan, is located on Myanmar’s west coast. It borders Bangladesh to the northwest, the Bay of Bengal lies to its west, and a mountain range to the east divides Rakhine from the rest of Myanmar.

Figure 1 Map of Rakhine State

Source: "Rakhine State" [map], Visual Scale, Radio Free Asia, 2015.

The Rohingya Muslims first migrated to Myanmar in the fifteenth century as part of strengthening the links between the rulers of Arakan and Bengal, and conflict between them and the Buddhist Rakhine majority has persisted ever since.¹ Today, an estimated one million Rohingya² live in Rakhine State. The Rohingya account for most of the population in Rakhine's three northernmost townships of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung.

Much of the Burmese government's refusal to treat Rohingyas as legitimate Burmese citizens post-independence stems from the lack of a distinctive difference in physical features between the Rohingya people and the Bangladeshi people living in southeast Bangladesh (near the border of the Rakhine State, where most of the Rohingya people currently live). The key characteristic that differentiates them from Bangladeshis living in the

1 "Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh and Thailand," *Danish Immigration Service* 1 (2011): 7.

2 Maung Zari and Alice Cowley, "The Slow Burning Genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 23, no. 3 (2014): 683.

same region is their spoken language.³ The Rohingya speak a language similar to the Chittagonian dialect of Bangla spoken by Bangladeshis living in the same geographical area, only with a minor difference. The Rohingya language is not a written language, and many of the Rohingya population today are illiterate after three decades of systemic persecution.

During the British colonization of Myanmar (1824–1948) and throughout the Japanese occupation (1942–45), the Rohingyas remained staunchly loyal to the British. They thus found themselves on the opposite side of the pro-independence Rakhine. The British promised the Rohingyas an independent Muslim state in the northern part of the Rakhine State in exchange for their loyalty, but the promise was never fulfilled.⁴ Instead, the Rohingyas found themselves stateless in a country where they have been born, raised, and are currently still living.

Three Decades of Systematic Repression

The Rohingyas face systematic and endemic discrimination in their home country of Myanmar. This discrimination is framed by the Burmese government as a disputed immigration problem and leads to the Rohingyas being denied basic and fundamental human rights. There was little effort to assimilate the Rohingyas throughout Myanmar's independent history, and Burmese leaders continue today to deny the existence of the Rohingya people.

Efforts to deprive Rohingya of citizenship began shortly after Myanmar's independence and have continued relentlessly. The 1948 Union Citizenship Act identified specific ethnicities—the “indigenous races of Burma”—to gain citizenship.⁵ However, Rohingyas were not on the list. In 1974, Myanmar began to require all citizens to obtain National Registration Cards. Yet, the Rohingya people were only allowed to obtain Foreign Registration Cards (FRC). This severely limited educational and employment opportunities for the Rohingyas, as many schools and employers did not recognize FRC holders.

3 “Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh and Thailand,” 11.

4 “Burma: The Rohingya Muslims: Ending a Cycle of Exodus?” *Human Rights Watch Asia* 8, no. 9 (1996): 9.

5 The Union Citizenship Act 1948 (Act No. LXVI of 1948), Union of Burma, http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/UNION_CITIZENSHIP_ACT-1948.htm.

The 1978 military operation “Naga Min” (Dragon King) was undertaken by the national army to find and take action against illegal immigrants.⁶ This nationwide program degenerated into abusive attacks in the Rakhine State on Rohingyas by both the army and local Rakhine people. The Rohingyas were deemed by the Burmese government to be illegal Bangladeshi immigrants instead of an ethnic minority. Operation Dragon King—employing mass murder, rape, and desecration of Muslim religious landmarks—was thus aimed at Rohingya civilians. This resulted in an exodus of more than 200,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh, many of whom were later repatriated after Myanmar faced international condemnations for the military operation. The repatriated faced persecution in Myanmar due to a national law which declared that the Burmese government owned all lands in the country and that only citizens had the right to live on and use the land.⁷ The stateless Rohingyas had no rights to the land they lived on and were vulnerable to land confiscation by the government.

In 1982, General Ne Win instituted a new citizenship law that again prohibited the Rohingya people from qualifying for full Burmese citizenship, effectively rendering a majority of the Rohingya people stateless.⁸ The citizenship law required a person’s family’s proof of residence in Myanmar since before 1948. Many Rohingya lacked the required documentation despite their families having lived for centuries in present-day Myanmar. They were not issued any form of state identity cards and were also designated as illegal residents in Myanmar with little or no access to education, health care, social security, and employment opportunities. Even if a Rohingya person met the citizenship law criteria, “the Central Body still had the discretion to deny citizenship.”⁹

The Burmese government instituted discriminatory laws that paralyzed the everyday lives of the Rohingyas. The government imposed marriage laws on the “non-citizen” Rohingya people that required government authorization for marriage and imposed a two-child limit on the Rohingya community.¹⁰ Children were used as “evidence” of unregistered marriages,

6 Amanda Crews, Slezak alia Roussos Singer, and Rupa Ramadurai, “Stateless and Fleeing Persecution: The Situation of the Rohingya in Thailand,” *Children’s Legal Rights Journal* 35, no. 1 (2015): 47.

7 Scott Leckie and Ezekiel Simperingham, *Housing, Land, and Property Rights in Burma: The Current Legal Framework* (Geneva: Displacement Solutions & The HLP Institute, 2009), 506.

8 Burma Citizenship Law 1982, Union of Burma, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f71b.html>.

9 Crews, Singer, and Ramadurai, “Stateless and Fleeing Persecution,” 47.

10 Jason Szep and Andrew R.C. Marshall, “Myanmar Minister Backs Two-Child Policy for Rohingya Minority,” *Reuters*, June 11, 2013, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-idUSBRE95A04B20130611>.

an act punishable with up to ten years in prison, and third and fourth children who were unregistered were “blacklisted” for life—unable to travel, attend school, or marry.¹¹ The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) also began to forcibly relocate villages to bring the Rohingya community more directly under government control in the 1990s. The relocations of the Rohingyas between 1995 and 2010 concentrated the Rohingya community in the northern part of the Rakhine State.

There was also a military buildup due to the military campaign “Pyi Thaya” (Prosperous Country) after the 1991 elections in the Rohingya majority town of Maungdaw and Buthidaung. SLORC justified the buildup by citing concerns about Rohingya insurgents, painting them as Islamic extremists who stirred trouble within the local Muslim population.¹²

All the above constitutes a well thought-out state policy that subjected the Rohingya to systematic abuses and persecution over decades. A growing body of evidence reveals that the centrally planned large-scale death and destruction of the Rohingya people has been achieved over a time frame of several decades. Prominent scholars, such as David Simon, Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University, as well as researchers from the International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) have concluded that these actions by the Burmese government and anti-Muslim ultra-nationalists (Buddhist Rakhines) are tantamount to genocide.¹³

Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide:

[A]ny of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

In a landmark paper, scholars Zari and Cowley demonstrate how there was

11 “40,000 Rohingya Children in Myanmar Unregistered,” *IRIN*, January 19, 2012, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.irinnews.org/news/2012/01/19/40000-rohingya-children-myanmar-unregistered>.

12 “Burma: The Rohingya Muslims: Ending a Cycle of Exodus,” 12.

13 Zari and Cowley, “The Slow Burning Genocide of Myanmar’s Rohingya,” 684.

intent from state and non-state actors in Burmese society who sought the complete destruction of the Rohingya people as an ethno-religious group. Their study of the state policies against the Rohingya found that it satisfied four out of the five criteria defined in the Convention. Regardless of whether these acts constitute genocide or the government was incompetent in preventing “communal violence” against the Rohingyas, the Rohingya people are still victims of serious human rights abuses and violations.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the world has not done enough to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingya.

A Three-Decade-Long Refugee Crisis in the Making

The systematic discrimination deployed by the Burmese government against the Rohingya people has resulted in a massive refugee flow to neighboring countries. Unfortunately, the first two exoduses have only prompted international verbal castigation of the Burmese government’s actions and resulted in a forced repatriation of the Rohingya back to Rakhine. Little action has been taken beyond the monitoring of the plight of the Rohingyas by human rights advocacy groups and various UN organizations.

Following the 1978 Operation Dragon King, the first massive exodus of more than 200,000 Rohingya refugees arrived in Bangladesh. About 10,000 died from starvation in the squalid refugee camps, while many of the remaining were repatriated to Myanmar and continued to live in destitution. Between 1991 and 1992, the Burmese “Pyi Thaya” military campaign started with a buildup of military forces and formation of a border task force, called Nay-Sat Kut-kwey Ye (or Nasaka), and led to a second exodus of over 250,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh and over 15,000 to Malaysia.¹⁵ A subsequent bilateral repatriation agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar saw the repatriation of most of the Rohingya refugees by the year 2000, with only 28,000 left in the Bangladeshi refugee camps. A steady outflow of Rohingyas to Malaysia and Bangladesh to flee persecution continued in the years that followed. Unfortunately, the UN could only document Rohingyas in refugee camps and had no resources

14 International Crisis Group, “The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar,” *Asia Report* 251 (2013): 4.

15 Samuel Cheng, “Migration Control and the Solutions Impasse in South and Southeast Asia: Implications from the Rohingya Experience,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 1 (2011): 52.

to engage with the huge population residing outside of the camps.¹⁶ As a result, many unregistered refugees were left without access to food rations or employment due to lack of a refugee identity card.

The third exodus was sparked by the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by Muslim men in May 2012. It caused the long-simmering tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities to boil over in the Rakhine State. The tensions intensified in June 2012 with the murders in Toungup township of ten Muslim pilgrims, who were not Rohingya, after the anonymous distribution of inflammatory leaflets attacking followers of Islam. Revenge attacks followed in October, resulting in the displacement of 140,000 in 2012 alone. In the years since then, another 120,000 Rohingyas have been estimated to have fled Myanmar.¹⁷

Renewed International Interest: 2012 - Present

The Rohingya crisis was catapulted into the international spotlight in 2012 when a boat carrying Rohingya refugees fleeing the violence in Rakhine and travelling illegally from Myanmar to Malaysia sank off the coast of Bangladesh, resulting in more than 100 deaths.¹⁸ In 2013, several boats carrying up to 150 Rohingya refugees capsized near the western coast of Myanmar after trying to evacuate from the path of a cyclone.¹⁹ This incident drew short-lived attention to the vulnerable Rohingyas, who suffered from both man-made and natural disasters.

The discovery of mass graves containing hundreds of Rohingyas in both Thailand and Malaysia in May and August of 2015 led once again to world outrage and attention to the plight of the Rohingya.²⁰ The graves were found near trafficking camps in the border areas, prompting UN investigations into whether the deceased were victims of human trafficking. The resulting

16 International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of Transition," 8.

17 Andrew R.C. Marshall, "Exclusive: Poor and Besieged, Myanmar's Rakhine Join Rohingya Exodus," *Reuters*, November 26, 2014, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-economy-rakhine-idUSKCN0JA27020141127>.

18 Hannah Osborne, "100 Rohingya Muslims Drown After Myanmar Refugee Boat Sinks off Bangladesh Coast," *International Business Times*, November 7, 2012, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/muslim-rohingya-refugees-drowned-boat-sank-myanmar-402405>.

19 Jethro Mullen and Brian Walker, "Boats Carrying Scores of Rohingya Capsize in Myanmar, UN says," *CNN*, May 14, 2013, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/14/world/asia/myanmar-boats-capsize/>.

20 "Asia Migrant Crisis: New Mass Graves on Malaysia-Thai Border," *BBC News Asia*, August 23, 2015, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34033474>.

pressure forced the Thai government to crack down on human trafficking routes on land. Traffickers in turn abandoned boatloads of Rohingya in the Andaman Sea. Despite these terrible circumstances, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia refused to let the Rohingya go ashore. Instead government officials merely replenished their boats with food and water before sending them back into international waters.²¹ This maritime ping-pong drew much criticism from the international community, eventually pressuring Malaysia and Indonesia to take in Rohingya refugees on the condition that they would be relocated elsewhere after a year.

Time and again, the world did not care enough to take action. The Rohingya refugee crisis of the past three decades has only intensified in the twenty-first century, with seemingly no future signs of improvement. The following sections will analyze three non-domestic factors which have contributed to the continuation and deepening of the Rohingya crisis and the difficulty in achieving a solution.

Rohingyas: Putting up a Weak Fight

The first factor is the inherent weakness and lack of a unifying force among the Rohingya people. Unlike other oppressed minorities who either have a visionary leader as their spokesperson (e.g. the Dalai Lama) or a strong military force (such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that fought for the rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka), the Rohingya people have neither. The absence of an outspoken leader meant little representation for the Rohingyas abroad and at home, hence contributing to much obliviousness about their plight. The inability of an outspoken leader to emerge might be attributed to the multi-generational discrimination and vicious cycle of abuse the Rohingya people face in Myanmar. Generations have grown up illiterate and in poverty, unable to leave due to the lack of access to any form of documentation. The government fronted efforts to eliminate their existence in theory is unmatched by many other marginalized groups (Tamils, Kurds, Tibetans, etc.) across the world. Coupled with the crippling lack of a decent military force, it was next to impossible for the Rohingyas to put up an effective resistance against the Burmese government when acts of violence were carried out against them.

21. Aubrey Belford and Reza Munawir, "Migrants in 'Maritime Ping-Pong' as Asian Nations Turn Them Back," *Reuters*, May 16, 2015, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-asia-migrants-idUSKBN00105H20150516>.

Scholars who have studied Rohingya resistance have concluded that while Rohingya insurgencies have a long history, they do not appear to have much support from the local Rohingya people they claim to represent.²² None of these insurgencies have grown from within the Rohingya population living in Myanmar, and many are supported by hardline Muslim organizations in other countries, hence having little appeal to the Rohingya people. Not only is there little support, the actual size of these groups are very small (no more than a few hundred fighters) when considering the one million Rohingyas who live in the Rakhine State, and none of them operate from within Myanmar, where most of the Rohingya people live.

Rohingya Armed Forces

The Rohingya Independent Force (RIF) was formed in April 1964, in the hopes of creating an autonomous Rohingya state within the Union of Burma (then named Myanmar). In 1969, the RIF changed its name to the Rohingya Independent Army (AIR), which later became known as the Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1973.²³ The RPF faced serious factionalism and disunity, leading to much infighting and eventually resulting in two breakaway groups—the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO).

The buildup of the RSO along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border earned the RSO much media coverage, especially in South Asia, in the 1990s. Due to its religious stances, it has gained the backing of other like-minded religious groups in the Muslim world. However, an investigation showed that it was not purely Rohingyas who were undergoing training in its camps.²⁴ Many of the trainees were members of the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the youth organization of Bangladesh's Jamaat-e-Islami from the University of Chittagong, where a campus war was being fought between Islamist militants and more moderate student groups. The RSO, unlike what its name suggests, fought little for the rights of Rohingyas living in Myanmar.

22 "Burma: The Rohingya Muslims: Ending a Cycle of Exodus," 11.

23 Bilveer Singh, *The Talibanization of Southeast Asia: Losing the War on Terror to Islamist Extremists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 42–43.

24 Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror," *Asia Times*, September 21, 2002, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/DI21Df06.html.

The two factions of the RSO eventually chose to join hands with the ARIF into a single representative organization called the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO). ARNO is an armed self-determination movement whose recruits are mostly Rohingyas living in the refugee camps. ARNO sought to protect the rights of the Rohingya minority and to push for an autonomous Rohingya state within Myanmar. However, the growing radicalization of both ARNO members and other Rohingyas living in Bangladesh meant that much of the Rohingya fighters were fighting for terrorist organizations in the Middle East instead of for their own people's right to self-determination in Myanmar.²⁵

ARNO members were found to have had established ties with radicals from the Taliban and al-Qaeda, while other Rohingyas were also found to be involved with Bangladesh's Islamic militants, Hakarat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI).²⁶ HuJI was founded in 1992 and has since been labeled by the United States as a terrorist organization with ties to Islamist militants in Pakistan. Rohingya recruits in HuJI were sent to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban and al-Qaeda and not within Myanmar.

The Rohingyas have gained little traction in establishing a well-trained and centralized armed force to fight for their rights. While various groups have sprouted up claiming to represent the interests of Rohingyas, such as the new umbrella organization formed in 2002 called the Bangladesh Islamic Manch and the Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)—a small group operating in India's northeast—none have any track record of having fought for Rohingya rights from within or outside Myanmar. While the emergence of ARNO in the late 1990s was widely regarded as a symbol of hope for the Rohingya people, the two decades since then have been remarkably devoid of progress.

Rohingya Non-Military Organizations

Unlike the Rohingya military forces, the Rohingya non-military organizations seemed to have made more progress in shining light on the plight of the Rohingyas to the world, albeit achieving little in prompting the world into action.

25 Singh, *The Talibanization of Southeast Asia*, 42.

26 Lintner, "Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror."

The Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU) is a non-profit global umbrella organization founded in 2011 in Saudi Arabia to represent various Rohingya organizations worldwide. Its mission is to seek a political solution to the issues faced by the Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar.²⁷ Since the individual citizens within Burmese borders presently and collectively have rights as a people to self-determination, the goals of the ARU include forging an indivisible Arakan State within Myanmar by seeking peaceful co-existence, democracy, human rights, and federalism. The ARU also seeks the recognition and protection of the rights of the Rohingya minority by the government of Myanmar, including their cultural, religious, ethnic, and political rights. The ARU counts Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as its Muslim allies.²⁸

The Global Rohingya Center (GRC) has a more defined structure, with a legal section to monitor the development of the situation of the Rohingya people and coordinate with donors to provide relief.²⁹ The GRC and the ARU have strived to garner support for their cause within the Muslim world and have been relatively successful. ARU and GRC representatives have met some key leaders, including the King of Saudi Arabia and the Prime Minister of Turkey, which has garnered considerable press coverage in the Muslim world.

However, like the military organizations, the ARC and the GRC gave fresh traction to the Rohingya issue but ultimately failed to speak for the Rohingya people on the international stage. There is little to no press coverage about them or their activities in Western media, nor is there any mention of them in press releases and statements made by the UN offices handling the Rohingya crisis. The lack of a strong unifying force for the Rohingya has resulted in a lack of world attention to their plight, and the resolution of the Rohingya problem will only continue to be a struggle.

27 "ARU Mission Statement," Arakan Rohingya Union, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://ar-union.org>.

28 Associated Press, "UN Rights Council: Rohingyas Hail Pak-Saudi Resolution," *The Express Tribune*, July 8, 2015, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/916764/un-rights-council-rohingyas-hail-pak-saudi-resolution/>.

29 "About Rohingya," Global Rohingya Center, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://rohingyacenter.org/en/?p=259>.

ASEAN: The Paper Tiger

As the second non-domestic factor, the response of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the issue has been weak despite its proximity to the Rohingya crisis. While the ASEAN approach of constructive engagement has been partially responsible for the opening up and democratization of Myanmar, it has been unsuccessful in changing the country's discrimination towards its Rohingya population. This section will explore how ASEAN's soft stance towards Myanmar has enabled the Burmese government to continue its repression of the Rohingya people with little consequences.

ASEAN and Myanmar

Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in 1997. In contrast to the sanctions adopted by Western countries against Myanmar, the ASEAN approach has been that of "constructive engagement." ASEAN's norms of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interferences in domestic affairs enabled Myanmar to continue to be a part of ASEAN while doing little to rectify its political authoritarianism and severe human rights abuses. The policy of "constructive engagement" was undertaken to decrease pressures from the West to punish Myanmar for its authoritarian political system and human rights abuses.³⁰ While it was useful in bringing Myanmar into the ASEAN community, it is counterproductive when trying to pressure the Myanmar government about the Rohingya issue. ASEAN has long faced the challenge of how to handle a member state whose actions went largely against the values and ideology of ASEAN without a potential solution.

Unfortunately, ASEAN's reaction towards Myanmar's discriminatory policies towards the Rohingya has mostly been verbal. While Myanmar has since come a long way, with a 2010 general election that ended the rule of the military junta and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2012, little has changed for the Rohingyas. Not only have they not benefitted from the recent democratizing of Myanmar, they became victims whose plights are drowned out by the noise of global encouragement and praise at Myanmar's opening up.

30 Fan Hongwei, "ASEAN's 'Constructive Engagement' Policy towards Myanmar," *China International Studies* (2012): 55.

ASEAN on the Rohingyas

Much of ASEAN's response towards the Rohingya issue can best be described as lackadaisical—soft and hiding behind the policies and doctrines of respecting territorial sovereignty and integrity as well as non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN member states. Responses from the Muslim majority ASEAN member states, in particular Indonesia and Malaysia, have been stronger as they largely involve non-state actors.³¹ The plight of the Rohingyas has attracted sympathy, political, and non-political support from several Muslim organizations across the region, forcing Malaysia and Indonesia to be more vocal of Myanmar's handling of the issue.

The exodus of Rohingyas by sea in 2012 presents itself as a new and acute challenge for ASEAN. Despite the nature of this non-traditional transnational security threat, ASEAN has struggled to achieve a solution. Furthermore, several ASEAN member states face huge strains in accommodating the Rohingya refugees. ASEAN continues to lack a regional framework on refugees, with only two of ten ASEAN member states (Cambodia and Philippines) serving as signatories of the UN Refugee Convention. While the member states have convened to criticize the handling of the Rohingyas on boats, there has been no formal criticism of Myanmar, except for bringing up the Rohingya issue during bilateral talks.³²

ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights

The establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009 has not led to any improvements in the ASEAN response towards the Rohingya issue. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, while being a step in the right direction in advancing human rights awareness and protection in ASEAN member states, merely remains a paper tiger. It does not have the mandate to handle individual cases should they be submitted to the AICHR, depending heavily on consensus and consultation. The AICHR describes its contribution and impact on human rights in ASEAN as “educating and raising awareness on human rights to

31 Bilveer Singh, “ASEAN, Myanmar and the Rohingya Issue,” *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 18 (2014): 12.

32 “ASEAN Leaders To Press Myanmar To Solve Rohingya Issue,” *South China Morning Post*, November 19, 2012, accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1085658/asean-leaders-press-myanmar-solve-rohingya-issue>.

the people of ASEAN” and its duty as “the overarching institution in ASEAN on human rights...cooperat[ing] with other ASEAN bodies and with external partners. AICHR will develop a regional cooperation on human rights.”³³ It is ambitious with good intentions but has few, if any, achievements to show for its grand ambitions.

An examination of the AICHR’s second five-year work plan (2016–20) shows that the mandates are an exact replica of what is listed in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, the Phnom Penh statement, and the first five-year work plan (2010–15). While improvements have been made, serious fundamental defects remain, especially within the realm of human rights. Also, AICHR relies on human rights reports submitted by member states to the human rights bodies in the UN instead of conducting a thorough investigation and writing its own report on each member state. It also relies on each member’s voluntary sharing of information and updates instead of closely monitoring the situation. AICHR’s work fails to meet even the minimum level for compliance with international human rights law and standards for it has never intervened in nor reported on any concrete national or regional human rights issues. It has also been disappointingly and shamefully silent on key incidents of human rights violations in Southeast Asia, such as the mistreatment of migrant workers from ASEAN states, thus failing a basic test of its integrity as a human rights body. This incoherence in goals and execution is undeniably the reason why the AICHR has failed to provide any meaningful impact on the Rohingya crisis and on the overall human rights situation in ASEAN.

Toothless ASEAN

The long-burning Rohingya crisis is an apt example of how ASEAN principles of non-interference and a weak mandate on non-economic issues are no longer up to date with the geopolitical reality of Southeast Asia, for they severely limit ASEAN’s ability to enforce collective political will to mitigate the Rohingya crisis.³⁴ The lack of a rough outline of a possible regional solution,

33 The ASEAN Secretariat, “AICHR: What You Need To Know,” ASEAN Public Outreach and Civil Society Division, October 19, 2012, accessed June 1, 2016, http://aichr.org/?dl_name=web_FA_AI-CHR_19102012_FINAL.PDF.

34 Syed Munir Ksar, “Rohingya Refugee Crisis can be Solved Only if ASEAN Musters the Will to Do So,” *South China Morning Post*, June 19, 2015, accessed June 3, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1823719/rohingya-refugee-crisis-can-be-solved-only-if-asean-musters>.

in spite of all the discussions about the Rohingya crisis in 2015, further exposes the toothlessness of ASEAN. The ASEAN community will be a failure without any form of regional rights protection, and each day that ASEAN does not step up and take ownership of the Rohingya crisis as a regional problem is one more day where the Rohingyas will suffer in silence.

International Community: Strategic Ignorance?

As the final non-domestic factor, the international community is mostly focused on Myanmar's democratization and seems very willing to lavish praises upon it, despite the blatant human rights violations carried out against its minorities. There is an overall optimism about the democratization progress, marked most visibly by the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from long-term house arrest and her party's sweeping win in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Such optimism remained largely undampened even as Aung San Suu Kyi, a symbol of human rights activism in Myanmar and in the world, flatly denied the ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas in a BBC interview in April 2017.³⁵ The UN is also overstretched in its resources to help the displaced, including the Rohingyas, due to the various systemic barriers placed upon them by the Burmese government. While the UN Human Rights Council finally agreed in March 2017 to send a fact-finding mission to investigate the human rights abuse long suffered by the Rohingya, it was not a Commission of Inquiry (a higher level of investigation) as called for by the UN's special rapporteur in Myanmar.³⁶ This section will thus examine how the unwillingness to pressure Myanmar plus the limitations of finite UN resources contribute to the perpetuation of the Rohingya crisis.

International Community on the Rohingyas

While the outbreak of the boat crisis in the last few years has sparked horror around the world and saw the word "Rohingya" carried in the headlines

35 "Aung San Suu Kyi Denies Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya," *Al Jazeera*, April 6, 2017, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/aung-san-suu-kyi-denies-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-170406081723698.html>.

36 OHCHR Press Release Office, "Human Rights Council Decides to Dispatch a Fact-Finding Mission to Myanmar to Establish Facts on Violations, Especially in Rakhine State," *Human Rights Council*, March 24, 2017, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21443&LangID=E>.

of major global newspapers, little concrete action to help these migrants has been taken. Western optimism about government reforms in Myanmar coupled with the history of Chinese and Russian vetoes on intervention translates into little political will for a military intervention of any sort against the violence experienced by the Rohingyas.

Despite the attention shone on Myanmar from US President Obama's visit in 2012, the Rohingya crisis remains as dire as ever.³⁷ Tom Malinowski, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Labor, also cautioned against hoping for any major improvements in the situation in the short term. US engagement with Myanmar was, and still is, mostly driven by the concern that Myanmar may become part of China's sphere of influence.³⁸ The strategic location of Myanmar and its abundance of natural gas resources have led the US to become less vocal on the plight of the Rohingyas. The US wishes to keep Myanmar within its sphere of influence and has avoided imposing sanctions that would only alienate Myanmar.

The Rohingya crisis remains a challenge for the West, which has showered economic aid and good will on Myanmar in the hope of one day winning support from a democratic, resource-rich country. Thus, many Western governments have mostly kept quiet about their concerns towards the Rohingyas's treatment in hopes of persuading the Burmese government to change its stance.³⁹

UN Efforts

While a Special Rapporteur to Myanmar by the UN has been appointed, Myanmar has not allowed the establishment of an Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with a full mandate. It continues to place restrictions on visas and travel authorizations on OHCHR team members.

While the Special Rapporteur is a step in the right direction for supervising the situation in Myanmar and an effort to work with the domestic government, the Special Rapporteur faces many hurdles in being

37 Holly Yan and Ivan Watson, "Obama in Myanmar: Rohingya Crisis Could Dim ASEAN Summit," CNN, November 13, 2014, accessed June 4, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/13/politics/myanmar-obama-asean-visit/>.

38 "Will Anyone Help the Rohingya People?" *BBC News Asia*, June 10, 2015, accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33007536>.

39 Ibid.

able to make significant steps towards resolving the Rohingya crisis. Former Special Rapporteur Tomás Ojea Quintana commented in a 2013 interview that Myanmar has not done enough to address human rights abuses and described the situation in Rakhine as “quite fragile and critical.”⁴⁰

The Special Rapporteur report in 2016 emphasizes the importance of changing the discriminatory Citizenship Law (1982) to meet international standards. In particular, the provisions of granting of citizenship on the basis of ethnicity or race, which are clearly discriminatory, should be revised. The report also calls upon the new government to take immediate steps to end the highly discriminatory policies and practices against the Rohingya and other Muslim communities in Rakhine. It highlights that little progress has been made in resolving the legal status of the more than one million Rohingya in Myanmar, including their access to citizenship.

The UN’s weak stance regarding the Rohingya can also be seen from the UN Secretary General’s Special Advisor on Myanmar Vijay Nambiar’s visit to the Rakhine State in May 2015. A disappointingly benign statement was released following the visit, stating that “[t]he UN recognizes and appreciates the recent improvements in the conditions in Rakhine, including efforts to improve the situation of the IDPs [internally displaced persons]” and weakly concluded that “[n]otwithstanding these welcome improvements, more work needs to be done to address the daily issues of discrimination, restricted freedom of movement, and deprivation of fundamental rights faced by the IDPs and other Muslim populations.”⁴¹ The statement failed to use the term Rohingya, instead accommodating the Myanmar government by using its preferred term “Bengalis,” referring to and underscoring their alleged illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

The current UN strategy emphasizes development investment as the solution to Rakhine State’s problems; however, it fails to account for development initiatives carried out by discriminatory state actors through discriminatory institutions will likely have a discriminatory outcome. The UN Resident Coordinator in Myanmar (with an ambassador equivalent status) was more focused on the development approach instead of human rights, even asking the Special Rapporteur to be less vocal about the Rohingya

40 “Interview: Tomás Ojea Quintana,” *IRIN*, October 24, 2013, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/98988/interview-un-special-rapporteur-human-rights-myanmar>.

41 “Press Statement,” UN Office of the Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator, Union of Myanmar, May 22, 2015, accessed June 4, 2016, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FINAL%20Press%20Release_UN%20Mission%20to%20Rakhine%20State_22-23%20May%20.pdf.

issue and to not visit Rohingya displacement camps.⁴²

Also, no commission of inquiry on the human rights situation in Rakhine State was established for an urgent, comprehensive, and independent investigation of the widespread and systematic abuses committed against the Rohingya. For decades, the UN limits its criticism of the Burmese government's treatment towards the Rohingya people to verbal statements and press releases. Despite reports from the Special Rapporteur and various other NGOs about the worsening situation, the UN is still unable to rally member states in undertaking an official resolution against Myanmar's systematic discrimination towards the Rohingya people. The inaction underlies a strategic intent to not cross the line in pressuring the Burmese government with hard measures, especially with the Special Rapporteur's comment about the UN's decision to launch a fact-finding mission instead of a Commission of Inquiry in order to give the new Aung San Suu Kyi-led government more time.⁴³

Conclusion

The inability of the Rohingya people to put up an organized resistance, an ASEAN hiding behind the shield of non-interference, and a strategic ignorance of the international community have all contributed to the perpetuation of the Rohingya crisis. Of the three factors, the author believes that most difficult to change would be the Rohingya people's ability to organize themselves. The Rohingyas, having been a disenfranchised minority for a long time, lack the resources to unite and stand up for themselves. It would also not be ideal to arm them and sit back, letting them fend for themselves and escalating the Rohingya problem into a military conflict. Not only would it not lead to a resolution of the problem, but it would give the Burmese government more reason to use force against the Rohingya people, thus creating further civilian casualties.

The most feasible course of action would be for ASEAN and the international community to stand up for the Rohingya by pressuring the

42 Emanuel Stoakes, "Leaked Documents Show How the UN Failed to Protect Myanmar's Persecuted Rohingya," *VICE News*, May 22, 2016, accessed June 4, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/how-the-un-failed-to-protect-myanmars-persecuted-rohingya>.

43 "UN to Probe Alleged Crimes against Rohingya in Myanmar," *Al Jazeera*, March 24, 2017, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/probe-alleged-crimes-rohingya-myanmar-170324113526685.html>.

Myanmar government into ending its decades-long persecution. While experts have determined that a resolution to this crisis would require more political interest and economic resources from across Southeast Asia, the ASEAN member states lack collective political will. ASEAN's collective failure to address the root causes of the inadequate rights of the Rohingya will ensure its continuation. On the part of the international community, a Human Rights Watch report's succinct conclusion that "the Rohingyas have no constituency in the West and come from a strategic backwater, no one wants them (and no one is prepared to help them end their decades of persecution) even though the world is well aware of their predicament" is a painful but brutally honest truth. The Rohingya crisis persists today because no one has sufficient interest to create a blueprint of what needs to be done to end this slow-burning humanitarian crisis.

CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN SOUTH KOREAN BUSINESS: THE CASE OF HAANSOFT SOFTWARE PRODUCTS

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This paper explores the use of cultural nationalism and protectionism in business. It uses the example of a rivalry between two software companies offering word processing program and software solutions in South Korea. One of the products offered by a domestic South Korean company had an association with the Hangul writing system, which is an important part of Korea's cultural identity. The competing company was a North American multinational corporation (MNC) seeking to conduct a takeover of the local South Korean company. The research suggests that a local investment company may have leveraged consumer perceptions of American cultural imperialism in order to block the takeover, so that they could take control of the company instead.

South Korea is now a modern country with access to extensive information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and business systems. These systems involve a mix of domestically developed and international products. In some cases, domestically developed products end up in direct competition with international products aiming at the same industries. This can result in large multinational corporations (MNCs) directly pitted against local rivals that are solely dependent on the consumer base of their own country. This could be a mismatch because the MNC has a huge budget, marketing, and reach advantage, as long as their product has been localized successfully to suit the target market.

However, there are some strategies that countries and companies can use to try and protect themselves against the competition posed by the products and services of MNCs. According to Anthony D'Costa, one means to do this is through the use of trade barriers or technical barriers to trade

(TBTs) to restrict or limit access to a market.¹ This would take place at the government level. Another approach would be to encourage consumers and businesses to “buy local” by advertising the importance of supporting local businesses and employees or by portraying the MNC as a foreign threat to domestic industry or culture. The government or the domestic company can do this either together or separately in conjunction with the media. This strategy could be more effective if the brand of the domestic product can be associated with the cultural identity of the country.

A study by Taewon Suh and Ik-whan Kwon determined that consumer ethnocentrism is still an important factor when it comes to a reluctance to buy foreign products in South Korea.² Research has also been carried out on the idea of globalization as modern-day colonialism.³ The perception of colonialism though globalization could constitute a potential barrier to market penetration for MNCs. The role of perceived American imperialism in South Korea has also been widely studied as the US has maintained a large military presence in Korea since the 1950s, and this divides opinions in South Korea on the influence of the US. A study by Gi-wook Shin noted a rise in anti-Americanism in South Korea in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴ David Morley⁵ and John Rowe⁶ explored the blurred lines between perceptions of globalization and American cultural imperialism and determined that the two are often considered to be the same in certain countries.

This paper explores the rivalry between an American MNC, Microsoft, and a South Korean company called Haansoft⁷ for control of the office

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- 1 Anthony P. D’Costa, “Looking Ahead at Economic Nationalism: Concluding Remarks,” *Globalization and Economic Nationalism in Asia* (2012): 246.
 - 2 Taewon Suh and Ik-whan G. Kwon, “Globalization and Reluctant Buyers,” *International Marketing Review* 19, no. 6 (2002): 663–80.
 - 3 Robert I. Westwood and Gavin Jack, “Manifesto for a Post-Colonial International Business and Management Studies: A Provocation,” *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 3, no. 3 (2007): 246–65; Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee and Stephen Linstead, “Globalization, Multiculturalism and Other Fictions: Colonialism for the New Millennium?” *Organization* 8, no. 4 (2001): 683–722; Andreas Georg Scherer and Guido Palazzo, “The New Political Role of Business in a Globalized World: A Review of a New Perspective on CSR and Its Implications for the Firm, Governance, and Democracy,” *Journal of Management Studies* 48, no. 4 (2011): 899–931.
 - 4 Gi-wook Shin, “South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective,” *Asian Survey* 36, no. 8 (1996): 787–803.
 - 5 David Morley, “Globalization and Cultural Imperialism Reconsidered,” *Media and Cultural Theory* (2005): 30–43.
 - 6 John Carlos Rowe, “Culture, US Imperialism, and Globalization,” *American Literary History* 16, no. 4 (2004): 575–95.
 - 7 Haansoft was rebranded as Hancom in 2010; however, to avoid confusion, their original company name is used throughout this paper.

productivity business area in South Korea. Frédérique Sachward,⁸ Gil-sung Park et al.,⁹ and Sang Mi Park¹⁰ provided examples of protectionism based on the collusion between South Korean companies and the government in order to restrict market access for MNCs. Chuan-hoo Tan et al. used a game theory approach to analyze the rivalry between companies in the word processing area in Korea.¹¹ However, they did not explore the role of nationalism and cultural heritage. Youngmi Kim,¹² Sungwoo Kim and Michael Chesnut,¹³ Haksoo Ko,¹⁴ and Gi-wook Shin¹⁵ discussed the perceptions of cultural imperialism by the US in South Korea but did not investigate the software area.

This study uses the research synthesis approach to investigate whether evidence exists to suggest that business and protectionist measures were used in this software area. The study will use qualitative data to determine if the available literature provides evidence that the South Korean government, media, and business leaders worked together to form a barrier to Microsoft through consumer manipulation using cultural heritage and nationalism.

History and Significance of the Hangul Language

The Korean script, Hangul, is distinct from other East Asian languages as it uses independently created alphabet blocks; whereas Japanese and the various Chinese writing systems are mostly based on ancient Chinese

8 Frédérique Sachward, "Globalization and Korea's Development Trajectory: The Roles of Domestic and Foreign Multinationals," in *Going Multinational: The Korean Experience of Direct Investment*, ed. Frédérique Sachward (London: Routledge, 2001), 361–83.

9 Gil-sung Park, Yong Suk Jang, and Hang Young Lee, "The Interplay between Globalness and Localness: Korea's Globalization Revisited," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 48, no. 4 (2007): 337–53.

10 Sang Mi Park, "The Paradox of Postcolonial Korean Nationalism: State-Sponsored Cultural Policy in South Korea, 1965-Present," *Journal of Korean Studies* 15, no. 1 (2010): 67–93.

11 Chuan-hoo Tan, Xue Yang, and Heng Xu, "An Investigation of the Word-Processing Software Market War in South Korea: A Game-Theoretic Approach," *Information & Management* 47, no. 2 (2010): 96–101.

12 Youngmi Kim, "Digital Populism in South Korea? Internet Culture and the Trouble with Direct Participation," *Korea Economic Institute Academic Paper Series* 3, no. 8 (2008): 1–8.

13 Sungwoo Kim and Michael Chesnut, "Hidden Lessons for Developing Journals: A Case of North American Academics Publishing in South Korea," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 47, no. 3 (2016): 267–83.

14 Haksoo Ko, "Uncompetitive Deals," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 161, no. 33 (1998): 33.

15 Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

characters. As discussed by Hŭng-gyu Kim and Robert Fouser, this writing system allowed the Chosun monarchy to break the elitist grip that the powerful Yangban families had at the time on education and information due to the difficulties associated with learning more complex Chinese characters.¹⁶ It also was a symbol of Korea's cultural independence from China during the many Chinese and Mongolian invasions and occupations of the Korean peninsula. Later the Hangul script was threatened during the Japanese colonization of Korea when Japan attempted to impose their writing and family name system on Korea in the late 1930s. This made Hangul a symbol of Korean national pride, independence, and patriotism.¹⁷

Research by Harald Haarmann discussed the cultural significance of Hangul.¹⁸ He explained that as Chinese culture dominated East Asia until the mid-nineteenth century, Hangul was seen as one of the ways in which Korean culture could be distinguished from Chinese. In addition, Iksop Lee and Robert Ramsey explained how the Hangul writing system became a key part of the Korean cultural identity under the Japanese empire.¹⁹ Nahm-Sheik Park showed how Hangul literacy was pursued in the years following the Korean War as way to ensure continued independence.²⁰ An example of this was shown when Korea regained its independence at the end of World War II. A new national holiday called Hangul Day was established, which is held on October 9 to celebrate King Sejong's unveiling of the new characters.²¹

Early Digital Representations of the Hangul Language

Until the second half of the twentieth century, access to computers and word processing systems were limited in countries that used non-Romanized writing systems, as it was too expensive to justify investment in localized character input systems. However, as personal computer prices started to become more affordable in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the situation

16 Hŭng-gyu Kim and Robert Fouser, *Understanding Korean Literature* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

17 Youngsoo Park, "The Language of the Country" in *International Handbook of Reading Education*, eds. John Hladczuk and William Eller (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 269.

18 Harald Haarmann, "The Emergence of the Korean Script as a Symbol of Korean Identity," *Contributions to the Sociology of Language* 65 (1993): 143–58.

19 Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, *The Korean Language* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).

20 Nahm-Sheik Park, "Language Purism in Korea Today," *The Politics of Language Purism* 54 (1989): 113.

21 Valentina Marinescu and Ecaterina Balica, "Audience Perceptions and Representations of Korea," *The Global Impact of South Korean Popular Culture: Hallyu Unbound* 89 (2014).

changed. The Korean language was excluded from many of the earliest attempts to display languages on computers, as it was considered to be a niche market for one country only. The breakthrough in displaying Hangul on computers came from within Korea. The person behind this achievement was Lee Chan-Jin, a former Seoul National University mechanical engineering student, in the late 1980s.²² Lee quickly realized he had a good potential business with his creation, and on October 9, 1990, he established a Korean language word processing program as part of a company called Hangul and Computer. The owners later decided to change their company name first to Haansoft and then later to Hancom in 2010.²³ The company called the Korean language word processing program Hangul, or sometimes Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul in English.²⁴ Coincidentally, this was the same year that Microsoft first began to offer Korean language support through MS DOS and later Windows 3.0.²⁵

Based on the ability of Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul to effectively display and edit Korean text, along with its symbolic significance, the new program moved into a strong market position. After its release in 1990, Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul reached sales of 1 billion won in 1991, before progressing to 10 billion won in 1993 by adding over 100,000 registered users.²⁶ One major advantage the new company had during this period was that Microsoft did not even have a branch in South Korea at the beginning of the 90s. Microsoft's first office in Seoul opened in 1992, but by this time the American company was already well behind in the desktop office software area in South Korea.

To compete with the success of Haansoft, Microsoft tried to create ties with the South Korean business and academic communities. In 1994, the CEO of Microsoft signed a source code licensing agreement with the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), one of South Korea's top technical universities.²⁷ Then, in June 1997 he went to South

22 Chuan-Hoo Tan, "Battle for Dominance in the Word-Processing Software Market in Korea-How and Why Microsoft Tipped the Market as an Entrant? Is it by Chance?" *PACIS 2004 Proceedings* 129 (2004).

23 "Company History," Hancom, accessed November 1, 2012, <http://www.hancomoffice.com/>.

24 Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul was later shortened to just Hangul and then incorporated into the Hancom Office Suite. To avoid confusion, Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul will be used throughout this paper.

25 "Korea Information Security Agency," Microsoft, accessed November 23, 2011, <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/news/press/2004/nov04/11-22KoreaPR.aspx>.

26 Calvin Sims, "The Business World: How Korean Pride Rallied to Save a Software Maker," *The New York Times*, August 15, 1999, accessed November 23, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/15/business/the-business-world-how-korean-pride-rallied-to-save-a-software-maker.html>.

27 "Korea's Bill Gates Surrenders to Microsoft: Financial Trouble," *The Korea Herald*, August

Korea again to deliver a presentation to the Chief Information Officer (CIO) Forum, organized by the Federation of Korean Information Industries.²⁸

Meanwhile, the surge in Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul word processing program's usage continued, and by 1997 Haansoft had attained a 60 percent market share for domestic users. The success of the company was a source of pride in South Korea, leading to the software winning the media-voted Hit Product of the Year award for 1995, 1996, and 1998, the Thirteenth Venture Society Grand Prize of 1995, and the New Software Product Grand Award from the Association of Korean IT Industries.²⁹ All this attention meant that the CEO of Haansoft became a very high-profile figure in Korea. His status allowed him to branch out into the world of politics, and he even managed to win an election to become a member of the Korean National Assembly.

At the same time, Microsoft was the clear global leader in the industry with their flagship MS Word program, but they only had a 30 percent market share in South Korea for word processor usage. One technical difference between the products, which Haansoft used as part of their marketing campaigns, was that Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul was able to display over 11,000 combinations of the Korean language's phonetic characters, compared to Microsoft Word's 2,500.³⁰ The default file type of Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul was the HWP format, with the filename extension *.hwp. Early HWP files up to and including Hangul 97 could be opened with the Open Office Suite, but they had to be converted for Microsoft Word use. These conversions often resulted in formatting errors that made the files almost unusable and effectively forced users to purchase a copy of Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul to work with HWP files. Meanwhile, Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul was able to open MS Word files without conversions or formatting problems. This combination of the proprietary file type of Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul and its ability to open MS Word provided a business advantage to Haansoft that contributed to their dominant market share at the time.

18, 2003, accessed November 23, 2011, http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-24117266_JTM.

28 Ryan Leganza, "Free Software in Korea: Part One - The Microsoft Connection," *Linux Today*, October 4, 1999, <http://www.linuxtoday.com/developer/1999100400105NWLF>.

29 Donald Kirk, "Local Company Draws Fire for Ceding a Market to Microsoft: Koreans Bristle at Software Deal," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/03/business/worldbusiness/03iht-hangul.t.html>.

30 "Koreans Raise the Anti-Microsoft Standard Save our Software," *The Register*, July 24, 1999, http://www.theregister.co.uk/1999/03/24/koreans_raise_the_antimicrosoft_standard/.

Haansoft's Issues with Piracy and Microsoft's Attempted Takeover

In order to analyze the reaction to Microsoft's attempted takeover, a detailed overview of the factors that led to the move are presented here. On the surface, the market dominance looked like a huge success for Haansoft, but the figures masked a serious problem. As with a lot of the software of that era, the licensing and security systems were basic, and it was easy to pirate and copy the program. Furthermore, enforcement of intellectual property laws for software use in South Korea was also a relatively new area, so the legal route was often not a practical option. One of the Haansoft executives disclosed in a 1998 press conference that an estimated 80 percent of the software in use throughout South Korea at the time was pirated. Another issue was that Haansoft had unsuccessfully expanded into new business areas without first stabilizing the company's financial situation, which further stretched their finances. On May 13, 1998, the company defaulted on promissory notes worth KRW 250 million. On May 21, 1998, another arm of their business, Haansoft Service, also defaulted on its notes and could not pay employees' salaries for three months in a row.³¹

The financial problems at Haansoft became public in 1998 at the height of the Asian Financial Crisis, when the company disclosed that they had built up over US\$10 million of debt and were on the verge of collapse.³² A takeover by Microsoft at this time would have allowed them to attain a virtual monopoly of the Korean word processing market, so negotiations began between the heads of Microsoft Korea and Haansoft on June 8, 1998. According to the former Microsoft Korea General Manager, Lee Chan-jin of Haansoft had initially suggested selling the intellectual property rights to his word processor software since he needed operational funds.³³ Instead, Microsoft Korea's representatives proposed that Microsoft would like to invest in Haansoft and change the business strategy of the company. Haansoft showed an interest in this suggestion, so the next step involved forming a team led by the law firm Kim & Chang to arrange the details of the deal.³⁴

31 Seungeun Bae, "On the Rebound," *Invest Korea*, last modified March 3, 2003, http://www.investkorea.org/InvestKoreaWar/work/ik/kor/bo/content_print.jsp?code=4020303.

32 Hyo Jeong Lee, "Calls to Boycott U.S. Goods Spread on Web," *JoongAng Daily*, March 4, 2002, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=1901090>.

33 "Hancom: A Day of Reckoning," *The Chosun Ilbo*, December 15, 2000, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2000/12/15/2000121561221.html.

34 Kirk, "Local Company Draws Fire for Ceding a Market to Microsoft."

At a meeting held on June 15, 1998, in front of a large media audience, Haansoft and Microsoft Korea signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that confirmed the Korean company's plan to discontinue its Korean word processor software in return for Microsoft's investment. Around the same time, Microsoft's CEO was visiting South Korea and informed the South Korean president about his investment plans in South Korea, explaining that Microsoft actions would help the country out of its financial crisis. During the subsequent press conferences, the South Korean Information and Communication Minister made it clear that the government would never be involved in business activities. This was seen as a gesture to clear the way for Microsoft's investment. In order to project a positive profile for the company, Microsoft's Vice President also announced a US\$77 million software donation to South Korean schools and institutions as part of a promotional tour.

Microsoft's offer of US\$20 million investment in Haansoft was contingent upon the withdrawal of the Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul word processing program from the South Korean market. The US\$20 million would then entitle Microsoft to 19 percent of the company, and they would steer the business in new directions, with Haansoft becoming a reseller for MS Products. According to Laxmi Nakarmi, a Haansoft PR executive announced that with the help of Microsoft's investment the company planned to move away from packaged software into the internet infrastructure business area.³⁵

The Campaign to Save Hangul

The idea of a foreign company taking control of the word processing business in Korea's own language when the country was at a low point due to the financial crisis struck a nerve with the local media and government, and it inspired an immediate backlash. In 1998, the South Korean economy saw a 6 percent contraction in GDP. Conversely, Microsoft was at the peak of the software industry with a US\$260 billion market valuation, which was not very far behind the value of the entire South Korean economy (US\$317 billion in 1998). This also occurred just before the global dotcom crash that affected technology companies all over the world. Microsoft would have been

35 Laxmi Nakarmi, "Pulling Back from the Brink. Korea's Software Giant Gets Internet-Ready Fast," *CNN Asia Week*, May 26, 2000, <http://edition.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/technology/2000/0526/tech.korea.html>.

paying the equivalent of what it earned in two days in exchange for virtually complete control of the Korean word processing market.³⁶ The timing of the attempted takeover was significant as it coincided with a weakened South Korean economy, and bankruptcies or takeovers by international companies loomed over many domestic companies. Furthermore, the country faced pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the economic restructuring package. There are connections between economic downturns, xenophobia, and nationalism as explored by Peter Gourevitch³⁷ and Anthony Wimmer.³⁸

In this environment, the Committee to Save Hangul Software was established on June 22, 1998, by local entrepreneur Lee Min-hwa who planned to protect Haansoft from foreign involvement. Lee Min-hwa was the founder of the Korea Venture Business Association (KOVA) in 1995 and the CEO of a successful medical devices company called Medison.³⁹ His new group was supported by over fifteen civic organizations, including the Hangul Society. Support from the Hangul Society was especially significant and symbolic because this organization was originally set up in 1912 during the Japanese colonization of Korea in order to preserve and promote the Korean writing system as part of the resistance movement. One of the Committee's announcements stated, "If Haansoft gives up Hangul software, it will be a tremendous loss for the country. The entire business will be taken over by Microsoft, and people will have to learn MS Word." The statement implied that the loss of ownership of the software would be something more than just a common business merger. The phrase "gives up" suggests that something was going to be taken away, and use of the word "country" suggests that it would affect the nation itself and not just their customers. The Committee attempted to connect the cultural value of the product and the nation itself in order to foster resistance.

The group explored alternatives to the Microsoft proposal. One proposition was to open the Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul program's source code and develop an all-Korean word processor product that could serve as its replacement. The leaders of the "Save Haansoft's Korean Software"

36 Tae Gyu Kim, "Die-Hard Korean Software Maker Vows to Undercut MS," *The Korea Times*, June 18, 2012, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/tech/2012/08/133_4956.html.

37 Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986).

38 Anthony Wimmer, "Explaining Xenophobia and Racism: A Critical Review of Current Research Approaches," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20 (1997): 17–41.

39 Ji-hyun Cho, "Digital Hospitals to Bolster Growth," *The Korea Herald*, November 21, 2011, http://eng.kohea.co.kr/pr_news/the-korea-herald-digital-hospitals-to-bolster-growth.

movement also met with Microsoft Korea's president to request that they back out of the deal.⁴⁰ The next step in the movement's campaign against Microsoft was to set up the Hangul Venture Company Committee, whose goal was to raise enough funds to keep Haansoft afloat and avoid the need for Microsoft's investment. Lee Min-hwa announced that "Lee Chan-jin and his staff must fight until the end" in a newspaper interview. He also presented a report suggesting that the cost to retrain all South Korean users on Microsoft software could surpass the US\$14 million debt of Haansoft.⁴¹ Meanwhile, South Korean newspaper editorials were published branding Microsoft's CEO as a colonialist. Also, in a survey of South Korean college students, it asked which celebrities they admired most, in which Haansoft's founder Lee Chan-jin placed second and the chairman of Hyundai came in first. In a media interview, the Haansoft founder said that the Hangul Venture Company Committee's aim was "flattering but unrealistic" and asked for more time to negotiate a deal with Microsoft and avoid bankruptcy.⁴² The narrative of connecting Microsoft's CEO with colonialists of the past was a strategy to convince people of an association between the takeover of Haansoft and the perceived American cultural imperialism over Korea. In addition, the survey results suggested that the college students considered the Haansoft founder to be a national hero.

Haansoft and Microsoft Korea continued the takeover negotiations until July 16, 1998, in spite of widespread public opposition. This opposition began with discussions on online bulletin boards like Chollian, Hitel, Naunuri, and Unitel. The participants in these discussions came together and created a petition against the proposed takeover, gathering 13,000 signatures and endorsements from 120 organizations.⁴³ Moreover, the Korean Venture Business Association's (KVBA) fundraising campaign against the takeover was gaining steam. They reached out to both South Korean businesses and individuals for donation requests to protect Haansoft and managed to raise US\$7.3 million, approximately two-thirds of which came from KVBA members and one-third from South Korean individuals. Despite these campaigns, talks continued, and representatives from Microsoft and Haansoft agreed to sign the final draft on July 20, 1998. Microsoft Korea also closed their offices for

40 Sims, "The Business World: How Korean Pride Rallied to Save a Software Maker."

41 Seong Byeon Kim, "Linguistic Nationalism of Korea in the Information Age: Political Economy of the 'Movement to Save Hangul,'" *Korean Political Science* 37, no. 1 (2003): 409–67.

42 "Hancom: A Day of Reckoning."

43 Jinsang Hwang, "Social Shaping of ICTs Standards: A Case of National Character Set Standards Controversy in Korea" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2005.)

two days because of the Constitution Day holiday starting on July 17.

Within Haansoft, internal conflict was brewing due to the high-profile campaigns against the deal. Haansoft Service's president turned against the Microsoft plan, and he persuaded a Haansoft director to join him.⁴⁴ Between them, they succeeded in forcing Haansoft's CEO to bow to public pressure and back out of the turnover plan at the last minute. They did not immediately inform Microsoft of their change in plans, and Microsoft's CEO was already enroute to South Korea to announce the deal at a prearranged press conference as part of a two-day promotional tour that included meetings with the South Korean president. The press conference was still held on July 20, 1998, but Haansoft's founder surprised the assembled reporters and Microsoft visitors by announcing his decision not to accept their investment offer.⁴⁵ Instead, they outlined their intention to go with the offer from the "Save Haansoft's Korean Software" movement and try to turn the company's finances around with their new backers.

As part of the powershift within Haansoft that led to the strategy change, the Haansoft founder, Lee Chan-jin, was forced to transfer to the position of CTO (Chief Technology Officer) from CEO, and on July 27, 1998, a replacement CEO was chosen. The new CEO's first action was to capitalize on the national pride movement that had been created by rebranding their word processing software and re-releasing it with the name "Hangul 815." The "815" referred to August 15, which was the day that Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule.⁴⁶ This name was symbolic and had nationalistic overtones because it drew parallels between Korea regaining independence from Japan and the software product retaining independence from American cultural imperialism. On October 19, 1998, the "Save Haansoft's Korean Software" movement officially dissolved as they announced that their campaign had achieved their goal.

Post-Agreement Problems for Haansoft

The company soon ran into more problems because some of the money

44 Ilhyung Lee, "Culturally-Based Copyright Systems: The US and Korea in Conflict," *Washington University Law Quarterly* 79 (2001): 1103.

45 "Microsoft's Poke in the Eye from Korea," *Computer Business Review*, accessed November 30, 2011, http://www.cbronline.com/news/microsoft_gets_poke_in_the_eye_from_korea.

46 Nissim Otmazgin, "A Tail that Wags the Dog? Cultural Industry and Cultural Policy in Japan and South Korea," *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 13, no. 3 (2011): 307-25.

pledged by individuals towards the “Save Haansoft’s Korean Software” campaign did not materialize. This meant Lee Min-hwa, the chairman of Medison, was forced to increase his investment to cover the shortfall, making him the largest shareholder of Haansoft. The company’s new power base decided to restructure the company, aiming to refinance the company’s debt and reduce its costs. Haansoft’s workforce was reduced by 10 percent, and their unprofitable businesses, including publications, educational programs, and hardware distribution, were shut down. Research and development efforts were also significantly downsized.⁴⁷ However, these changes did not sit well with the Haansoft founder, and he left the company in 1999 along with a core group of engineers and developers.

In 1998, Haansoft participated in a national campaign to reduce software piracy in South Korea. The campaign encouraged businesses, organizations, and individuals to destroy pirated copies of their software and buy legitimate ones. To facilitate the purchases of legitimate copies, Haansoft cut their prices and began selling their software in places as diverse as banks and supermarkets. The campaign was a success, and the company managed to sell a record 700,000 copies. In August 1998, just one month after their failure to purchase Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul, Microsoft released a Korean version of Windows 98. However, they only managed to sell 27,000 copies in the first four days, which was more or less the same amount as the Windows 95 launch sale three years earlier, and was seen as a disappointing return.⁴⁸

Another new strategy of Haansoft at the time was to expand into the internet business area. In 1999, the company opened a new portal website, Netien, and successfully conducted a KRW 10 billion takeover bid for the Hanulsarang chatting website, immediately gaining access to their 350 million user accounts. They further expanded their offerings by establishing an internet service sister company called Yecar. Haansoft’s share price increased to KRW 40,000 in 2000 from its earlier junk valuation. Medison’s investment of KRW 5 billion jumped up to KRW 120 billion, and their intervention was initially seen as a big success. However, since overexpansion was one of the main reasons Haansoft got into difficulties earlier, there was always the possibility of history repeating itself.

Microsoft decided that the best way to compete with Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul was to develop Microsoft Word’s ability to display Korean characters,

47 Ko, “Uncompetitive Deals,” 33.

48 Josh Meier, “Microsoft Denies Korea’s Request; Windows 98 Support To End July 2006,” *Ars Technica*, December 15, 2005, accessed November 23, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/uncategorized/2005/12/5765-2/>.

so they released a new version of Word 2000 in January 1999 that addressed this. Microsoft explained that Word 2000 could now display 11,172 Korean syllables, 1.6 million old Korean characters, and 27,000 Chinese characters, which now placed it technically ahead of Haansoft's Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul. In October 2000, Haansoft launched their rival Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul upgrade called Wordian. User reviews of the new program were largely negative, and many Korean customers decided to purchase Microsoft Word at this time. This came as a major blow to Haansoft. However, during this period, no civic movements emerged, as the problem was competition rather than an attempted takeover.

One of the reasons why Microsoft gained market share with Windows 2000 was because they gave large discounts for MS Office use to South Korean universities and schools. Student licenses for MS Office were often priced at around US\$20 per head. This coincided with emerging internet licensing techniques that made it more difficult to distribute illegal software, which benefitted all software producers. One high-profile case illustrating the changing business environment was when a Seoul court fined the majority government-owned Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) KRW 10 million in 2000 for using pirated versions of Microsoft programs.⁴⁹

However, the reduced academic prices also had a slightly negative outcome for Microsoft, as individual software buyers still had to pay the full price. The result was that Microsoft's own software resellers held public protests in Seoul against the company. Also, Haansoft accused Microsoft of using dumping tactics by selling software at 10 percent of the market price to certain user groups. This became a big public relations problem. The consumer sentiment problem was illustrated in mid-May 1999 when *The Korea Times* ran a story of a study that showed 87.2 percent of South Korean users indicated that the Windows operating system was "unsatisfactory" but had no choice other than to keep using it.⁵⁰

Microsoft responded to the dumping accusations by claiming that they created the site license system to sell their software packages at reduced prices to Korean education customers to encourage the installation of genuine software with students. Microsoft then suggested that Haansoft was guilty of their own accusations because they reduced their prices to under US\$10 for a one-year license of their program. The South Korean government reacted by saying they planned to open an investigation into

49 Cho, "Digital Hospitals to Bolster Growth."

50 Sooyoung Cho and Youngshin Hong, "Netizens' Evaluations of Corporate Social Responsibility: Content Analysis of CSR News Stories and Online Readers' Comments," *Public Relations Review* 35, no. 2 (2009): 147–49.

business practices in the area. Facing mounting pressure, Microsoft had no choice but to relent and withdraw its campus license package before the legal decision by the South Korean government was published.⁵¹ This was another setback for Microsoft Korea in their attempts to dominate the Korean office suite market, but it was not a complete disaster because they did manage to increase their market share.

The South Korean government was caught among pressures from consumers, organizations, and the software industry, along with the need to show the world that South Korea was open to foreign business in the wake of the financial crisis. Therefore, putting a full technical barrier to trade was not an option. However, by this stage, the government was fully aware of the cultural significance of the Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul program, and they tried to support the business. Consequently, the government openly promoted Haansoft's word processor by adopting it for a number of state-run agencies and schools.

However, behind the scenes, Haansoft was again having financial problems. The dotcom bubble was bursting globally, and their main investors from the Medison had run into financial issues with their own business. In 2000, the South Korean credit rating agency downgraded Medison's rating to the junk bond category, and this prompted the firm to attempt to sell its shares in Haansoft to raise funds. Initially, the shareholders approached South Korean companies, including LG Telecom, SK Telecom, and Daum Communication, but they could not make a deal. As a result, the value of Lee Min-hwa's Haansoft stock dropped from KRW 100 billion to KRW 25 billion. Then, Lee Min-hwa searched outside of South Korea in order to make a sale. On November 24, 2000, Medison opted to sell half of their Haansoft shares to Bicus Ballas, a subsidiary of Singapore Telecom, for KRW 22 billion.⁵² After the sale, Medison was no longer the largest shareholder of Haansoft and was in fourth place behind Hong Kong's West Avenue (7.28 percent), South Korea's Moohan Technology Investment (5.84 percent), and Singapore's Bicus Ballas (5.53 percent).

However, there was no significant negative media reaction or public backlash to this purchase of shares by either the Singaporean or the Hong Kong companies. There were a few differences between the earlier offer by Microsoft and this investment. First, these investments were not from companies that offered a rival product to any of Haansoft's services. Therefore, it was not seen as a direct threat to the existence, operation,

51 Hankwon Kim, "Cultural and State Nationalism: South Korean and Japanese Relations with China" (PhD diss., American University, 2007).

52 Cho and Hong, "Netizens Evaluations of Corporate Social Responsibility," 147–49.

and cultural role of the Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul software. Moreover, the two non-Korean companies involved were from Singapore and Hong Kong. Singapore was previously a colony of the British Empire, so it has no connotation of potential cultural imperialism in South Korea. Hong Kong is a part of the People's Republic of China, and China does play a pivotal role in Korea's history. However, Hong Kong was a British concession until 1997, so their cultural association with Beijing from a Korean perspective may not be tied to Korea's historical relationship with China.

As explained earlier, Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul was based on a program design that was not fully compatible with Microsoft. After the new investment, Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul also dispensed with Open Office compatibility.⁵³ However, .hwp files could still not be opened directly by any other program without conversions and major formatting problems. During this time period, the use of digital documents and forms was increasing. Subsequently, local and regional governments in South Korea began supporting Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul by making mandatory online forms available exclusively as .hwp downloads. This meant, for example, all businesses and organizations who needed to file tax returns, fill in reports for local councils, or apply for government support had to get a copy of Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul.⁵⁴ This is another example of the government favoring one product. It could be considered as an example of a soft-trade barrier. It resulted in many organizations needing to purchase multiple word processing products in order to maximize their compatibility for both domestic and international operations. In most other countries, the option of a PDF document or even a web-based form would have been used, as it is considered to be a platform-neutral solution that would have no effect on competition in the industry.

Another one of the avenues that Haansoft ventured into during this time was UNIX, which aimed to create a Korean operating system and compete with Microsoft's Windows system. To do this, Haansoft established an affiliate organization called Hanscom Linux. In January 2002, the new affiliate announced that the South Korean government had procured 120,000 copies of the Hanscom Linux Deluxe 2.0, which came bundled with Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul. The government again favored Haansoft through procurement and extended the usage of Ah-Rae-Ah Hangul through bundling. However, this product did not turn out to be a success, so the Hanscom Linux development team was discontinued and merged back into Haansoft.

While Haansoft was trying to find new business areas, Microsoft

53 Hojung Kim and Yun Jeong Choi, "The Effect of Merger on Innovation: An Empirical Analysis in the Korean Software Industry," *National University of Singapore Review* (2013).

54 Tan, "Battle for Dominance in the Word-Processing Software Market in Korea."

continued to expand their Office Suite market share in South Korea without a huge success. In 2005, they encountered more problems when the Korean Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) followed in the footsteps of the European Union (EU) and launched an inquiry into whether the bundling of a media player and instant messenger services in Windows, along with the availability of Windows Media Services as an optional extra within the Windows server operating system, breached South Korea's fair trade regulations. Consequently, Microsoft was ordered to produce separate packages of Windows after reaching a US\$32 million settlement with the South Korean government.⁵⁵ In this case, the role of nationalism was less clear, especially seeing it was in line with a similar result from the case in the EU. Therefore, there was no discussion of nationalism at this time.

Towards the end of 2010, the digital playing field started to change dramatically when cloud computing and mobile devices emerged. Haansoft reacted to the new landscape by forming new partnerships. The most significant was a 2010 deal with Samsung to provide Thinkfree Mobile services as a pre-installed android app on the Galaxy smartphone and tablets in many regions. Haansoft also created partnerships with other mobile device companies, including LG, Pantech, Qualcomm, ARM, and Toshiba.

Conclusion

This study explored the attempted purchase of the software product Haansoft Office Productivity Suite by a large MNC in South Korea. This was a unique case because the product itself was associated by name with one of the main symbols of Korean cultural identity: the Hangul writing system. In addition, the MNC seeking to purchase rights to the product originated from the US, which meant it could have been associated with perceptions of US imperialism by some Korean consumers.

Based on the available evidence, the media and some local interest groups perpetuated the cultural association of the product and the Hangul writing system in order to ensure that the takeover did not go through and provided an opportunity for a local venture capital organization to take control of the product. When the company got into financial trouble a second time, the next attempted takeover was not by an MNC with a rival product. Instead, it was by a non-Korean and non-American private investment group,

55 Joo-Seong Hwang, "Digital Divide in Internet Use within the Urban Hierarchy: The Case of South Korea," *Urban Geography* 25, no. 4 (2004): 372–89.

so it did not trigger cultural imperialism associations. Thus, the media and consumers did not react in the same way and the business deal progressed smoothly. This suggests that companies need to be aware of the local cultural implications of certain business deals and takeovers before making the decision to proceed, as they may have unexpected repercussions.

POLITICIZATION OF CULTURE: CHINA'S ATTEMPT AT RECLAIMING CULTURAL LEGITIMACY AFTER MAO'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

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The Cultural Revolution in China was Mao Zedong's attempt to redefine China within a new historical and traditional context by removing elements of Chinese heritage and traditions deemed unproductive in pursuit of a socialist utopia. The Cultural Revolution was a way to revitalize the legitimacy of his leadership after the disastrous failure of the Great Leap Forward. However, in China's post-Mao history, the country's heritage and traditions became imperative and integral in China's attempt to re-brand itself politically, domestically, and internationally. The perception of culture and heritage evolves in accordance to the specific dominant political views within specific dominant ideologies. Therefore, culture and tradition become political tools—in both their eradication and subsequent proliferation—utilized by the state to assert cultural dominance and influence on its citizens and other countries.

The Cultural Revolution in China left indelible consequences on the country's cultural and historical trajectory, as centuries of pre-modern culture and traditions were destroyed or appropriated for the political agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This cultural and historical interregnum not only attempted to delegitimize China's pre-revolution past but also created a state constructed out of a cultural and historical void. The rise of modern China in the 1970s is the country's re-genesis in medias res,¹ or without any preceding context and reference points, as it is severed from its connection to its past heritage and traditions. According to the rhetoric propagated by Mao Zedong, China's traditional culture and heritage were impediments to

1 Encyclopædia Britannica, "In Medias Res," last modified December 1, 2015, <https://global.britannica.com/art/in-medias-res-literature>.

the formation of a socialist utopia because they were constant reminders of China's humiliating history of subjugation. China's culture, in contrast to that of nations that had invaded and occupied the country in its modern history, was considered backward and incompatible with the values needed to create Mao's socialist vision.

However, after Mao's death, there was a significant shift in the perception towards culture, and it became re-conceptualized within the new political rhetoric and environment. Therefore, cultural and traditional elements that were previously destroyed during Mao's Cultural Revolution were revived and imbued with the purpose of creating a new and strengthened national identity. The state did this through several concerted efforts to reconstruct China: from a new and unknown entity to one with a legitimate history. The state intended to create a softer national image that was not hostile and offensive to other countries. In contrast to Mao's vision of China as a socialist utopia, later generations of leaders wanted to resituate China into its traditional and pre-modern historical trajectory and to re-establish its former status as the apex of cultural superiority, as it had during the period of the Middle Kingdom. The Chinese state continues to encourage efforts to rebuild the country's image as the cultural center of the world, thus enforcing its prestige and status as a regional and international power. Post-Mao China's attempts to reclaim ownership of traditional cultural identity is in response to not only recovering from the previous generation's devastating Cultural Revolution but also achieving regional cultural dominance and hegemony. Therefore, culture and tradition in China have become tools of rhetoric, and its context evolved depending on the dominant ideology that shaped the political environment at specific junctures of Chinese history.

A State, *in medias res*

Mao found it necessary to remove political, social, and cultural elements that would threaten his vision of a socialist utopia, in which past notions of wealth and class were irrelevant.² This necessitated the Cultural Revolution from 1966 till 1976, at the peak of Mao's political control, which instead produced a litany of disturbing and long-lasting consequences. The event

2 Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 2008), 52.

created a society without any discernible social structure in its wake and resulted in the displacement and deaths of millions of Chinese, all for the Party elite's own political agenda.³ Elements of traditional Chinese culture and heritage were systematically eradicated and destroyed, resulting in the loss of China's ancient civilizations.⁴ Thus, the state was inadvertently re-conceptualized and underwent a new national identity formation in medias res without any historical context; all vestiges of traditional culture, heritage, and individual self-expression were violently removed from social and public consciousness.

The Cultural Revolution

The destruction of traditional culture and heritage in the Cultural Revolution-era of China further entrenched Mao's personality cult, legitimizing his leadership and control over the Party and the state. The Cultural Revolution was used to remove dissidence and political threats within the Party and to rid Chinese egalitarian society of any elements containing subversive sentiments, reinforcing the people's loyalty to Mao and the Party.⁵ Mao's leadership and position within the Party had experienced a backlash after the Great Leap Forward (1958–62), which was an attempt to boost the country's economy through agriculture and industrialization. The Great Leap Forward failed because it resulted in famine, resulting in public disillusionment in Mao's political legitimacy.⁶ To deflect the scrutiny and criticism from his political rivals and the masses, Mao targeted China's pre-modern history and society's non-socialist characteristics as being the source for the Great Leap Forward's failure. Therefore, Mao and his allies could justify the identification and removal of elements and individuals that were perceived to be threats to his political control.⁷ By encouraging Chinese youth to turn violently against intellect and traditional culture as a display of unwavering loyalty to him, Mao was able to regain public support by developing a cult of

3 Lucian W. Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, no. 108 (1986): 597.

4 MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 118–20.

5 Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 68.

6 Jeremy Brown, "Great Leap City: Surviving the Famine in Tianjin," in *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*, eds. Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 227.

7 "Cultural Revolution," University of Washington, accessed December 24, 2016, <https://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/graph/9wenge.htm>.

personality.⁸ By denouncing China's traditional history and cultural heritage, Chinese society was politically reconstructed, with no historical precedent, allowing Mao to manipulate the loyalty of the people for his personal pursuit of power and legitimacy.

The Cultural Revolution involved institutional deliberation of which aspects of Chinese culture, if any, were conducive to the development of a socialist state and how to treat characteristics that did not advance the values that Mao wanted for the country. According to Mao's perspective, traditional culture and history were reminders of historical elements (e.g. traditional art and history) that did not have any utilitarian value and were pervasive symbols of capitalism and the country's dynastic history.⁹ With Mao's encouragement, Chinese traditional art and architecture were destroyed by youths, leaving behind a cultural landscape devoid of vestiges of the past. Under Mao, China had become a country liberated from its history of political humiliation and economic stagnation.¹⁰ Without the cultural burdens of the past defining Chinese identity, the Party had the opportunity to create a new form of history and national identity according to its own specifications, instead of following the evolutionary historical trajectory of identity formation. However, because the Cultural Revolution occurred without precedence, the Chinese state during and after this event is severed from its own historical trajectory and remains an outlier.¹¹ Therefore, Chinese national identity during this period, and the one that succeeded it, is an anomaly. It is the product of a conscious process by the Party to separate the Chinese state from its past, thus removing the essence of a rich history and heritage within the context of Chinese history.

Cultural elements that could be appropriated by the Party for its political agenda became mediums for reinforcement and propagated the Party's ideology and norms for the population to adhere and exemplify in their daily life. Aspects of culture and heritage that had no utilitarian value, or considered too subversive in content and context, were destroyed to ensure that these undesirable elements of China's imperial past could not be revived, thus minimizing the threat of the past on the Party's desired

8 MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 102–04.

9 Yomi Braester, "Mansions of Uneven Rhyme: Beijing Courtyards and the Instant City," in *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 99–100.

10 Suzanne Ogden, *China's Unresolved Issues: Politics, Development, and Culture* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 64.

11 Mobo Gao, *The Battle for China's Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 50–51.

formation of the egalitarian culture and identity.¹² Rather than remaining as mediums of self-expression and historical significance, these cultural products were appropriated and reframed by the Party to promote its own values and utilitarian agenda.¹³ For example, Peking opera, which was once a form of narrating traditional Chinese myths and stories of past dynasties, was reinvented to proliferate the tenets and ideologies of the Party.¹⁴

After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution was Mao's overt political attempt to regain legitimacy and credibility and to solidify the loyalty of the Chinese people for the socialist cause. By removing non-socialist and traditional elements that did not align with state rhetoric, Mao and his loyalists were able to reconstruct China's political and social history that Mao desired. Furthermore, Mao was adamant about how his legacy would be remembered by future generations, which needed to be mitigated after the failure of his earlier economic and political reforms. To reconstruct the histories of China and the Party, Mao was required to castigate the country's non-socialist past as detrimental to state development. This led to the eventual destruction of China's past and traditional cultures and thus removed them from the anticipated social and political trajectory. The iteration of China constructed during and after the Cultural Revolution appeared in medias res and cannot match the country's historical contexts before and after the events.

Reclaiming National History and Culture in China after Mao

After the demise of Mao and the appointment of more practical leaders within the CCP, the Party could not immediately dismantle Mao's cult of personality because they could not fully discredit the extent of his influence and control over the masses.¹⁵ However, in order to delineate the Party from its tumultuous Cultural Revolution past and to gain power, it was imperative to reposition China back into its predicted historical trajectory.¹⁶

12 Chris Berry, "Entering Forbidden Zones and Exposing Wounds," in *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Edward Beauchamp (New York: Routledge, 2004), 80.

13 Michael J. Lynch, *Mao* (London: Routledge, 2004), 177–202.

14 Ruru Li, "Mao's Chair: Revolutionizing Chinese Theatre," *Theatre Research International* 27, no. 1 (2002): 4.

15 Lynch, *Mao*, 177–202.

16 Heidi Yu Huang, "Gramsci and Cultural Hegemony in Post-Mao China," *Literature Compass* 12, no. 8 (2015): 410.

By reclaiming ownership of the same non-socialist culture and heritage that it had once denounced, the Party legitimized its position in national history by reinforcing the notion that it was responsible for the liberation of the masses, when contrasting the quality of life of the liberated proletariat to the capitalist oppression. By resituating the Chinese state back into a natural, evolutionary history, the state would be able to justify its cultural dominance and enhance its global position. As such, increased interest in state and international politics facilitated the Party's position to reclaim a sense of national heritage and culture, furthering the role of the state in China's cultural development.

As more individuals expressed interest in the country's pre-socialist history, the CCP saw the need to meet these demands by reviving cultural and heritage products that were once considered symbols of the country's shameful capitalist and bourgeois past.¹⁷ As Chinese society became more open and receptive, the people became more critical of the conditions in Chinese history that precipitated the Cultural Revolution and focused on the prevention of such an event from reoccurring.¹⁸ Rather than claiming that its history was problematic and a hindrance to social development, Chinese society and the CCP fully recognized that the country's past and cultures are part of the cause and the solution to healing from national trauma.¹⁹ Therefore, the revival of traditional culture and heritage was a conscientious means for the country to confront and reconcile with its past.

Whose National Culture?

The authenticity of the national culture being propagated by the post-Mao CCP needs to be questioned. In the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultured China, which culture receives the privilege of becoming the national identity, and how are other cultures represented in this new context? Since the inception of the Han dynasty, ethnic Han culture and philosophy underlies China's national and cultural identity, and the country's cultural policies continue to feed into this hegemonic national identity.²⁰

17 Lisa Bixenstine Safford, "Cultural Heritage Preservation in Modern China: Problems, Perspectives, and Potentials," *ASIA Network Exchange* 21, no. 1 (2013): 8.

18 Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," 602.

19 Ban Wang, "Postrevolutionary History in a Traumatic Key," in *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China*, eds. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 94–95.

20 Michael Barr, *Who's Afraid of China?: The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power* (London: Zed Books,

Since China's population comprises over fifty minority ethnic groups, with insignificant population sizes in inaccessible locations, it would be essentialist to conflate the cultural hegemony of one dominant ethnic group to represent the entirety of China's population.²¹ Therefore, the Party faces issues of equal representation and protection of all ethnicities and cultures, which threatens the country's cultural diversity.

In a socialist state like China, the question of ethnic and cultural minorities is a predicament that democratic multi-cultural and multi-ethnic countries do not have to answer; their political systems preclude unmediated cultural representation as a condition to democracy.²² The CCP displays some benevolence to indicate that it acknowledges the presence of minority ethnic groups in the country's social and cultural identity, but groups must exist within boundaries constructed by the Party's political agendas.²³ There is a precarious balance between the will of the socialist state and the protection of ethnic minority rights, as the Party maintains political control to prevent a volatile multi-ethnic and cultural environment.²⁴ Even though the Party has policies that encourage the development of minority cultures and ethnicities, the hegemonic relationship between the dominant culture and minority cultures perpetuates a singular national cultural identity.

The CCP's Present Goal

The Party's efforts to revive national history and culture stems from its attempt to construct the country's political legitimacy in an international context and to justify its position as a dominant global figure. Through an overt display of soft power to its neighbors and other international powers, the CCP spares no political or economic resources in enhancing its global status and promoting Chinese culture within China and abroad.²⁵ For example, the proliferation of Confucius Institutes in other countries legitimizes China's status in the world, allowing China to market itself as

2011), 45; Ke Fan, "Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Socialist China," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 12 (2016): 2103.

21 Qian Zheng, *China's Ethnic Groups and Religions* (Singapore: Cengage Learning, 2011), 33–34.

22 Jostein Gripsrud, "The Cultural Dimension of Democracy," in *Media, Democracy and European Culture*, eds. Ib Bondebjerg and Peter Madsen (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), 197–214.

23 Fan, "Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Socialist China," 2097.

24 Wenshan Jia et al., "Ethno-Political Conflicts in China: Toward Building Interethnic Harmony," in *Handbook of Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives*, eds. Dan Landis and Rosita D. Albert (New York: Springer, 2012), 188–89.

25 Barr, *Who's Afraid of China*, 19.

having adequate solutions for the social and cultural problems that plague Western countries.²⁶ The 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing provided the perfect platform for the country to shed its hostile, offensive image and to establish a softer, more welcoming environment for foreigners.²⁷ Disassociating itself from its recent hostile past, the state reconnects with its national history and culture to prove its pacifist and virtuous nature, with the goal of building relations and dominance through mutual trust instead of force.²⁸

Conclusion

Under the sole control of Mao Zedong, the CCP launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to improve the country's egalitarian economic goals and to legitimize the CCP's social and political authority in China that had suffered from the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward. It was imperative for Mao to tighten his political control by removing elements that would impede the construction of his vision of a socialist utopia. Even though the Cultural Revolution's purpose makes retrospective sense in the specific historical context, Mao's policies and the events that transpired created a China that appears in medias res; it does not follow the projected trajectory of Chinese political and social development.

To understand Chinese society that was the consequence of this unprecedented event, researchers must situate it within the context of the preceding historical, socio-political, and economic conditions of China. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the Kuomintang, Chinese society was not prepared for the propagation of socialist economic policies, which resulted in the failed Great Leap Forward—a blow to Mao's political authority—and led to the disillusionment with this political and economic model. In Mao's perception, it was imperative to destroy these cultural and socio-political structures that continued to promote capitalist values and ideals. Therefore, the destruction of national culture was not a spontaneous event but a careful political maneuvering to secure the political position of Mao and his

26 Joe Tin-yau Lo and Suyan Pan, "Confucius Institutes and China's Soft Power: Practices and Paradoxes," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46, no. 4 (2016): 515.

27 "The Beijing Olympics: Focus on Chinese Diplomacy," *Strategic Comments* 14, no. 2 (2008): 1–2.

28 Christopher A. Ford, "Realpolitik with Chinese Characteristics: Chinese Strategic Culture and the Modern Communist Party-State," in *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills (Washington, D.C.: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016), 29–30.

loyal supporters.

However, after Mao's death, the CCP, although it could not fully discredit Mao's legacy, did alter its cultural policies to encourage diversity and the country's soft power image for the benefit of its political position. The Party altered its position regarding traditional Chinese culture to enhance political legitimacy to change perceptions regarding Chinese society and culture, within China and abroad. Therefore, the CCP's post-Mao culture policies are set not to deny its pre-modern and pre-socialist history and culture but to embrace and incorporate them into the identity of modern China, creating a new national cultural identity.