A Day at Nanjing University in China: Part Two
by Mu ZHOU

Exhausted: The Structural Problems of Hong Kong’s Economy
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Transnational Advocacy in India and China
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MONSOON WOULD LIKE TO THANK MR. YUN-FEI JI FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION, AND
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A review of this painting by Hoong Chuin Lim, our Senior Editor for Southeast Asia,
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A Message from Monsoon’s Co-Editor-in-Chief

Even after the name Yao Ming became almost as reputable as the tick on a Nike sweatshirt, I am still fascinated by his appearance in the NBA every time he steps on the court in his Houston Rockets uniform.

It was sometime in December 2002 when I first saw Yao playing in the NBA on national TV. That was when Yao was still a rookie, when sports fans were still wondering how a Chinese would fit into an American professional sport traditionally dominated by African-American players, and when the legendary Charles Barkley was still insisting that Yao could never score over twenty points in a game.

Now Yao is no longer a rookie. Over the course of two intensive basketball seasons he has proven himself to be one of the most dominant players in the league. Some even predict that along the years Yao will develop himself into a legendary figure in American sports history. But back then in December 2002—I thought he played horribly.

I would hardly forget that game. Just like millions of Chinese basketball fans from around the world, I was jumping up and down in front of the TV screen, cheering and celebrating every time that Yao caught the basketball and attempted to battle Shaquille O’Neal, the most dominating center in NBA history.

There was hardly a competition. However excited I was seeing my countryman playing on the highest level of my favorite sport, I could not deny the fact that Yao struggled through the entire game. Of course, now that he has proven himself to be capable of excelling in the NBA, that first “battle” between him and Shaq does not seem to matter anymore.

To me, however, it still does. That basketball game serves as a benchmark for one to see how much Yao has improved and will have improved in the course of his career. It is clear that from night to night he is becoming a better and better basketball player; yet, what fascinates me the most is not how great a basketball player he is becoming, but his tremendous determination to become one—in a culture and environment to which he did not “belong.”

Equally fascinating were the Athens Olympic medalists who excelled in categories that are traditionally underrepresented in their respective countries. Somehow, the gold medal of Chinese athlete Liu Xiang in the Men’s 110m Hurdles or that of American Carly Patterson in Women’s Gymnastics seems to shine brighter than any other gold medals.

What adds that extra brightness to Liu Xiang’s gold medal was obviously not just his record-tying 12.91s finish but the extra effort and determination he had to pay to become the first Asian man ever to win an Olympic gold medal in short distance track events, a category that was almost an exclusive club for athletes from the western hemisphere.

Such effort and determination are what I believe to best define Monsoon. Founded upon the mission of “bringing Asia to Brandeis,” Monsoon became the first Asian-related publication to serve as a bridge between the Asian minority and the Brandeis community. I believe that our achievement in the past year was the result not only of the quality of our publication but also of the tremendous effort and determination we have put into our work. I cannot deny that there will always be many obstacles lying ahead for an organization like Monsoon, but I am also confident that our hard work and determination will allow us to get over every hurdle on our way—just as Liu Xiang clears the hurdles in front of him.

Benjamin Ngan
Co-Founder and Co-Editor-in-Chief
A Day at Nanjing University: Part Two

-by Mu ZHOU

I am now used to getting up around 7:00 in the morning. Except on Saturdays, electricity is turned off at 11:00 pm in our dormitory every single day, and this forces us to go to sleep and get up at the right time. What a wonderful regulation: my sleeping schedule was never disarranged.

I live on the third floor of a four-story dormitory building, in a quad room. Luckily, I have only two roommates, with whom I share a private washbasin, a shower that provides only cold water and a latrine. Having used a toilet all my life, I still cannot get used to using the latrine. To make things worse, the latrine remains broken, although a work order was sent a month ago. I didn't want to wake my neighbors up to use their bathroom, so I had to dress up and aim straight for the public bathroom half a mile away.

Nanjing often has a foggy morning in the fall, and today is no exception. I was not alone walking on the spacious flagstone road. A few students had their backpacks on, heading to the classrooms to study individually before classes started. They never need to cram for exams.

Breakfast was good as usual. I had a bowl of wonton—tuffed thin dumplings served with soup—and a thin pancake made of millet flour for less than three yuan (approximately $0.30). When I walked out of the cafeteria, I saw streams of people rushing to the teaching building, where most of the classes are held. I jogged back to my room and got prepared for my morning classes.

Again, it was Ms. Schwabbauer, our German lecturer and discussion leader, who walked up to the teaching platform with her usual modest smile. After weeks of teaching, she got acquainted with all of our German nicknames, as well as our timidity to speak up. It was a relatively large language class, with approximately thirty students. She wanted to give each of us an equal opportunity to speak up, but not every one of us took this opportunity. Frustrated, she resorted to old-style Chinese methods. She pulled a card from a deck, and judging from the name on the card she asked students to read the text, answer questions, or do role-playing on the stage.

When a question to “Morris” was asked, there was no answer. Everyone looked at the male student, and saw his eyes glued on the textbook, as if he did not hear anything. Unlike Chinese teachers, who would simply turn to the next student, Frau Schwabbauer repeated “Morris” once again, without receiving a reply. Finally, I saw her face blush, and heard her speak in German with a somewhat trembling voice: “This is terrible! This class is meant to let you practice your spoken German. If you don’t speak, why not read the dictionary back at home?” There was silence in the classroom for a moment. Then slowly, I heard the male student starting to rumble. His voice was as low as a mosquito. Everyone seemed disappointed.

Our next German class was taught by a Chinese lecturer, who could hardly be interrupted during her talk. She was obviously unaware of my hand being raised to ask questions. When I was finally given a chance to speak, I made a mistake on the article of my first word, and was immediately interrupted. “Zhang Kou Jiu Cuo!” (What a mistake you’ve made on the first word from your mouth!). After correcting my mistake, she continued her talk. I suddenly understood the silence in the class that frustrated Ms. Schwabbauer.

On my way to lunch, I began to ponder: Those who teach us German are all experienced teachers who speak German fluently. However, this is far from enough to make the class interactive. Although an interactive
class stems both from the efforts of the students and the teacher. I trust that not many people would cast the blame on the students, who have been told to behave and remain silent in class since primary school. The campus is a reflection of the rapidly modernizing Chinese society, both in the form of material change and intellectual change. However, recalling what I experienced in the past few weeks, I came to realize that China’s intellectual development takes longer to mature than its material development.

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**Exhausted: The Structural Problems of Hong Kong’s Economy**

- by Tak-Hin Benjamin NGAN

For almost half a century, the name “Hong Kong” meant “economic miracle.” As described by John T. Wenders, Honored Emeritus and former Professor of Economics at the University of Idaho, “this small patch of rocky land (Hong Kong), devastated by war and Japanese occupation, in a mere 50 years rose to the top of the world’s economic heap.” In the beginning of 1997, Hong Kong, a “small patch of rocky land,” held the world’s third largest foreign reserves, surpassed Tokyo as the world’s costliest city in the world, and was still immersed in an economic prosperity that seemed to be everlasting. In the same year, Hong Kong’s miracle was over.

The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which was identified by most Hong Kong-ers as “The Financial Storm,” turned the Hong Kong economy upside-down. As the financial situation in Southeast Asia rapidly deteriorated, confidence in the economy of the whole region was shaken and foreign capital retreated dramatically. Furthermore, the Hong Kong government was forced to increase its local interest rates drastically to defend its currency in which investors were losing confidence. The drastic increments in interest rates led to a disastrous crash in Hong Kong’s stock market, which saw a 23% drop in the value of the Hang Seng Index in four trading days. Suddenly, those Hong Kong-ers who used to feed on the stock they held saw their future as dark as the night sky without stars. The fifty years of optimism vanished, and the “economic miracle” was replaced by a seemingly never-ending “recession.”

But if “The Financial Storm” was the only cause of Hong Kong’s economic trauma, its effects should be temporary. An economic recession should be followed by a boom, and some sort of economic upswing should happen—the market will respond, that’s the rule of economics. But somehow in Hong Kong, Adam Smith’s rules did not work. The situation grew worse and worse and an economic recovery became a routine New Year’s wish of every Hong Kong-er. In 2002, data from the World Bank denotes a negative growth in Hong Kong’s private consumption—the richest city in Asia was cutting back its consumption. Ironically, in the next few years, the government of Hong Kong recorded historical highs of budget deficits which amounted to billions and billions of dollars. Macroeconomists conclude that government spending is a means to speeding up the economy, but this did not hold in Hong Kong. The economy is stagnated, seven years after “The Financial Storm” attacked. Seven years—perhaps there is something else besides “The Financial Storm” and an economic recession.

Hong Kong’s economy is not in a recession; it is trapped. Foreign investments began pouring in when the Asian Financial Crisis was over, Gross Domestic Product continued to grow, but the economic atmosphere in Hong Kong is notably pessimistic. Even though GDP per capita has been rising steadily, people in Hong Kong apparently feel that they are getting poorer and poorer. The government continue to pour billions and billions of dollars into public spending, but the average Hong Kong-er feels that they are getting worse off from year to year. The unemployment rate is not astonishingly high, but somehow one sees college graduates and professionals fighting over low-paid jobs or fleeing north to Mainland China every single day. Conventional economic indicators are pointing towards an economic recovery, yet the Hong Kong-ers are feeling most pessimistic than ever. This is not an economic recession; this is a structural trap.

The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 was only the trigger of Hong Kong’s dramatic economic downturn. It initiated the momentum, yet it is not responsible for the downside in the years to come. The true cause of Hong Kong’s current economic crisis is a series of structural flaws that have been inherited within the city’s economic system. They have been there for a long time, yet people were just too astonished by the beauty and hopefulness of the “economic miracle” that they never noticed such structural flaws within the system. Hong Kong’s “economic miracle” was like a sculpture with cracks in its foundation—it had to collapse one day. And it did. Hong Kong’s economy is exhausted.

One of the structural problems of Hong Kong’s economy is that it is built upon nominal gains rather than real production. Economists, when calculating the GDP of an economy, give equal weight to primary, secondary,
and tertiary production. This mode of measuring economic success is applicable to most economies in the world, but when 87.5% of an economy’s “production” belongs to the category “services,” somehow it becomes problematic. In 1993, the World Bank estimated that 81.2% of Hong Kong’s GDP belongs to the category “services”; that number rose to 87.5% approaching the year 2002. Most of the income generated through “services,” as a common Hong Kong-er would know, arose from such “financial activities” as stock brokerage and real-estate transfers. It is widely known around the city that, in the 1990s, Hong Kong-ers made their money by buying and selling stocks and real estate, more commonly known as “Stock Stir-Frying” and “Real Estate Stir-Frying.” In other words, people in Hong Kong made money out of money. All they had to do was to “buy low, sell high,” and their wealth would roll like a snowball, growing bigger and bigger, and turning many into millionaires.

That was the problem. Money was made out of money, not out of production. “Investors” bought and sold the same piece of property over and over again, and each time at a higher price so as to put more nominal gains on their scorecards. People saw the numbers on their savings accounts going higher and higher, without there actually being any real production behind those rising numbers. Essentially, more and more of the Hong Kong-ers’ wealth was nominal and was gained through existing resources rather than production. This is the “parasite economy.”

Of course, when there was still enough “nominal money” around, people were happy. But suddenly, the economy went down. Stock prices, values of real estate, and returns to investments were all subjected to freefalls, and hence, so were the numbers in people’s saving accounts. Those who dreamed of becoming millionaires through “buying low, selling high” suddenly found themselves holding stocks and real estate that are worth much less than they were before—and of course, they owe huge debts to the banks that they borrowed to do their stock or real estate “Stir-Frying.” The entire Hong Kong economy used to support itself through the “financial activities”; all of a sudden, the bubble burst and there was no real production to count on. Now what?

Hong Kong-ers realized that they could no longer make money out of money, so why not try to make a fortune by doing something else? Here comes another structural flaw of Hong Kong’s economy—there is no other way to make money! Economist Steven M. Goldstein points out the concept of “path dependency” in his article, “The Political Foundations of Incremental Reform” (1995), stating that “institutions are ‘sticky’ and institutional inertia means that ‘history matters,’ as the ‘shadows of the past’ embodied in institutional arrangements continue to shape present possibilities.”

The people of Hong Kong used to make 87.5% of their income through one mode of “production.” If one chooses to call this Hong Kong’s “institutional inertia,” the inertia had better be a huge one.

Indeed, this “institutional inertia” of Hong Kong’s economy is dooming the city’s economic future. For years, the people of Hong Kong embraced themselves in a fantasy that their wealth could be expanded indefinitely through their favorite “financial activities” and they could feed on the numbers of their savings accounts like parasites. In turn, such fantasies molded the Hong Kong economy into a “sticky” institution where people’s minds were set on making money through “financial activities.” As time passed, education and social values became fixed on the idea that “this is the only way money can be made in Hong Kong.” Possibilities are suppressed, and the Hong Kong economy is trapped under the “sticky” institution created by its own people. College graduates come out of college without knowing what they can do, “professionals” who lost their jobs possess no other skills than those applicable to “financial activities,” and even the government seems to have no clue as to what kind of industries it should create and encourage to develop so as to rejuvenate the Hong Kong economy.

The aforementioned structural problems, however, account only for Hong Kong’s failure to escape its current economic crisis. But what about that GDP that has been constantly rising? Why are the Hong Kong-ers getting more and more pessimistic about their economic future when their income actually grew? One probable reason is that those who lost a huge portion of their wealth after “The Financial Storm” and the burst of the economic bubble find the rise in their income not enough to compensate their losses or debts. Yet this explanation is only pertinent to those who suffered from the situation. What about the rest of the Hong Kong people then? What about those who did not indulge themselves in “making money out of money” in the first place? This points to yet another structural flaw of Hong Kong’s economy.

In this “small patch of rocky land” whose area reaches merely 1000 square kilometers, nearly 7 million people live and work. The problem is obvious—a simple economics demand and supply problem. With few resources to be distributed amongst a huge population, the cost of living soars to its limit, whereas with a huge supply of labor and relatively few jobs to offer, wages tend to stagnate. In fact, the living standard of Hong Kong has been rising constantly throughout the years, whereas significant rises in wages were rare. People remain productive even though their wages do not reflect their
costs of living because they have to keep their jobs. That is why Hong Kong’s GDP has been climbing up the scale every year even though the people are getting poorer and poorer in real terms: they do not make enough money to catch up with the rising standard of living. They used to compensate the gap between their wages and costs of living through those so-called “financial activities,” but that is rarely an option anymore. On the other hand, new jobs are not created because of the “institutional stickiness” mentioned previously, and there seems to be no way for the Hong Kong-ers to get out of their slump.

The Hong Kong economy is exhausted. The “economic miracle” is gone and there is nothing left in the pool for the Hong Kong-ers to draw on. Resources are scare and competition is stiff, yet no alternatives are found. The most prosperous city in Asia is now seeing itself trapped by a series of structural flaws. Slowly, though, the government and the people are beginning to think out of the box and are attempting to save the Hong Kong economy from jeopardy. Resources are now spent to explore new options for the city. Innovations are being encouraged, special connections with Mainland China are being developed, tourism is being re-emphasized, and there will even be a Disneyland in Hong Kong in 2005. But whether the motherland or Mickey Mouse will be the cure to Hong Kong’s economy remains to be seen. The main focus, after all, should be tackling the structural problems in Hong Kong’s exhausted economy.

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Confucianism, Marriage and Women
- by Karen JIANG

Not many westerners know about Confucius’ home, in Shandong Province, China, which is as worth visiting as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. Confucius’ mansion, known as “Kong Fu” in Chinese, has been preserved as a public museum by the Chinese government and is accessible to the public. “Kong Fu” consists of three sites: the Confucius Family Mansion, the Temple of Confucius and Confucius Woods, which is an approximately one-square-mile graveyard used for burying all members of the Kong clan. Confucius Woods is often the final destination of each tour. At the end of tour, one will notice that, of the 100,000 graves, there is a small monument standing alone on the side of the road that leads out of the graveyard. The monument is the “zhen jie pai fang” of a young widow in the Kong family. Her husband died shortly after their marriage, and she never remarried. She kept her “virtue” for the rest of her life until she died at an old age. The gravestone was specially made to remember her “virtuousness” and her loyalty to her dead husband. More importantly, the “pai fang” served as an example for other women to act according to the widow’s virtuous lifestyle.

Confucius is known as one of the wisest men in the history of China. His philosophies have shaped the traditions and values of the Chinese culture. Throughout time, Eastern intellectuals have worshipped Confucius’ thoughts, and they have gained the respect of the Western world today. However, history has overlooked the impact Confucianism has had on women, in terms of women’s rights, their role in the society and their obligations to their families. According to Confucianism, a woman’s destiny revolves around the man she marries. Traditionally, a woman was expected to be able to conceive and give birth to many children. Her duties included raising the children, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of all youngsters and elders in the family. This often meant yielding to the in-laws’ unreasonable demands and harsh treatments. A woman was expected to take on all these burdens from the moment she stepped into her newlywed’s house. Moreover, a good wife would swallow her bitterness or any thought of complaint and continue to serve the family quietly and submissively. All of these helped to display the woman’s loyalty to her husband’s family, and thereby, to her husband. More importantly, a woman was judged based on the “virtuousness” of her nature. Without having such a quality, a woman might not even have the chance to be married.

In ancient Chinese society, a woman’s virtue was heavily based on her sexuality. An unmarried woman’s virginity was valued over any of her possessions. (Considering the system of arranged marriage at the time, the parents probably had more right over that than the woman herself). If it was ever known that an unmarried girl was not a virgin, her family’s reputation would be destroyed, and she might never marry into a “good,” wealthy family, or be married at all. Due to a woman’s obligation to her husband and the societal standards for her virtue and sexuality, the most ideal way of expressing her loyalty was through refusing to remarry or to have any form of physical contact with other men after her husband’s death. In fact, her every move and interaction with other men was often under the scrutiny of the public. In contrast, men were encouraged if not obligated to remarry in order to continue the “family line,” or simply to have someone fulfill the domestic obligations in the household. In fact, for different periods in Chinese history, men were allowed
to take in as many wives as they could afford. Among
the five relationships\(^2\) defined by Confucianism, the one
of husband and wife is the only one that
specifies the relationship between
the two genders. As a result of
the influence of Confucianism,
such an unequal relationship
was well accepted by
the society of the time,
and it automatically
placed all women in an
inferior position relative
to the men. Because
of this inferiority, more
expectations and standards
were piled onto women,
especially single or widowed
women. It seems that the more
a woman could live up to those
expectations, or in other words, the more she
was able to stand her suffering, the better of a woman
she was.

As one walks past the gravestone, one cannot
help but wonder, how ridiculous was it for a woman
to agree to live a lonely life when her father, father-in-
law and brothers had many wives and were probably
involved with their maids at the same time? Did she
really decide to live in agony for her entire life just so
when she died, she could have a piece of stone carved for
her? But the truth is, that piece of stone was considered
the ultimate honor and nobility a woman could ever
earn in her lifetime. And knowing the powerfulness
of Confucianism’s influence on the Chinese culture, it
is not difficult to believe that there were thousands of
women in ancient times who lived by that example.
One may find such an unreasonable, unequal and unfair
expectation of women too inhumane to be compensated
with any form of honor. Then again, others would
probably argue that it is impossible for any “modern”
person of our era to fully comprehend that sense of pride
in one’s honor.

One cannot trivialize the significance of
Confucius’ contribution to the people of China. His
wisdom and enlightenment have nourished the prosperity
of a civilization and remain as the foundation of the
Chinese culture today. Even after having experienced
decades of modernization and westernization, the
Chinese still value the ideas of “Li,” “Xiao,” “Yi,” “Xin,”
“Zhen” and “Cheng.” The only difference is that a “modernized”
Chinese woman would reject the
inferior and suppressed position that Confucianism
has taught Chinese women to fulfill and the repressing
and submissive image that we must live up to. That
negative aspect of Confucianism contributed to the
struggles of women throughout the history of China,
as they lived under the incredible amount of societal
pressure and the judgmental eyes of others.

Nevertheless, the female gender role and
women’s lives in general have changed
dramatically in China’s modern era.
As the economy rapidly develops
in China in the past two decades,
more and more opportunities
unfold themselves before young
Chinese professionals—both
women and men. Many women
are competing equally with their
male colleagues in the workforce,
and many of them are living a
lifestyle that they wish and choose.
After all, it is possible for women to
have the right and the ability to do so
without having to sacrifice their “standards”
and “virtues.”

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The Coming Collapse of China?
- by Janine JAMES

As a society that is over five thousand years old,
China is steeped in a rich cultural, economic, scientific,
medical and political history. Chinese civilization
is credited with many innovations that we presently
take for granted. Unlike the great civilizations of the
Romans, Greeks and Egyptians, China’s rich traditions
continue to flourish, both within and outside the
country. Presently, these traditions have taken the form
of a conscious national ambition to become a global
powerhouse.

China has superseded the expectations of those
within the so-called civilized world, having grown
from a position of obscurity and notoriety to one of
prominence. China holds a permanent seat on the United
Nations Security Council—one of the most prestigious
positions within the international community, as they
are tasked with maintaining peace and order throughout
the globe. In addition, China has gained entry to the
World Trade Organization. The growing role that China
plays within the international economic system—all
countries and most products have some direct or indirect relationship to China—has catapulted China into the forefront of international trade. Additionally, China is a nuclear power and possesses the largest standing army in the world. Clearly, China is a rising force on the international scene which commands recognition.

However, this picture of a homogenous and united China is not entirely accurate. Even though China has made great advances over the past half century, she is still plagued by many unresolved issues, which have remained constants throughout her history. China has a tumultuous history of political upheavals and revolutions. Each revolution has disrupted many of the social gains which may have been won by the average Chinese citizen. The Chinese populace has a history of being exploited, whether it is at the hands of dynasties, foreign invaders or political leaders. The victimization of Chinese citizens continues to this day, but presently and ironically, at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party.

China stands at a precipice. It can either assume the role of an enormous global power, commanding economic markets and world politics, or implode on itself due to its inability to confront and correct the issues plaguing its system. One such challenge facing China is corruption. Corruption pervades every imaginable level of society in China, from the very top of the central government to the rural areas. According to Ting Gong, China is “particularly prone to corruption” because the bureaucracy manages all levels of Chinese society. The systemic nature of the Chinese bureaucracy makes corruption particularly easy. As with any large machine, the greater its size, the easier it is to miscalculate its inefficiencies.

Corruption can be defined, in short, as the exchange of power for personal benefits. Corruption isn’t unique to China, but the Chinese governance system’s reliance on central planning makes it much easier for those in power to abuse the privileges given to them by the state. Jean C. Oi believes that “communist systems tend to display structural properties that constrain their members to engage in illegal actions to survive and promote their own self-interest.” Within state-run economies, where many vie for few available resources, individuals must operate outside of state-sanctioned enterprises, such as the black market, to effectively provide for themselves and their families.

The levels of corruption in China affect every level of society. Unlike corruption in Western nations, which is usually hidden and carried out with mostly private funds, corruption in China utilizes monies and resources that belong to the state and indirectly to the people. So when a state official engages in corrupt behavior, he drains the populace of what little resources they have. Additionally, it grinds productivity and progress to a halt because, in effect, nothing can get done within the system without someone’s outstretched palm getting greased. Corruption therefore becomes a second income stream for anyone in the bureaucracy. The difference between corruption in China and that in the Western world is that under the communist system, citizens are not allowed to own any of the means of production; therefore, there is no quid pro quo. There is no ability to slide envelopes filled with cash to certain governmental officials in exchange for large governmental contracts. Since an individual in China cannot own the companies necessary to secure those contracts, there are no envelopes to be passed. But conversely under the Chinese system, a massive bureaucracy controls every aspect of life, and even the simplest tasks can be expedited by paying off the necessary bureaucrat in charge.

In recent years, the Chinese Communist Party has been facing an additional challenge. In the past, citizens did not publicly voice their discontent against the system. Spurred on by the wave of corruption that is crippling Chinese society and along with other defects, however, people have taken to the streets in protest. This presents a new wrinkle to the Chinese government, as they must now tackle the tasks of market reform while trying to maintain their communist societal structure. It is very difficult for a society to live in limbo. The average Chinese citizen is being made to embrace market reforms outwardly, while being constrained by the old ideologies of the Communist Party inwardly. This presents a paradoxical dilemma.

Previously China had to deal with unrest from a small number of dissidents; now dissent has taken hold of much of the citizenry. Gordon Chang relates an incident that occurred in China of a taxi driver voicing his discontent over a dispatch frequency for all to hear: “What is the use of working hard? The Communist Party exploits us anyway.” In the past, this would have never happened in China because citizens would have been too afraid of retribution from those in power, but nowadays they no longer fear those threats.

Corruption has been a significant catalyst for opposition. According to Gordon Chang in his The Coming Collapse of China, “resentment against the corruption of Party officials and lawless government smolders and is infinitely harder to handle than protesters. The price the Party has paid for its monopoly on power is the loss of community with the people of the People’s Republic. The Party, as a result, is fundamentally unpopular, surviving only by withdrawing from the lives of the masses.” Chang further articulates that the government is unwilling to “undertake structural reforms” to make the system fairer. It is almost as
though they feel that the collective citizenry does not pose enough of a threat or they just don’t care to make any changes within the system.

But the days of the government ignoring the citizenry are numbered. As demonstrations and protests erupt in major cities and the countryside, the people can no longer be disregarded. There are two potential threats to the Chinese government, as far as “integrated” individuals are concerned. The first threat comes from Falun Gong followers. Falun Gong, a religious sect born in China and outlawed by the Chinese government, continues to oppose the state ban on religion and their right to gather and worship. Although Falun Gong worshippers are faced with harsh fines and even imprisonment, they are steadfast in their opposition to the Chinese government and, as history shows, religion is a great motivator. Religious beliefs have led groups in the past to do what some would consider “the unimaginable.” Catholics purged Spain of “non-believers” during the Spanish Inquisition, Muslims and Christians fought holy wars, which culminated in the Crusades, and Israelis and Palestinians continue to kill each other daily, solely in the name of religion. Should the Falun Gong movement, or other religious movements in China, decide to adopt a more adversarial stance against the Chinese government, chaos would surely ensue, as a determined citizenry anchored by religion would come to arms against a strong and powerful army.

A second formidable threat posed to China is the growing extremist movement. These individuals believe that revolution should and can be attained by any means necessary, even if it involves terrorism. In a recent article Chang talks to a “new revolutionary” by the name of Peng Ming, who violently opposes the communist government of China, heads a revolutionary group and has made it his life’s mission to subvert the current Chinese regime. Ming stated, “We want to overthrow this regime…to grab complete power from them…we don’t want them to give us certain rights to exist under them.” Ming believes that a small, organized group can remove the Communist party from power and replace it with democracy. He claims that this can be done simply by leveling small but calculated attacks against the State, for example, poisoning the water supply, disrupting the flow of power and electricity, or using computers to damage the Chinese banking system. Ming believes that “the Chinese Communist is ruthless…we have to be more ruthless. To use more ruthless means to overthrow it. Peaceful means will never get one to power.”

Peng Ming and his group bear a striking similarity to two other powerful groups. The first, ironically, resembled Mao Zedong and his revolutionaries. Mao virulently opposed the Guomindang and fought them viciously until they collapsed. He, like Peng Ming, did not believe in playing by the rules with one’s enemy, as the goal is to undermine them and capture their power base. Mao gained power even when confronted with insurmountable odds. Could the same hold true for Ming? Additionally, when examining the views and ideals held by Ming and others like him, we should not take their threats lightly, especially in the context of a present global order that is continuously threatened by terrorism. Al Qaeda and their sympathizers worked for many long years to accomplish their goal of sabotaging the West, particularly the United States. Although Ming and other Chinese revolutionary groups may not possess the network of some of the more established terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, given time and resources they can grow to be a tremendous menace to the Chinese government.

Moreover, Mao adopted a grassroots approach to spreading the revolution, by heading for the countryside and converting each man, woman and child individually. Should these groups follow in his footsteps and take advantage of the growing discontent among the citizenry, citizens whose ideologies and beliefs once straddled the middle could give way to extremism. If this scenario occurred, the likelihood that the State would have the ability to contain such a revolution would be unlikely.

A recent article published in this journal discusses the implications of a democratic revolution in China. The author, Tak-Hin Benjamin Ngan, takes the opposing role of Gordon Chang and other contemporary Chinese theorists. In his article, Ngan suggests that a democratic revolution of any sort will not take hold in China, simply because the populace is more concerned with feeding their families than the ins and outs of politics. Additionally, he believes that if the Chinese government continues to maintain some semblance of social stability within the nation, Chinese citizens will prefer that over another “revolution” that risks instability and all that goes along with the unknown. However, Ngan doubts the tenacity of the Chinese people. Human beings, no matter their origin or culture, may stand for something that hinders their growth—but only for so long, as evidenced by past civilizations and their ensuing revolutions. A revolution in China may not happen in the near future as Chang proclaims, but that does not mean that a revolution will never happen. If the Chinese government continues to stifle the growth of its citizens, the Chinese people will fight for their right for self-determination, no matter the costs.

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Transnational Advocacy in India and China
- by Kassian POLIN

The rise in number of internationally oriented civil society actors over the past two decades has been phenomenal. An entirely new range of social movements, networks and organizations has emerged at the transnational level, often collectively described as “global civil society.” In today’s world, civil society has become quite active in a large number of public interest issues, of which the environment has occupied a place of considerable importance. By comparing the nature of transnational advocacy in the cases of the Indian Narmada Dam and the Chinese Three Gorges Dam, this article will attempt to present the opportunities for, and the constraints on, non-state actors in international politics.

In the contemporary world, transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are comprised of relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services. The proliferation of the pertinent actors, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is encouraged by three major trends. Firstly, the global spread of democratization has bestowed upon many individuals and collectivities increased freedom from interference by the state. This is seen in the widespread acceptance of universal human and civil rights. The rapid improvement in technology and communication facilitates popular participation in collective decision-making. The increase in people’s ability to use these means of rapid communication, through huge advances in material abundance and cost reduction for both old and new means of technology, has contributed much to transnational mobilization possibilities.

Secondly, the notable increases in global integration have empowered global civil societies. Growing economic interdependence and information exchanges have helped create the proverbial global village. Governments are increasingly limited in their ability to control these developments, as most of them are shaped by decisions made by multinational corporations and intergovernmental organizations. Many problems today, such as immigration flows and ecological disasters, do not respect national borders. These are issues that require transnational responses, which stimulate the formation of TANs.

Finally, the increasing convergence and diffusion of values is a crucial factor in the formation of the networks. Despite the growing challenges to widely believed Western cultural domination as shown by the rise of ethnic and religious particularism, indications of long-term trends moving peoples towards shared values do exist. Consumerism, represented by the high priority many people attach to having goods and services for consumption and enjoyment, has spread throughout the world. The diffusion of such values does create discrepancies between popular expectations and actual benefits reaped, though. The dissatisfaction caused by widespread global inequalities in their many forms is a key element in the emergence of social movements to correct such undesired conditions. Environmentalism, being one of the main arenas of transnational advocacy, represents a global movement that has been brought about by the aforementioned factors. We now turn to India and China for a more in-depth analysis of the efficacy of global civil society.

The Narmada network came together through the work of Indian activists concerned about the fate of the vast swaths of people to be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). The hydroelectric dam, reservoir and irrigation canal network to be built would dislodge villagers in three populous Indian states. The project, which received significant funding from the World Bank and the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, contained only vague provisions for resettlement and proceeded in complete disregard of the environment. From the mid-1980s on, opposition to the SSP was channeled through the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), or “Save the Narmada Movement.” The organization united affected populations and national activists’ organizations. Through extensive networking efforts, the movement obtained the support of international environmental groups. The activism of the Narmada campaign during the 1980s and early 1990s set a remarkable precedent in which the Japanese government and the World Bank were both forced to withdraw their funds, in addition to the successful initiation of commissioning of landmark studies about the viability of SSP and other large dams in the region.

In a sense, the movement represented a victory for transnational advocacy. The Bank, which is well known for its opaque decision-making processes and work style, underwent substantial reforms in terms of its approaches to portfolio management and openness to dialogue on policies. In fact, the organization played an important role in ensuring that Indian authorities were complying with binding legal precedents set by TANs such as Survival International. One of the fundamental factors that led to NBA’s success, though, is the democratic system of governance in India. This offered a set of political opportunity structures that gave domestic groups the right to mobilize, as well as the ability to forge coalitions with like-minded foreign actors and access large quantities of information. Also instrumental in stalling the SSP was the presence of a free press and a relatively autonomous legal system,
through which domestic state and non-state actors could be held accountable to Indian and international norms and laws.

One must be careful in viewing such transnational actors through the convenient lens of “social movement,” however. Different actors enjoy different levels of power and privilege in shaping the terms of the debate, speaking for the affected, and gaining entry into policy-making arenas. As a result, a distinction must be made between those who are advocating the reversal of harms inflicted upon their homes and communities by economic change—known as “direct stakeholders”—with those who are indirectly affected, no matter how committed they are towards relieving the plights of others. Such imbalances of power must be made between those who are advocating the reversal of harms inflicted upon their homes and communities by economic change—known as “direct stakeholders”—with those who are indirectly affected, no matter how committed they are towards relieving the plights of others. Such imbalances of power between stakeholders and their advocates directly influence who can effectively access advocacy opportunities or participation spaces for civil society at the international public-policy level. Certain NGOs do not necessarily have direct links with the constituencies affected by certain state policies, and may have distinctly different perceptions of the nature of problems. Government authorities often collude and reinforce the exclusion of stakeholders by inviting “elite” NGOs into policy-making processes, rather than the usually loud, militant and hard-to-control grassroots groups which do not speak the same bureaucratic language that elite social advocates have learned. In light of these difficulties, it is conceivable that the interests and goals of more resourceful members end up being perceived as those of the network as a whole.

This problem of legitimacy concerning TANs is illustrated with the Narmada movement itself. With its over-reliance on strategies and priorities selected by its international members, the network’s activism was unable to successfully address the immediate interests of its local constituency. It was unable to prevent the flooding of villages in the Narmada River’s Nimar Valley and to deliver shelter to villagers and displaced populations from state repression. The NBA faced many challenges to cope with the demands and expectations placed upon it at the local, national and international levels. The network’s effectiveness in the latter two sectors encouraged the continuing allocation of network resources for action in those spheres, while the weaknesses of local groups and limited local victories further discouraged the institutionalization of activism at that level. Although local villagers have actively participated in many NBA-sponsored activities, there was an absence of channels within the Narmada network through which local voices could discuss pragmatic alternatives to the network’s main strategies, consisting of opposing the SSF, challenging India’s development model and democratic structure, and criticizing large dams. Limited capacity among grassroots groups in the Nimar Valley may have rendered them incapable of bringing their priorities to the forefront of the network’s agenda.

This lack of mobilization capacity at the local level is also true for China today, as demonstrated by transnational advocacy networks to stop the construction of the mammoth Three Gorges Dam. Given the country’s political environment, an extraordinary political event took place when dozens of prominent citizens and journalists in early 1989 published Yangtze! Yangtze!, an independently published collection of interviews and essays critical of the project. These activists released the book in hopes of influencing delegates attending the National People’s Congress to take a stand against the project. They earned a short-lived victory when nearly one-third of the delegates voted against the project or abstained—an unprecedented and courageous show of opposition against the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

The unpopular venture was swiftly resurrected in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. Critics of the dam were punished by the state on the grounds that they “abetted [Tiananmen’s] turmoil,” and public criticism was strictly forbidden. In late 1994, the Chinese government announced the commencement of the dam’s construction. Strong local and international opposition continued unabated, though. Perhaps with the lessons learned in the Narmada campaign, many former supporters of the dam—such as American and Canadian engineering companies and the World Bank—distanced themselves from the controversial project due to persistent local and international criticism. Governmental bodies such as export credit agencies, which do not have environmental or human-rights regulations on their books as development agencies like the Bank do, were steadfast in providing funds to Beijing, however. The first batch of generators started producing
power in 2003, with the entire project scheduled to be completed by 2009.

It is evident that an effective mobilization of international opinion against the Three Gorges project did play a key role in creating an awareness that would not be possible otherwise. Beijing’s ability to contain local resistance and draw the support of certain agents in the global system, such as the private capital market, limited transnational efforts by global civil society, though. This stood in stark contrast to the Indian situation, in which the success of the Narmada transnational network was strongly conditioned by the existence of a sustained local grassroots social movement and the political opportunities presented by India’s democratic regime. Both of these elements were missing in China, which could serve to explain the ultimate failure of the movement in stopping the construction of the Dam—a key objective of anti-Dam groups.

Chinese villagers, like many of their Indian counterparts, clearly did not have the capacity to mobilize against the state. Almost all existing Chinese NGOs are funded by the central government, and there are strict regulations involved in the setting up of new organizations. As many Western-trained scholars point out, the Chinese public sphere as a civil society institution remains weak due to a lack of sufficient autonomy from the state to function as a routinized social base against state power on behalf of citizens. As a result, the viability of transnational advocacy movements may be limited in China due to the dominance of the state.

The introduction of Western theories such as civil society may limit one’s ability to see China’s uniqueness and its ties with transnational advocacy, however. Many Chinese scholars note that China is not a strong breeding ground for civil society. In current Chinese industrial markets, the traditional small-farmer society has evolved into a network of family-based small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of today’s vibrant Chinese economy. Their interests are as scattered as the small farmer families in the past, despite a popular perception that plural economic interests lead to political pluralism. As a result, they do not feel the need to form large interest groups as people do in the West to promote their own interests. The emergence of truly independent civil societies (which do not include Chinese NGOs since they are mostly state-sponsored) capable of checking central government power has been absent throughout Chinese history, due to the lack of such a need.

It is true that in the past few years, the nation has seen the emergence of a broad range of green organizations, ranging from hierarchical, top-down public lobbies working from within the bureaucratic system, to participatory, grassroots organizations that employ mass-mobilization tactics. In this sense, the burgeoning environmentalism also implies a significant strengthening of civil society. On the other hand, environmentalism in China also has a distinct feature that sets it apart from the West: it lacks both the opportunity and the immediate urgency to openly confront the central government. Although it is quite plausible to conclude from the above case studies that non-democratic regimes impose substantial institutional constraints on the further pursuit of a popular approach to environmental governance, the reality may not be so clear-cut.

The first Chinese environmental conflict with the potential to incite nationwide protests was the commencement of the Three Gorges Dam project. Since then, the state has become increasingly aware of environmental degradation and has put the protection of the environment high on the political agenda, which coincided with the establishment of a vibrant environmentalist sector in China. A state that resolves to crack down on any social movement that attempts to challenge it, while relaxing its grip over society in the national pursuit of modernity, is an ally rather than an adversary of civil society—though an ally with clear shortcomings and constraints. Indeed, Chinese environmental activists profess a “female mildness”—a greening without conflict, an environmentalism with a safe distance from direct political action. Seen in this light, the viability of classic TAN tactics such as the boomerang effect, and by extension transnational advocacy networks, may be limited in China. This might change if the nation succeeds in implementing a Western-style mode of democratic governance—a topic that I explored in the last issue of Monsoon.

All in all, there are clear signs that at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the transnational advocacy movement is better equipped than at any other moment in history to exert influence on the state—the central subject of classical international politics—and beyond. There are also equally glaring limitations on global civil society, however, as demonstrated by factors such as the mode of state governance, the popular legitimacy of advocacy networks, and cultural relativism. Fifty years from now, Indians and Chinese will look back at their Narmada and Three Gorges episodes. One wonders what their final verdict on the debate between the state and global civil society will be.

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SARS Remembered and Revisited: Lessons Learned or Lost?
- by Elliott VELOSO

This November will mark the one-year anniversary of the first international outbreak of the twenty-first century. Prior to January 2003, few individuals in Asia, let alone the world, had ever heard of an uncommon viral infection referred to in medical nomenclature as severe acute respiratory syndrome associated coronavirus. After the viral disease broke out from China and spread globally, however, SARS caught the attention of the world, triggering panic and concern among international health organizations and medical experts. By the time the outbreak was officially declared contained by the Chinese Ministry of Health in July 2003, over 800 people had been killed globally and thousands had been infected abroad. Out of the tragedy the world was reminded once again the dangers of new mutating diseases and their ability to spread in rapid manners. With an increasingly globalized world under threat, what can Asia do to treat future potential outbreaks?

Disease transmission across the globe is not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of human civilization, diseases have been a primary cause for population decline, from the spread of the Bubonic Plague throughout Europe in the Middle Ages to the smallpox epidemics which decimated the native populations of the Americas during European colonization. In the twentieth century, the most devastating global outbreak of disease was the Influenza Outbreak of 1918-1919. Spreading amongst soldiers engaged in World War One and spreading along trade and shipping routes over the course of a year, the deadly disease eventually accounted for 21,000,000 deaths, making it the most destructive international outbreak in history. The disease’s spread was caused by a variety of factors, partially due to the unique mutation of the virus and the lack of immunity amongst the world’s population. The lack of initial concern amongst governments focused on the war was also a cause for the fearsome spread of the disease, as well as the lack of aggressive treatment once the disease spread to epidemic proportions. Poor organization amongst nations that possessed health ministries as well as a lack of resources guaranteed that the disease would be the killer that it was. In part due to a lack of coordination and international cooperation, the influenza epidemic was the worst in history. In today’s modern time, there is a greater awareness regarding the importance of monitoring and maintaining health standards. With the existence of organizations such as the World Health Organization, coordinated responses to global outbreaks are easier to initiate. Despite this, however, there is growing concern that new outbreaks could arise in Asia.

To understand why disease outbreaks are such a concern, one need only analyze how SARS spread so quickly from a region in China to infect Hong Kong, Toronto, and Asia. From what is understood from research conducted so far, SARS is contracted due to close person-to-person contact, usually from contact with warm air droplets produced from coughing and sneezing. After an initial incubation period of two to seven days, it then spreads from carrier to carrier. According to the United States Center of Disease Control fact sheet regarding the symptoms of SARS, it begins with a high fever of 100.4°F, followed by body aches and severe respiratory problems. To complicate matters further, most patients infected with SARS also develop pneumonia. (http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/faq.htm) It is this potential to develop pneumonia that proved the main cause for death from SARS, mostly for people over 40 and with health problems or young children with no immunity to respiratory diseases. The dangers of the disease are exacerbated by the fact that few treatments are possible for the SARS virus, given the lack of research on this new disease. There are no vaccines and antibiotics are useless against viral infections. Faced with outbreaks, the only viable option of treatment is quarantine and strict isolation as the virus runs it course. Without quarantine measures, the disease has free reign to spread from the carrier and anyone, from a vacationing tourist to a traveling businessman, can spread it abroad. Thus, in a worst-case scenario, a regional outbreak in Asia can transform into an international epidemic.

It was this very scenario that Asia would have to face. The earliest the disease was detected was in November in Guangdong Province in China. In that province, 305 people were infected, 30% of these health care workers treating the disease, as reported in the WHO report Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): Status of the Outbreak and Lessons for the Immediate Future. (WHO Report, May 20, 2003. http://www.who.int/csr/media/sars_wha.pdf) The disease spread out of the Guangdong Province when an infected medical worker checked into the ninth floor of a four star hotel in Hong Kong. From there, the disease infected carriers who traveled to Toronto, Singapore, and Vietnam. As cases multiplied and medical personnel scrambled to treat the disease, they were unwittingly exposed to the virus. By March, the WHO received reports of 150 cases of SARS, which it dubbed, and issued emergency travel alerts to all nations. This, coupled with travel advisory alerts from the CDC and other European and African health agencies, ensured that the majority of SARS
cases would be contained in Asia and North America. With knowledge and quarantine protocols indicated, the disease peaked in Vietnam, Singapore, and Canada, mostly by April and May of 2003. In China, however, the disease continued to proliferate until July 2003. By the end of the epidemic, approximately 8,000 had been infected and 774 had died according to WHO estimates and statistics.

In the aftermath of the outbreak, several important lessons were gleaned. The first was that global alerts toward disease outbreaks were capable of halting the spread of disease. As noted in the WHO report on the disease, “the SARS experience has shown the capacity of global alerts, widely supported by a global press and amplified by electronic communications, to improve global vigilance and awareness at all levels, from health professionals and national authorities, to politicians and the traveling public.” (WHO Report, May 20, 2003, p. 7) The crisis also revealed that immediate revelations of disease outbreaks by governments to international health organizations as well as government action to combat a crisis are key to successfully containing outbreaks. Immediate action and reporting in Vietnam led to quick treatment and the quickest recovery time of all the nations infected by SARS. As the WHO report notes, “The SARS experience in Vietnam has shown that immediate political commitment at the highest level can be decisive. Vietnam demonstrated to the world how a developing country, hit by an especially severe outbreak, can triumph over a disease when reporting is prompt and open, when WHO assistance is quickly requested and fully supported, and when rapid case detection, immediate isolation and infection control, and vigorous contact tracing are put in place.” (WHO Report, May 20, 2003, p. 7) Despite these positive developments, the SARS epidemic also revealed that government policy was also the cause of the spread of the disease, and that this fault must rest on China.

When the SARS epidemic appeared in the Guangdong Province in China in November 2002, little initial action was taken to control or monitor the disease save at the regional level. This was partially due to the fact that the outbreak was not viewed to be a serious health concern and because there few systems developed to report regional findings to the Ministry of Health in Beijing. As a result, the disease spread to Hong Kong before Chinese officials determined that the outbreaks in the Guangdong Province were more serious than initially suspected. In addition, even when Chinese officials had knowledge of the SARS outbreak, information was hidden to the World Health Organization until February 11, 2003. Even when it was revealed, permission from the Chinese government to visit the infected province was not granted until April 11, by which time the disease had spread to Vietnam, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Toronto.

The lack of warning led to a taxing of hospital space for quarantine as well as exhausting medical resources in countries ill prepared for outbreaks. The resulting crisis proved especially taxing on medical personnel, who were infected at alarming rates trying to treat patients with a disease they had no knowledge about. As a result of China’s obstinacy with disclosing the extent of the crisis with the WHO and slow coordination containing the virus, China was the last nation to recover from the outbreak. In comparison, nations that disclosed the nature and extent of the SARS epidemic to the WHO and took immediate and organized steps to contain the virus recovered at much quicker rates, even though they possessed fewer resources than China. In response to China’s policies, the WHO concluded that “Cases during the earliest phase of the SARS outbreak there [Guangdong Province] were not openly reported, thus allowing a severe disease to become silently established in ways that made further international spread almost inevitable.” (WHO Report, May 20, 2003, p. 8) What the crisis ultimately revealed to Asia and the international community was that concealing medical crises in order to protect economic or social interests only served to undermine them, as the costs of upgrading health systems in China to deal with possible future outbreaks will cost in excess of $30 billion dollars. As the WHO concluded, “This is the most important lesson for all nations: in a globalized, electronically connected world, attempts to conceal cases of an infectious disease, for fear of social and economic consequences, must be recognized as a short-term stopgap measure that carries a very high price—loss of credibility in the eyes of the international community, escalating negative domestic economic impact, damage to the health and economies of neighboring countries, and a very real risk that outbreaks within the country’s own territory can spiral out of control.” (WHO Report, May 20, 2003, p. 8)

Fortunately, it appears that China is learning from
its experience and, following the example of Vietnam, Canada, and Singapore, is committed to cooperating with international health agencies. After the SARS crisis, there have been improvements. The Ministry of Health in China has gone through reorganization, and has begun to work with the WHO in treating and combating the disease. Since the international outbreak in 2003, there have been additional cases in China, the most recent stemming from two researchers being accidentally exposed to the SARS virus at the National Institute of Virology in Beijing. These instances of infection, however, have been aggressively investigated and treated by Chinese authorities, a dramatic change since last year. While much more needs to be done to ensure bio-safety of viral samples in China, greater awareness over combating SARS through contact tracing and medical quarantine and a greater willingness to cooperate with international medical agencies have prevented international outbreak.

The SARS epidemic of 2003 exposed to Asia and the world that the potential for international epidemics is just as possible in the twenty-first century as it was in the past. Dangerous diseases and new mutations can wreak havoc on international economies, social institutions, and the general health of entire countries. Despite the fear, confusion, and turmoil that the epidemic caused, however, this dubious anniversary holds cause for hope as well as remembrance. The SARS epidemic revealed that in this new interconnected world, international cooperation is just as important to fighting disease as medicines and physicians. By reminding the world of the dangers of obstinacy, a simple virus may serve to galvanize international unity in the face of ever changing illnesses.

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Hope for Afghanistan and Hope for Asia
- by Herschel HARTZ

In the first democratic election in the history of war-torn Afghanistan, hope is rising that President Bush’s spreading of democracy across the world does more than just seep into Afghanistan and Iraq. The President’s new committed effort to end the United States practice during the Cold War of supporting the “better of two evils” in order to combat an enemy hopes to send a powerful message that the Chinese and North Korean dictatorships must reform and succumb to the powerful movement of freedom and democracy or face pressure to do so from an increasingly aggressive American administration. From the American perspective, this is the most prominent way to combat terrorism.

It really matters little whether Senator Kerry or President Bush hold the White House for the next four years. Both are committed to doing whatever it takes to help Hamid Karzai’s newly elected government. The only difference might be that, in Senator Kerry’s case, he has sworn to calm things down in Asia, especially pledging to reduce the demand that North Korea work within six-party talks and opening the door for bilateral talks between the two sworn enemies. As such, Senator Kerry has said little about overturning the President’s efforts to spread democracy around the globe and has stated that as President, he would get the job done in Afghanistan.

President Bush will continue to ratchet up the pressure on a Chinese government that continues to use governmental controls to artificially increase the productivity and worth of its economy, inflating its currency and continuing the practice of a timid and slightly government-controlled capitalism. This practice has been particularly bad for America’s trade deficits and for the President’s economic record, as more jobs go overseas. President Bush has also sworn to continue with the six-party talks in dealing with the North Korean nuclear crisis. But, again, little disagreement arises between Kerry and Bush when it comes to their commitment to Afghanistan or their commitment to democracy in the region.

Having said that, the elections in Afghanistan were monumental and historical. Lines at polling booths were long, despite threats from Taliban outlaws that terrorism would be used as a tool to prevent democracy from taking hold in this formerly terrorist-supporting land. More than forty percent of those who voted in the election were women. Men traversed the mountainside on donkeys to vote. Men and women, threatened with their lives, risked everything to express their support for democracy.

The signs from Kabul are clear and resounding: American efforts are working, but there are still signs that there is more work to be done. Democracy in a country as large as Afghanistan and that, until now, was so used to respecting dictators and not the rule of law, takes time, patience, and effort on the part of the UN-led peacekeeping force and the American-led coalition.

After the historic vote, most of the candidates who ran in the election accused the vote of being fraudulent because of a marking placed on voters to make sure that they only vote once. The marking, unbeknownst to the poll workers, easily rubbed off. While the vote then was in question, it is highly unlikely this fraud could have turned the election in any different
direction. Almost days after the election, international observers quickly discounted the theory of a fraudulent election and allowed the two-week process of counting the votes.

According to recent counts, US-appointed President Hamid Karzai had more than fifty percent of the vote, with his closest competitor having only seventeen percent. It was a clear electoral win for the US-appointed leader, which destroyed arguments that he was a puppet leader imposed against the will of the Afghani people. This showed, clearly, that the Afghani people not only accepted his leadership then but will accept it now for the first years of Afghanistan’s democratic movement.

Just days before the count was finished, a suicide bombing killed peacekeepers from Iceland as well as nine children. It was a stark reminder that even the good news of the first democratic vote in the history of Afghanistan would not end the hatred terrorists have for freedom and democracy. As Taliban spokesman Abdul Latif Hakimi said recently, “There will be more attacks around the country such as today’s attacks. We will remain an enemy of this government; we don’t care if it is elected.” The situation is still dangerous in Afghanistan and it will not be safe for years to come. Democracy will take years, not months. This example should be clear in the minds of American citizens as a transformation of a similar society in Iraq takes place with the same hope in mind for a quick democratic transition and increasing stability in the region.

What does this mean for Asia? With more and more countries becoming democratic, this will increase the pressure on those nations that are still under the rule of a few to take up reforms towards democratic elections. Even without American pressure, people in Asia will start to question their governments more as more foreign governments become democratic. This could mean that the fight for democracy by President Bush that many have said is a radical and utopian fight could actually be working. From a continent so used to the rule of monarchs, dictators, and the selected few, Asia could be experiencing the starkest change in its societies in the history of the continent.

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Left to Die: The Betrayal of Nepal’s Rural Masses
- by Abbie Zamcheck

Few know about the violent eight-year struggle in remote Nepal. Fewer care. But for those in the countryside, support from the outside has always been rare. Today more than ever, these people are on their own.

The war is fought between Maoist rebels based mostly in the country’s rural mountainous regions and the country’s government forces. In 1996, when the rural uprising first sparked in six remote districts, it was regarded as a matter of law and order by the state. Now it has become a full scale civil war. Although the country is only the size of Arkansas and has a population of 27 million people, Nepal’s troubles are shared by much of the developing world. The conflict may be a warning of similar events to come. It is time the world took a closer look.

Mao Zedong’s famous saying that political power comes from the barrel of the gun holds sway over all the major parties engaged in the conflict. Included is the United States, a supplier of military aid to the Nepalese government. While there is little disagreement that the source of the insurgency is the suffering of the country’s rural people, the most common response from those in charge is one of brute force. The justification for this is rooted in ideology, not reality. If there is any hope in learning from or improving the situation, it lies in seeing the costs and causes of this conflict clearly.

But outside of Nepal, the civil war receives scant news coverage. So to get a better picture, in February 2003 I trekked to a demonstration at Hunter College in New York City hosted by Li Onesto, a journalist and activist who for several months in 1999 traveled through Nepal’s Maoist-controlled countryside. During her trip, she interviewed the movement’s rebel leadership and covered the guerrilla-controlled countryside—a stunt comparable to the journey of Edgar Snow, an enterprising journalist whose 1930s reporting on Mao’s rebels in Red Star Over China amazed the world. The major difference is that while Mr. Snow’s work regularly appeared in the Saturday Evening Post and Chicago Tribune, Ms. Onesto’s articles on Nepal were published in the Revolutionary Worker, a newspaper better known for advocating violent world communist revolution than for comprehensive news coverage.

At the talk, Ms. Onesto’s description of the conditions and people in the countryside was vivid and her photography of teenage women rebels stunning. But she was unflinching in her support for the Maoist cause. “This is actually a war between two sides,” she said, downplaying the Maoists’ embrace of violence. She called the insurgents humane compared to the government. Her account of the rebels was glowing. So it seemed more like wishful thinking on her part when she said that the Maoists had recently achieved a state of “strategic equilibrium” with government forces and that...
the current talks between the government and the rebels were just a ploy to rearm. At the time of the lecture, a cease-fire was in place and there was talk of lasting peace.

But Ms. Onesto was right. By August 2003, the fighting resumed and the seven-month-old truce was history. Since then, the conflict in Nepal has become further entrenched and the killing more systematic. On both sides, the use of terror and the number of casualties have soared. Currently, about 10,000 Nepalese have died in the fighting and the Maoists are estimated to control about 40% of Nepal’s territory—according to conservative estimates. The conflict is more brutal than ever.

For the Maoists and the government, violating human rights norms is the norm. Along with redistributing land and providing social services and cultural programs in base areas, Maoists routinely carry out public executions of suspected collaborators, a tactic used to terrorize surrounding villages. Reports of executions involving painful mutilation are not uncommon. And over the past year, Maoists have stepped up efforts to press-gang school children into regiments.

The government’s human rights record is no better. The difference is that while the Maoists publicize their executions and attempt to justify them, the government mostly keeps mum. The National Human Rights Commission, a group which monitors “enforced disappearances,” documents 662 cases of “disappearances” by Nepal’s government forces, in which suspected Maoist sympathizers were routinely rounded up by the government’s security forces, never seen again and presumed dead. A 2003 United Nations report lists Nepal as host to the highest number of enforced disappearances in the world.

Among the government’s victims are journalists, human rights workers and members of oppositional political parties. Maoists can brag of a similar list. As a result, last September, the International Federation of Journalists declared Nepal to be one of the most dangerous countries in the world for reporters.

This is not the only way to attempt a revolution. Although the Nepalese Maoists claim to aspire to Mao’s theory of guerilla warfare, their use of terror actually owes more to rebels such as Peru’s Shining Path than to the Chinese leader. Mao Zedong placed a heavy emphasis on army discipline and on promoting good relations with villagers. Many scholars attribute the Chinese Communists’ success in the 1940s to their appeal to peasant moral values in comparison to the terror used by the Japanese and Nationalist forces. Civilian terror was not a strategy encouraged by the Chairman.

It might do the rebels good to listen to his advice.

There are some examples in which the Maoists’ embrace of terror tactics backfired. Human Rights Watch released a report on the conflict last October which describes a case in which Maoists shot and killed a landowner for not paying a rebel tax. In response, villagers captured one of the assassins and beat him to death with sticks. More often, the drawback of the Maoists’ use of murder and intimidation is a loss of popularity in the countryside. In this context, the rebels are seen not as a superior alternative to the Nepalese state, but as a rival in ruthlessness instead.

But this may not matter. Nepal is increasingly a nation of orphans and migrants, two groups that provide a source of new recruits for the Maoists. Coupled with their kidnappings of students, it is unclear whether the Maoists have suffered as a result of their terror tactics. But Nepal’s rural villagers have paid the price.

This is just the latest in a long history of setbacks for the country people. The high level of grievances which led to the start of the conflict in 1996 was a result of state policies which systematically ignored and abused the countryside’s impoverished inhabitants. Past treatment of the rural and migrant populace by the state can be characterized as predatory. Under the best circumstances it was one of deep neglect. Following this pattern, attempts to introduce resources and aid to rural areas in the 1980s and 90s were slow and crippled by government corruption. At the same time, economic policy often completely failed to take into account the needs of the country people.

The legacy of these failures often defines the current conflict. For example, the lack of roads to many of the areas in the mountainous regions of the country, which now constitute the Maoist heartland, was often cited as a major impediment to improving development in the region. Now it’s often blamed for the government’s inability to move security forces into the rebel strongholds. In Rukum district, one of the regions where the insurgency started, the first drivable road was built in 2002. And it was paved to transport Royal Nepalese Army troops.

This only underscores the problem inherent to the conflict: intense poverty in the country’s rural economy, which in Nepal encompasses 85% of the population. The existence of the insurgency is even less surprising when considering that the countryside is further plagued by severe environmental degradation and caste, ethnic and gender prejudices.

With these underlying problems in mind, many organizations continue to call for the introduction of development aid into the remote rural regions which form the heartland of the insurgency. But the civil war makes this nearly impossible. Maoists have a policy of destroying government infrastructure. Security forces
fear that aid will help the rebel cause. Still, most agree that the solution to the crisis in Nepal will not be solely a military one.

And yet despite this, and regardless of abuses inflicted by the government and the Maoists alike, the United States—along with India and the United Kingdom—have tried to pursue a military solution to the conflict by supplying military aid to the Nepalese government. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Nepal and called for closer ties with the government as part of the United States’ “global war on terror.”

According to the Human Rights Watch’s October report, US policymakers have shown signs that they might retreat from this position, despite the allocation of an extra $1 million in military aid following the bombing of the US embassy’s Katmandu information center last September. In response to the October report’s criticism of the United States’ aid to Nepal, a foreign assistance bill was introduced in the US Senate that proposed cutting military aid to the country unless the military obeyed court-ordered restrictions on the jailing of suspected Maoist sympathizers. One hopes that in this case, the US will change its course.

But such near-sightedness does not only dominate foreign policy towards the country. Last April, Monsoon held a seminar on the topic of the costs of globalization in Asia. Several professors on the panel agreed that greater market liberalization and modernization will inevitably lead to peace and prosperity in the region. Brandeis economics professor Serkan Bahceci was then asked why these forces have so far not averted the crisis in Nepal. His response was, “The good old life is gone. These people have to disappear. Somehow.”

In fairness to Mr. Bahceci, his statement is nothing radical. It reflects what many, if not the vast majority of economists believe, that these rural people will and must be fully incorporated into the urban economy. It happened in the United States, they say. But in Nepal, the equation is not so clean. The urban or global economy does not have the capacity to absorb all of these “obsolete” persons. Increasingly when it does, the result is new recruits to the international sex trade or desperate international laborers, such as the twelve from Nepal who were beheaded by militants in Iraq last September. And for the masses of the country’s rural people mired in the current civil war, “disappearing” means death.

Ms. Onesto is dogmatic in her support of the Maoists. But even more narrow-minded is US policy towards the region. At least Ms. Onesto knows who these rebels are. Awareness of the voices of Nepal’s rural people, and their hardships, beliefs and dreams is something much needed in the region. For now, the blasting of guns and bombs is the only sound in Nepal that matters.

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Self-Conscious Among My Own People

- by Mina YOSHIOKA

For those of you who have ever visited the bustling city of Tokyo, you must understand why I was afraid of going back. The memories I had of Tokyo from when I visited one summer as a young teenage girl were traumatizing. When the train doors opened, I was pushed into the train by the herd of salary men behind me, and after the door closed, my face was pressed against someone’s back and the air squeezed out of my chest. After a while, I squatted down to get some air, amongst a forest of black and gray suit-legs for as far as I could see. I felt like the heavens heard my prayers when the door opened and my father led me out the door. When I looked across the busiest intersection of Shibuya, I questioned whether I was really in Japan. Young girls and guys in colorful clothes walked around with their tanned-brown skin, yellow and white-dyed hair, blue and green eyes and white makeup. I felt completely out of place, and scared—would I ever feel comfortable in my home country?

Several years passed. I entered college and took some courses related to Japan. Although I was raised in a Japanese family with Japanese values and eating Japanese food, I never really studied Japan. Looking at Japanese art, history, and its people from a Western perspective made me curious about my own people, and whether I would fit into the Japanese society. Thus, I decided to study in Tokyo for a year, hoping to improve my Japanese language skills and become closer to being a Japanese citizen.

My study abroad experience in Japan was an unusual one. Foreigners talk about Japan as a homogenous country, feeling isolated, different, and at times transparent. I cannot say that I experienced the same, as I am sure I did not get the stares for being non-Asian and I did not have to duck to avoid running into entrances of buildings and trains. However, I always wondered what people would think of me when I took out an English book to read or when I spoke English with my American friends. Would they think that I might not be Japanese? Or would they just think that I have been successful in achieving a high level of English? Was I thinking too much? Perhaps. But it is a strange feeling...
to be self-conscious in a country where people have the same blood, same language, and same culture as you.

The balance between playing Japanese and playing “foreigner” was also something I had not intended on doing until I was there. I would talk and laugh out loud with my American friends in public, giving myself an excuse that I could be more obnoxious (or “American”) than I would be if I were with Japanese friends. At other times, especially when I was alone, I would conform to the Japanese values of respect, keeping one’s own space, and politeness. Whether I blended in completely in the eyes of the “pure” Japanese is something I will never know, but as a Japanese-American, I always thought about whether or not they would sense that I was different.

The Japanese word for foreigner is gaijin, literally meaning “outside person.” Although Japan is claiming to become more international, there is something that separates the foreigners from the Japanese. Whether it is pride or fear, or something else, depends on each individual. This difference is seldom verbalized, but both the Japanese and the foreigner know and feel this separation. As for me, I do not know whether I am considered a fellow Japanese or a gai-jin, or something in between, or perhaps something completely different. I, however, am not sure what I want to be labeled as, either. Once I am considered a Japanese, I feel as if I have the obligation to conform to all of the Japanese values and “rules” set in society—the structure of seniority and the structure of gender. As long as I consider myself American, I feel as if I have the power to discard these hierarchy structures that I do not agree with and am hoping will disappear altogether someday.

During my eleven-month stay, fortunately or unfortunately, I did not encounter too much of the Japanese structure with which I am uncomfortable. I attended a school where the curriculum was in English; I taught English as a part-time job; I held an internship position with an American firm; and I hung out mostly with Americans and other open-minded Japanese. If I were asked whether I truly experienced Japan in those eleven months, I could not say yes. The fact that I was able to lead my life in a similar manner without grave adjustments is also an amazing factor about Tokyo. However, those were months I was studying abroad from the US. I will return to Tokyo next summer as a shakai-jin, or full member of society. The unforeseen experiences and challenges that await me will continue to further shape my views about Japanese society and about my identity.

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Yun-Fei Ji’s “The Empty City”
- by Hoong Chuin LIM

From September 7 to December 12, 2004, the Rose Art Museum brought to Brandeis Yun-Fei Ji’s breathtaking landscape paintings, entitled “The Empty City.” Through his six-painting collection, Ji implicitly condemns that the construction of Three Gorges Dam, which will be completed in 2009, has caused and will further entail undesirable social, economic, political and environmental impacts specific to the regions along Yangtze River and China as a whole. Ji weaves into the landscapes in his painting harmoniously symbolic images like debris of broken buildings, walking skeletons, flying ghosts, Red Arm armies and a poster of President Mao with his face smeared to narrate his thoughts to the audience.

Born in China in 1963, Ji received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, and Master of Fine Arts from Fulbright College of Art and Sciences, University of Arkansas on a scholarship. In his masterpieces, Ji competently blends the classical Chinese landscape with the western caricatures and combines the gracefulness of Chinese brushstrokes with the energy and liveliness he observes from New York City. He expresses his ideas in his painting as an unfolding narration, opening up a space for his audience to follow his messages, think and find out the answer for themselves.

By hosting Ji’s highly acclaimed “The Empty City,” the Rose Art Museum set up a platform for the Brandeis community to ponder Ji’s alternative perspective about Chinese art as well as his stand about the social and political development in China. Gregory Volk, a regular contributor to Art in America, thinks that Ji’s paintings “radically update Chinese landscape painting and radically extend painting as it is practiced in this country: at once fiercely socially engaged, visually bedazzling, and poetically lively.” In addition, Ji’s paintings also offer pleasurable visual excitement for those who are purely interested in grasping the artistic value of art. Painted on mulberry paper with mineral ink using a combination of wet and dry touches, the paintings, “are extraordinarily beautiful,” comments Shannone Fitzgerald, the Curator of Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, “despite the disturbingly prophetic quality of the daunting content.”

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To the Editorial Staff of "Monsoon":

I have watched the progression of “Monsoon” and would like to honor your role in engaging us all in the concepts, the people, and the complexities of Asia. What better way to know the diversity we share at Brandeis than to take action, to share thoughts, to challenge one another, and to educate one another. On a personal note, I wanted to share how much I love the title that you have chosen: “Monsoon”.

A month before I went to Indonesia for the first time, a friend told me to rent the movie “The Year of Living Dangerously.” She said that the film had one of the most realistic pictures of a monsoon rain that she had ever seen. To her the rainy season captured her love for the people and for the country of Indonesia. I watched the film and didn’t have the same nostalgic feeling. In fact, it made me go out and buy travel rain gear. (Unfortunately, this is a true story!) However, the first major rainstorm in Bali, Indonesia was one that I hope never to forget.

The streets of the village of Ubud were flooded in what seemed like seconds. I pulled out my rain gear and realized at that moment I couldn’t be more of a tourist! Then I stopped to observe what others did in the rain – they ran to a dry spot and sat as the heaviest of rains passed. Sometimes they spoke to each other and sometimes they just sat in silence observing the world around them. I came to find out that the rains were part of everyday conversation; it was part of culture. Through this experience, I began to rely less on my silly gear, and I began to see the opportunities it provided for me to get to know people. It allowed me time to learn about the “other” and in turn I learned about myself. This is my hope for “Monsoon: The Asian Journal of Brandeis University”: that we take the time to slow down, to talk through issues or to just be together in the daily rains. I am thankful that the “Monsoon” journal is part of our culture at Brandeis. Through it, may we learn from one another and find our own sense of complicity.

Ashley Boudo
International Students and Scholars Office
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