

Studi e ricerche 12

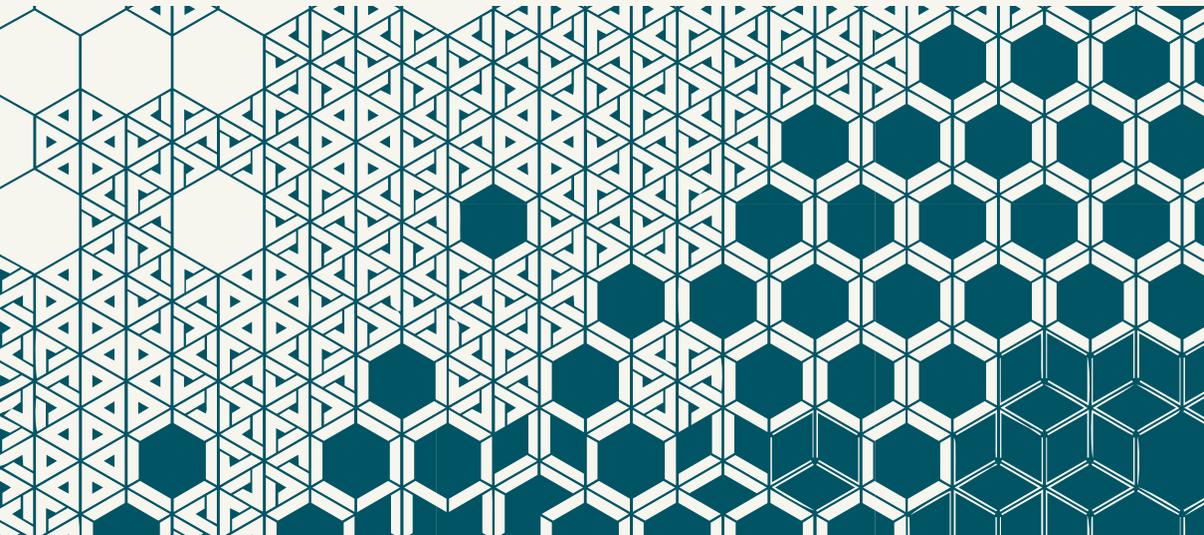
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# Proceedings of the XV East Asia Net Research Workshop

edited by  
Daniele Brombal



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## **Studi e ricerche**

12



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# Studi e ricerche

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# **Proceedings of the XV East Asia Net Research Workshop**

Venice, May 14-15, 2015

edited by Daniele Brombal

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## **Editor's Introduction to the Volume**

Daniele Brombal  
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

This volume contains papers prepared for the XV EastAsiaNet (EAN) Research Workshop, hosted by Ca' Foscari University Venice on May 14-15, 2015.<sup>1</sup> These proceedings consist of two sections, each relevant to one of the themes addressed by the workshop: the nature-culture-society nexus, with particular reference to the role of water as a natural and symbolic resource, and practices and expressions of cultural and scientific diplomacy. The six papers featured in this volume are representative of the variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches characterising the study of contemporary East Asia, drawing both from the social sciences and the humanities. The section on human-nature interactions opens with Sean Golden's contribution, focused on the evolution of China's ecological discourse. The paper is a poignant account of the contribution made by both classical Chinese thought and modern political culture in normalising interactions between man and nature. By bridging scholarship on ancient China with the study of contemporary politics, Golden provides a lucid contribution to our understanding of current trends and challenges ahead in envisioning a more sustainable future for the Asian country. Japan's quest for environmentally sustainable energy sources is the key concern of the second paper, authored by Yveline Lecler. Her contribution provides an in-depth analysis of organisational and policy structures of Japan's hydropower sector, with a special focus on the potential of small-scale hydropower systems. The paper also sheds light on future scenarios and relevant institutional constraints for the development of Japan's hydropower resources. The last contribution of the first section, authored by Giovanni Bulian, analyses processes of social construction of seawater and seascape in Japan's fishermen communities. The paper introduces original fieldwork materials collected by the author in Kamishima, a small island at the mouth of Ise Bay. It revolves around the role played by the mutual relationship between human beings and nature in shaping identities and

1 Further information about EAN's mission, composition, and activities can be found on the network's website at URL <http://www.eastasianet.org/index.php?id=3>.

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cultural expressions. In exploring interactions between nature, culture, and society, Bulian's work complements the normative and regulatory perspectives at the core of Golden's and Lecler's papers.

The interaction among cognitive attitudes held by diverse societies and the practices used by powerful actors to normalise cultural mindsets are the key topics touched upon in Tobia Maschio's and Marco Zappa's papers, featured in the second section of the volume. The first relates to the contentious role of the Confucius Institute, an organisation affiliated to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, entrusted with the promotion of Chinese language and culture abroad. Asia studies scholars have greeted its establishment across Europe and the US with mixed reactions. On the one hand, as a chance to foster collaborative initiatives; on the other, as a course of concern, due to its potential role as a tool of PRC's soft power, projecting an image of China - and the world - respondent to Beijing's political interest. Maschio contributes to the latter strain of research: his work provides an informative analysis of discursive strategies used by the Confucius Institute, focusing on the representation of China's culture and history, as depicted in the online portal Confucius Institute Online.<sup>2</sup> On his part, Zappa's work rather focuses on the *glocal* dimension of cultural interactions, by analysing the societal response to the increasing Japanese presence in Hanoi's Ba Dinh district (Vietnam). His work shows a positive example of community's adaptation to the change in wider social, economic and political conditions. In the last work contained in this volume, Gregory Lee draws from the tradition of critical cultural studies to offer a sharp critique of the so-called 'China model' as an alternative, distinctive path to modernisation. A path that not only is portrayed by Beijing as rational, efficient, and inherently positive, but also possesses a considerable appeal among Western audiences, due to its perceived efficiency in delivering growth. Lee contends that in fact the path pursued by China's élites for the most part of the XX century has been informed by scientism, or the belief that science and its technological applications may be a panacea for the country's ills. This approach has led to a gradual and yet meticulous removal from the arena of intellectual debate of instances of democratization, marginalizing as well alternative patterns of development. This process, the author argues, regards China as much as Western societies. In fact, Lee reckons that by looking at China's change into a consumerist society, largely driven by a "need, a thirst for technology [...] we are in fact looking at ourselves". Judging from the enthusiasm that increasingly characterises Europe's public debate over China's achievements, we might as well be looking into our future. Lee's paper is therefore a call on Asia studies scholars to transform their

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2 Accessible at URL <https://www.openlearning.com/ConfuciusInstituteOnline>.

research into a locus for a critical reflection on the way(s) our societies envision their future.

Such a reflexive approach is key to reframing the field of Asian studies in ways that are both scientifically sound and socially relevant. A large community of early stage and experienced scholars – including the ones featured in this volume – is contributing to the pursuit of this aim. However, considerable room for improvement remains to redefine methodological boundaries of the field, creating an epistemic community capable of a critical reflection on issues of societal and political relevance. This endeavour should be carried out with scarce regard to disciplinary pedigrees, but rather focusing on the relevance, rigour, consistency, and feasibility of methods of inquiry. This is no easy task, since Asian studies scholars would have to handpick and experiment themselves with the best resources, skills, and knowledge that can be brought into play to explore the social and cultural phenomena constituting their subject of study. However, some comfort can be found in history: after all, Oriental studies were born in a time when demarcations among different disciplines were much less coercive than nowadays. Most pioneers of the field – Matteo Ricci, to name one – were skilled not only in what we now call the humanities, but were rather equipped with a vast knowledge of social and natural phenomena, and endowed with a holistic intellectual attitude. This allowed them to play a vital role as knowledge brokers between widely different actors and across institutional contexts.<sup>3</sup>

The author of this brief introduction does not long for a return to a romanticised past. He does hope, however, that more scholars will take upon themselves the challenge of reshaping our field of study, by means of ethical commitment, scientific curiosity and civic engagement. A first testing ground would be the study of the New Silk Roads, as envisaged by China and her partners in the framework of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). Far from being a mere collection of infrastructural projects, the initiative is destined to reshape institutions of large parts of Eurasia. Understanding the New Silk Roads implications is a challenge calling for a long term, collaborative, interdisciplinary effort engaging Asian studies. Indeed, EAN scholars are already at work in this respect: a second volume – currently in progress – stemming from an EAN workshop is going to be devoted to the new Silk Roads.

Before leaving the floor to the authors of these proceedings, the Editor wish to thank the anonymous reviewers who appraised the submitted papers: their voluntary contribution was fundamental in crafting this volume.

Daniele Brombal  
Venice, 4th December 2017

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<sup>3</sup> This does not equate to an hagiography of Oriental studies *tout-court*: for centuries they were tainted with racial prejudice and political, confessional, and economic interests. In short, they often had less to do with science than with power.



# **Natural Resources, Culture and Society**



## **Ecological Discourse and Ecological Risk in China**

Sean Golden  
(Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, España)

**Abstract** This paper will outline three sources of ecological discourse for the defence of ‘ecological civilisation’ and ‘ecological Marxism’ and the promotion of an ‘ecologically civilised society’: in response to ecological risk in China: the official, governmental ecological discourse (official think tanks, ministry documents); the formal academic, nongovernmental ecological discourse (academics, advisers, opinion-makers); the informal nongovernmental or emergent civil society ecological discourse (social movements, protest movements, critical analysis of risk and governmental policy). The working hypothesis of this study is that, even though awareness of ecological risk and the need for an ‘ecologically civilised society’ is high among the emergent civil society, the ministry advisers and policy-makers, and the opinion-makers, the management of ecological risk is hampered by contradictory priorities and criteria in the meritocratic evaluation of performance by government and Party officials, on the one hand, and the need to generate wealth, on the other. This debate is analogous to the debate on efficiency (the generation of wealth) and equity (the redistribution of wealth) in the field of economic planning and performance, and a symptom of the increasing complexity of competing and contradictory priorities as the nature of Chinese modernisation evolves.

**Keywords** Chinese ecological discourse. Ecological Marxism. Ecologically civilised society. Ecological risk in China. Chinese modernisation.

Pollution is a major issue in China today, a source of popular discontent on a widespread level, which ranks with systematic corruption as one the most important threats to the stability of the political system. The government had to issue ‘red alerts’ in Beijing twice at the end of 2015 because of the excessive levels of air pollution. Both Prime Minister Li Keqiang 李克强 and President Xi Jinping 习近平 have stated that controlling pollution has the government’s highest priority. For 2016 the government has revised the levels of pollution that would trigger a red alert, from the present air quality index of 200 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic metre for three days in a row to an excess of 500 for one day, 300 for two days in a row or 200 for four days. By extending these criteria to include Beijing, Tianjin and four cities in Hebei province, the government has also imposed pollution controls on a more widespread area. The violation of existing legislation for control of the storage of dangerous chemicals caused a major disaster in Tianjin. At the same time, China contributed positively to the achievement of consensus for the Paris Agreement on the reduction of climate

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change. Ecological risk is very high in China and it requires management. A discourse analysis of the defence of 'ecological civilisation' or 'ecological Marxism' in China – and of the subsequent management of ecological risk in China – reveals how the construction of a discourse on ecological risk has become an area fraught with difficulties as a result of the incompatibility of diverse strategies and priorities.

This study will analyse three sources of discourse for the defence of 'ecological civilisation' or 'ecological Marxism' in response to ecological risk in China and its subsequent management:

- official, governmental ecological discourse (official think tanks, ministry documents);
- formal academic, nongovernmental ecological discourse (academics, advisers, opinion-makers);
- informal nongovernmental or emergent civil society ecological discourse (social movements, protest movements, critical analysis of risk and governmental policy).

The working hypothesis of this study is that, even though awareness of ecological risk is high among emergent civil society, ministry advisers, policy-makers and opinion-makers, the management of ecological risk is hampered by contradictory priorities and criteria in the meritocratic evaluation of performance by government and Party officials, on the one hand, and the need to generate wealth, on the other. This debate is analogous to the debate on 'efficiency' (the generation of wealth) and 'equity' (social justice, the redistribution of wealth) in the field of economic planning and performance.

When he was President (2002-2012), Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 promoted 'the construction of ecological civilisation' (生态文明 建设 *shēngtài wénmíng jiànshè*) as a key element of his 'scientific development concept' (科学发展观 *kēxué fāzhǎn guān*) in the context of 'people-centred development' (以人为本 *yǐrén wéiběn*) – a concept that opposes development that would benefit the people to development as an end in itself. On the one hand, uncontrolled environmental contamination generates serious economic costs that threaten the modernisation of the economy; on the other, environmental degradation generates social protest (or 'instability', in governmental terms). Thus, a far-seeing environmental policy would contribute to the construction of a 'harmonious society' (和谐社会 *héxié shèhuì*). This would require 'coordinated and comprehensive sustainable development' (全面协调可持续 *quánmiàn xiétiáo kěchíxù*), meaning that the various dimensions of development (economic, political, cultural and social) should be coordinated – with environmental preservation as a priority – as well as balancing development in order to reduce disparities between the city and the countryside, between regions, between economic and social development, between human soci-

ety and nature, between domestic development and foreign trade, between centralism and decentralisation (Hu 2007).

The construction of a discourse defining ‘ecological civilisation’ (生态文明 *shēngtài wénmíng*) or ‘ecological Marxism’ (生态马克思主义 *shēngtài mǎkèsī zhǔyì*) fits into the strategy that Deng Xiaoping began in 1978 of constructing a new ideological outlook – an ‘ecologically civilised society’ (生态文明社會 *shēngtài wénmíng shèhuì*) in this case – that would replace radical Maoism in order to justify his substitution of ‘reforms and opening up’ (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) for Maoist autarchy and egalitarianism.

Deng’s ‘two civilisations’ program (*liangge wenming* 两个文明), which differentiates between ‘material civilisation’ (*wuzhi wenming* 物质文明) and ‘spiritual civilisation’ (*jingshen wenming* 精神文明), constitutes the core of his ideological framework. In this program, Deng Xiaoping drew an ideological line in his clear separation of two civilisations for the Chinese: ‘material civilisation’ refers to economic growth led by market development and mass consumption, while ‘spiritual civilisation’, which can be understood as the ‘civilising of minds’, consists in a set of moral standards and practices such as hard work, abnegation, patriotism and trust in the Party, and therefore requests Chinese people to be morally beyond reproach. Right from its beginning, this ‘civilising of minds’ involved a single purpose, that of accompanying the growth and development of ‘material civilisation’, configuring and adapting minds to the new rules and socio-economic practices deriving from capitalist economies. (Boutonnet 2011, 79-80)

This is, of course, ‘civilisation’ (文明 *wénmíng*) ‘with Chinese characteristics,’ the construction of a specific imaginary/ideology that would justify and lend legitimacy to government policy, not the promotion of ‘culture’ or ‘civilisation’ *per se*. As Raymond Williams pointed out in *Keywords* (1983), in modern European languages, both of these terms have their etymological origins in ‘cultivation’ in the context of agriculture and of animal breeding but evolved into ‘Culture’ and ‘Civilisation’ in parallel with the profound alienation that accompanied industrialisation in Europe. The connotations in Chinese come from a different context, especially in the case of ‘culture’ (文化 *wénhuà*), a composite term that includes the concept of ‘transformation’ (化 *huà*). There are extensive and contrastive discussions of the different meanings and connotations of 文明 *wénmíng* and 文化 *wénhuà* in the Chinese context in works by Zhang Weiwei (2012) and Barbara Cassin et al. (2004, 2014). The *China-Europe Cultural Compass* quotes Hao Xiajun to contrast the Chinese from the European connotations: “In ancient Chinese texts, culture refers to civil administration and education. In a broader sense, culture embodies the capacity of material and spiritual production as well as all material and spiritual products” (EUNIC n.d., 17).

Party and government discourse now speaks of four civilisations that configure ‘socialism’ (社会主义 *shèhuìzhǔyì*):

- ‘material civilisation’ (物质文明 *wùzhì wénmíng*: the economy);
- ‘spiritual civilisation’ (精神文明 *jīngshén wénmíng*: culture);
- ‘political civilisation’ (政治文明 *zhèngzhì wénmíng*: democracy, rule-based governance);
- ‘ecological civilisation’ (生态文明 *shēngtài wénmíng*: clean and pleasing environment).

‘Nature’ generally plays a secondary role in most schools of classical Chinese thought because they emphasised ethics, the ordering of society and civic discourse, except in the case of Daoist thinkers who looked to the natural world for a realm where each being or thing could act in accordance with its own 道 *dào* and there was no need for any overriding teleological force to impose an order on them. The Confucians tended to look to Nature for analogies to justify social norms (e.g. 本末 *běnmò* ‘roots and branches’: just as branches were subordinated to roots, so should subjects be subordinated to rulers). There are, however, celebrated cases of a certain ‘ecological’ awareness. From Daoism and popular culture came concepts such as 度 *dù* ‘degree’ or ‘restraint’, 道 *dào* ‘the way of things’, 风水 *fēngshuǐ* ‘geomancy of the land(scape)’, 山水 *shānshuǐ* ‘mountains and water’ (the generic term for landscape), 风流 *fēngliú* ‘wind and river,’ following the flow. The Confucians banked on 礼 *lǐ* norms and customs, including 孝 *xiào*, a hierarchy of social obligations, to keep order, if not harmony, in society. For the Daoists, these were examples of 为 *wèi*, of an artificial way of doing things (i.e. based on artifice), as opposed to doing things according to their nature, a form of intervention that did not respect the nature of things. The graphic etymology of the written character in figure 1 - 为 *wèi* in its traditional form - makes this clear: an elephant 象 *xiàng* and a hand 手 *shǒu* guiding it:



Figure 1. The graphic etymology of 为 *wèi*

This visual metaphor represents a complex perspective on what is natural. The elephant is a huge and powerful animal, much stronger than the

human hand that guides it, yet wild elephants can be domesticated and transformed into tame animals that perform tasks assigned by humans. They are no longer wild in this case, yet humans, aware of the 道 *dào* of elephants, understand that their natural strength can be exploited for the benefit of human social ends because the nature (道 *dào*) of elephants allows them to be domesticated. Using domesticated animals to work the fields in agriculture suits the natural human need to produce food. Of course, for anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss, the difference between ‘raw’ (and therefore ‘natural’) and ‘cooked’ (and therefore ‘artificial’, i.e. ‘cultural’) – or between ‘wild’ and ‘tame’ – is precisely the frontier between *nature* and *culture* (Lévi-Strauss 1964).

The domestication of plants and animals transformed nature but had to respect the ways of nature in order to do so. Otherwise it would have failed. This required understanding of the 道 *dào* as well as minimal interference in the 道 *dào* in order to let things run their course. The 道德经 *Dàodéjīng* uses the example of horses to make the difference clear: 天下有道，卻走馬以糞。天下無道，戎馬生于郊。禍莫大于不知足 *Tiānxià yǒudào, què zǒumǎ yǐ fèn. Tiānxià wúdào, róngmǎ shēngyú jiāo. Huò mòdà yú bù zhīzú*: when everything beneath the sky respects 道 *dào*, work horses manure the fields (or work the fields); when nothing beneath the sky respects 道 *dào*, war horses are reared outside the city walls; no greater misfortune than insatiable greed.

Overstepping the bounds of the 道 *dào* became 为 *wèi*, and upset the ecological balance, of nature and of society, and led to disaster. So the Daoists preached 无为 *wúwéi* or non-interference, not to be understood as doing nothing, however, but rather to be understood as avoiding artificial interference in order to allow things to run their natural course: 无为而无不为 *wúwéi ér wúwùwéi* do not interfere but do not do nothing or do nothing and that way let everything get done. Even so, Mèngzǐ 孟子 (Mencius, 372-289 BC), a Confucian, gave a well-known example of the danger involved in interfering with the 道 *dào* of things:

Do not be like the man from Song (Sung). Among the people of the state of Song there was one who, concerned lest his grain not grow, pulled on it. Wearily, he returned home, and said to his family, “Today I am worn out. I helped the grain to grow”. His son rushed out and looked at it. The grain was withered. Those in the world who do not help the grain to grow are few. Those who abandon it, thinking it will not help, are those who do not weed their grain. Those who help it grow are those who pull on the grain. Not only does this not help, but it even harms it. (Mengzi 2008, 40)

The Legalist Hánfēizǐ 韩非子 (280-233 BC) gave a striking example of ignorance of the 道 *dào* of things that has become an example of 成语

*chéngyǔ*, a genre of folk wisdom based on four-character sayings: 守株待兔 *shǒuzhūdàitù*, stand guard by the tree, wait for the rabbit. He tells the story of a farmer from the state of Song who saw a rabbit run so fast it crashed into a tree and died, and decided not to work the fields any more, but to wait by the tree every day for another rabbit to do the same. A late Confucianist, Wáng Yángmíng 王阳明 (1472-1529), proposed extending 仁 *rén* or 'empathy', the principle virtue of Confucianism, to the world of nature:

When one hears the cry of birds and animals, one will have compassion, because the [仁 *rén*] is one with the birds and animals. If one says that animals have senses, then one will have compassion when one sees the grasses and trees faded and broken, because the [仁 *rén*] is one with the grasses and animals. If you say that grasses and trees are animated beings, then one will regret when one sees tilestones collapse; this is because the [仁 *rén*] is one with tilestones. (Chan 1963, 182)

By contrast, as Lynn White pointed out, the ideology of the Judean-Christian tradition that subordinated nature to human usage provides the historical roots of the contemporary ecological crisis (White 1967; see Capra, Mattei 2016 for a contemporary approach to harmonising environmental science and law). Karl Marx's well-known eleventh *Thesis* on Feuerbach stated, "Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt drauf an, sie zu verändern", philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, what matters is *transforming* it (Marx 1845). Marx was defending *praxis* as opposed to theory in his *Theses*, getting one's hands dirty with the practical work of creation, such as the Biblical God creating humans. In the context of the industrial revolution in which Marx was immersed, this practical work could include the transformation of raw materials into products ("Er betrachtet daher im Wesen des Christentum nur das theoretische Verhalten als das echt menschliche, während die Praxis nur in ihrer schmutzig jüdischen Erscheinungsform gefaßt und fixiert wird", Marx 1845). A purely exploitative approach to nature is a key element of the modernity produced in Euroamerica by the modern scientific revolution, the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution, an element that China imported along with Marxism-Leninism.

Deeply influenced by Western modernity, China has predominantly accepted an anthropocentric worldview and values, which regard human beings as totally different from the world of natural things, and accordingly treats the world of nature as a world of objects. The value of natural things lies merely in being "used for our purpose". [...] This worldview and its resulting values have infiltrated the mainstream ideology of modern China, both in Mao's period and Deng's reform period.

For example, during Mao's regime, the lyrics of one of the most popular folk ballads included the lines:

In heaven there is no jade emperor [the supreme deity of Daoism],

On earth there is no dragon king [the rain god in Chinese mythology],

I am the jade emperor,

I am the dragon king.

Let the mountains make way, I am coming.

Since Deng's reform and opening-up period, an anthropocentric worldview and values have spread throughout China. For Pan Jiazheng, a scientist and former general engineer in the Ministry of Water Resources and Power [...] the Yangtze River has only economic value – its use lies merely in producing electricity for human beings. The river's irrigation of farmlands and woods, spiritual nourishment of people, and beautification of the earth for thousands of years is totally irrelevant to him. The influence of the anthropocentric worldview and values on modern China is so deep that even the purpose of the Environmental Protection Laws is defined as “safeguarding human health and facilitating the development of Socialist modernization”. [...] It is clear then that intrinsic to the law is an anthropocentric worldview, which “can no longer fulfill the needs of environmental protection”. [...] It cannot undertake the extremely important task of creating an ecological civilization. (Fan, He, Wang 2014)

Such a view has led to the current environmental crisis that now requires the creation of an ecologically civilised society. In 2007 *China Daily* reported that Hu Jintao's concept of ecological civilisation

reflects an important change in the Party's understanding of development. Rather than emphasizing economic construction as the core of development as it did in the past, the Party authorities have come to realize that development, if sustainable, must entail a list of elements including the right relationship between man and nature. (*China Daily* 2007)

In 2011 *Xinhuanet* reported that “China, the world's second largest economy, is stepping up its efforts to achieve ‘ecological civilization’” (*Xinhuanet* 2011), and the Chinese Ecological Civilization Research and Promotion Association was founded in a ceremony in the Great Hall of the People.

In their congratulation letters and written instructions, the Central leaders noted that to develop ecological civilization is a task of strategic significance to advancing the socialism cause with Chinese characteristics, and a definite requirement and major move to achieve science-based development; it is of relevance to the improvement of people's living

standards, the sustainable development, and the development of the Chinese nation in a long run. (MEP 2011)

Zhou Shengxian, the Minister of Environmental Protection of China, lent official weight to the project.

Environment and development go hand in hand. In nature, environmental issue is the issue of economic structure, production pattern and development path. Talking about environmental protection while ignoring economic development is like 'climbing a tree to catch a fish'. Talking about economic development while ignoring environmental protection is like «draining the pond to catch the fish». Right economic policy is the right environmental policy and vice versa. Green development is the reflection of right economic policies and environmental policies. Environmental protection has the role of 'guiding', 'optimizing' and 'expanding' economic development. 'Guiding' means clearly identifying ecological functions of the region and guiding the region and enterprises to develop the economy while bearing in mind what could be developed, encouraged, limited and prohibited. 'Optimizing' means utilization of the 'target driven mechanism' to facilitate industrial restructuring and shift of development mode. 'Expanding' means expansion of environmental carrying capacity by further promoting the pollutants emission reduction in order to create conditions for sustained economic development. Giving full play of the comprehensive role of environmental protection in optimizing economic development will strongly promote green development in China. (Zhou 2011)

Pan Yue, the Vice-Minister for Environmental Protection, appealed to traditional Chinese thought to justify contemporary environmental policy: "Longstanding Chinese ideals, which seek balance between man and nature, could help humans find a better way of living" (Pan 2011).

Traditional Chinese thought not only calls for the unity of man and nature, but provides the tools that allowed China to practice this principle for thousands of years. This is of great significance in the quest to solve today's financial and ecological crises.

For the past century, China has studied the west and followed the western path of industrialisation. And while three decades of reform and opening up have brought astounding economic achievements, China has also concentrated into those 30 years levels of pollution it took the west a century to create. (Pan 2011)

Pan identifies ecological ideological differences between the West and China.

China must not continue to follow in the footsteps of developed nations.

Instead, it should take time [to] re-examine western industrial civilisation and its own cultural traditions.

Western industrialism has its own characteristics and patterns. It is profit-driven and anthropocentric, runs on modern capitalism and is embodied in cities built on industry, commerce and finance. It has created great riches, but it has also done everything possible to shift its class, economic and social conflicts overseas. (Pan 2011)

From Pan's point of view, Western ecological ideology has led to ecological disaster and China should not make the same mistakes. Post-industrial societies can boast of and demand environmental protection because they have exported their pollution to newly industrialising countries through the relocation of industrial production. For Pan, China should look to its own cultural history to find new paths. China could offer a viable alternative.

However, industrial nations have found that they can export any kind of crisis except for one – the environmental crisis. Hurricanes hit both south-east Asia and New Orleans and rising sea levels will inundate both the small island nations of the Pacific and New York.

Faced with the inherent failings of western industrial civilisation, politicians and academics worldwide have started to re-examine the ecological wisdom of world cultures and ancient religions in search of solutions. In recent years, westerners with the necessary breadth of vision have turned to the east, and specifically to China. (Pan 2011)

Pan's arguments reflect the uneasy relationship between 'western' modernisation and 'Chinese' wisdom that has haunted China since the first Opium War imposed 'Western modernity' on China by force of arms, the dilemma defined by Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909) as the choice between preserving the Chinese cultural tradition as the Chinese essence and exploiting western culture for what it may offer that is useful (中学为体西学为用 *zhōngxué wèi tǐ xīxué wèi yòng*).

Although traditional Chinese culture is a product of an agricultural past, I firmly believe it contains universal values and can undergo a modern transformation.

The core of Chinese culture is the pursuit of the harmonious unity of man and nature. This value is expressed in actual institutions and lifestyles by the word *du* [度 *dù*, literally 'degree' or 'limit'] – the concept of restraint, temperance, etiquette, balance and harmony. *Du* is the art of propriety, the balance of moderation and suitability, the wisdom of standing in society and acquiring knowledge. It represents the wisdom of the Chinese not just in politics, but in life and in human interaction with the environment.

This wisdom exists not just in the writings of the sages, but is strongly rooted in family values and social customs, and this is one of the great things about the Chinese tradition. In traditional society, a single set of principles linked state institutions and policy with the common people and the privileged; and the classical texts and texts of the sages with the lives of the public and the official class. These doctrines or *dao* apply to anything from the management of a household and making tea to commerce, swordsmanship and even drinking and the underworld. (Pan 2011)

Despite Pan's insistence on the contrary, the introduction of concepts of integrated planning, harmonising environmental, economic, social and cultural concerns (which informs the idea of ecological civilisation, as well as of the scientific outlook on development) was to a large extent a by-product of intense exchange with the West throughout the reform era (Wang 1998). Furthermore, the history of exploitation of the environment in China and its consequent degradation right up through the Maoist era contradicts the Daoist idealisation of the harmony between human society and nature that Pan calls a core value of Chinese culture (cf. Economy 2004; Elvin 2004; Shapiro 2001, 2012). Simona A. Grano has edited a special issue of *China Information* on environmental governance that contributes more recent information and analysis on the topic (Grano 2016).

In the field of ecological thinking, as in many other fields of thought in contemporary China, a new political terminology, whose analysis can reveal contemporary tensions in social, economic and political policy-making, is emerging. The emergence of this discursive strategy with Chinese characteristics uses Chinese knowledge as the substance and western knowledge for practical purposes, and develops three premises:

1. Chinese traditional wisdom foresaw (and forestalled) current problems but failed to compete successfully with Western modernity.
2. China has tried the Western models and seen that they are doomed to failure - in the West as well as in China.
3. Chinese solutions based on renovating Chinese models will work for both China and the rest of the world.

One corollary of this line of reasoning is that China will recover its once (and future) pre-eminent role in the world order.

The academic world is a second source of ecological discourse. Lu Feng 卢风, a Tsinghua University philosophy professor, suggests that the era of industrial civilisation has ended, but insists that the creation of an 'ecological civilisation' (生态文明 *shēngtài wénmíng*) would require

nothing short of a 'civilization revolution 文明革命' [*wénmíng gémìng*] (in Chinese, just one character different from 'cultural revolution 文化革

命' [wénhuà géming]). In his view, it is necessary to overhaul the intellectual foundations on which our present industrial civilization, and our model of industrial development, are based. In his analysis, ecological civilization represents not just a development of the modern industrial paradigm, but a radical transformation.

This view was not universally held, however. [...] Chen Zhishang, a senior philosophy professor at Peking University [...] [t]rained in orthodox Marxist philosophy, and well connected within the Party [...] views ecological civilization more as a continuation of the materialist/humanist paradigm, but one that is reformed and extended to take the natural environment into account. (Miller 2010)

In his very influential economic analyses, Hu Angang 胡鞍钢 identified ecological threats – such as the shortage of water resources in Northern China, worsening environmental degradation, or the diversion of water from some southern rivers to the North – as factors that could generate negative GDP growth of 1%-2% (Hu 2003).<sup>1</sup>

A third source of ecological discourse is what might be termed as 'default' civil society in China, an informal, nongovernmental or 'emergent' civil society that communicates ecological risk by means of social movements and the social media, despite the government's efforts to control the social media. Although prominent environmentalist authors such as Dai Qing 戴晴 and Wang Hui 汪晖 have been involved in environmental protest, structurally organised environmental protest movements with an identifiable leadership can be easily dismantled and rendered ineffective, but not amorphous rhizomatic networks. In the last few years, there have been a number of celebrated cases of successful mobilisation against specific governmental decisions on the location of ecologically risky installations. The first occurred in Xiàmén 厦门 in 2008. An anonymous SMS message started the movement.

"The Taiwan-funded Xianglu Group has begun building a PX plant. It's like an atomic bomb in Xiamen", read a text message that spread quickly in Xiamen at the end of May. "Many people will suffer leukemia and more babies will be born with congenital defects". [...] "A paraxylene project should be at least 100 kilometers from a major urban settlement, but we are only 16 km from the project. For the sake of our future generations, please forward the message to all your friends", it reads. At the end of the message, it also calls for Xiamen residents to demonstrate in the street on June 1 to protest the project.

1 For more detailed academic analyses of 'ecological civilisation' see Lu 2011; Keeley, Zheng 2011; Wang 2012; Wen et al. 2012; Miller 2013; Fan, He, Wang 2014.

Even now the source of the original text message is still a mystery. (Xinhua 2008)

Since then, similar incidents have proliferated. Barry van Wyck offered “a quick run-down of the notable environmental ‘not in my backyard’ (NIMBY) protests in China in recent years, leading up to last week’s Ningbo [宁波] protest”:

- June 2007: anti-PX march in Xiamen against the planned construction of a toxic chemical plant in the city. An environmental assessment is ordered to determine the effects that the plant would have on the surrounding area.
- January 2008: thousands of Shanghai residents protest against a proposed extension of the high-speed magnetic levitation ‘Maglev’ train.
- May 2008: 400-500 residents of Chengdu in Sichuan province protest a 5.5\$ billion ethylene plant under construction by PetroChina.
- August 2008: Beijing residents protest against the city’s biggest dump site that they claim is polluting the air with a foul stench and dangerous dioxins.
- August 2011: a chemical plant in Dalian in Liaoning province is closed down after thousands of protesters confront riot police, demanding that the plant be shut down due to safety concerns.
- July 2012: protests in the city of Shifang in Sichuan province result in the cancellation of a copper project.
- July 2012: tens of thousands of protesters in Qidong near Shanghai protest a sewage pipeline at a paper factory. Plans for the pipeline are shelved. (van Wyk 2012)

The Ningbo protest was a clear example of informal or default civil society action in the age of information.

Ningbo was the scene last week for protests by residents of the city against a multi-billion yuan expansion project of an oil refinery and chemical plant by the Zhenhai Refining and Chemical Company, a subsidiary of the Chinese petrochemical giant Sinopec. Thousands of people took part in the protest against the project, which they believed would be spewing out more paraxylene, or PX, a hazardous hydrocarbon. Then on Sunday, following a meeting of the Ningbo city government, an official statement announced that the PX project would not go ahead. (van Wyck 2012)

The possibility of grass-roots social movements successfully changing government policy is a matter of great concern for the Party and the government. Even though both the Party and the government promote and defend ecological civilisation, their Leninist legacy can neither contemplate nor

tolerate the possibility of political movements being organised beyond their control. The frontier between legitimately claiming one's rights, on the one hand, and 'social instability' (社会不安定 *shèhuì bù āndìng*) or 'mass incidents' (群体性事件 *qúntǐ xìng shìjiàn*) on the other is quite blurred because the highest priority is given to 'the preservation of social stability' (维稳 *wéiwěn*, an abbreviation of 维护稳定 *wéihù wěndìng*).

One of the most interesting dynamics we see again in the Ningbo PX case is the face-off between social media and 'stability preservation,' in recent years the Party's most robust method of dealing with social instability.

Rapid economic development in the absence of transparent and inclusive institutions in China has generated an upswell of social unrest. Party leaders have tried to balance this equation with massive spending on 'stability preservation', the mobilizing of domestic security forces against the population. But in some sense, social media are now upsetting this equation. Thanks largely to social media, the tactics of 'stability preservation' are increasingly under scrutiny. (Bandurski 2012)

The local Ningbo newspaper was bold enough to editorialise the incident.

Even though this issue has now been resolved, another related issue for us to consider now is whether incidents like these can be resolved before-hand. Because of the problem with PX, this same mass incident have already occurred in Xiamen, Dalian and other cities, and there is no way that Ningbo didn't know about these incidents in other cities. [...] This event has just reminded all government departments again that important policies must take public opinion into account early on with a smooth and unhindered process. If this does not happen it might result in unpredictable and costly consequences. Even though the projects at Xiamen, Dalian and Qidong were all different, they all point to the same reality: pay attention to the environment or risk alienating public opinion. (van Wyck 2012)

The current *status quo* between government attempts to 'preserve stability' and emergent or default civil society amorphous and rhizomatic attempts to influence public policy seems to be a stand-off.

"Today we're seeing really for the first time, the old 100 names [the ordinary people], able to articulate their ideas in a kind of public sphere", says Kaiser Kuo, now a spokesman for Baidu, China's largest internet search engine.

Internet penetration is only about 40%, he acknowledges, but that 40% does now include a lot of people who have very ordinary jobs in cities or small towns, and even some villagers.

“Their voices are now heard, in cyberspace at least”, says Kuo. “And that has come to function as a kind of public spirit, that China has never in its very long history actually had.

“I think that this is absolutely unprecedented, and it has given the Chinese leadership itself a vantage point, on the feelings of ordinary citizens that I think perhaps has made it a more responsive and deliberative and participatory leadership”. (Gracie 2012)

How blurry the frontier is was demonstrated in a very public way in 2015 by the fate of the documentary film *Under the Dome* (穹顶之下 *Qióngdǐng zhī xià*) by Chái Jìng 柴静.

The authorities in China have removed from websites a popular documentary which highlights the country’s severe pollution problem.

*Under the Dome* explains the social and health costs of pollution, and was watched by more than 100 million people online, sparking debates.

It was removed just two days after Premier Li Keqiang called pollution a blight on people’s lives.

Mr Li had promised to fight it with all the government’s might. [...]

The newly appointed environmental protection minister, Chen Jining, had praised *Under The Dome*, telling reporters it should “encourage efforts by individuals to improve air quality”.

But having initially praised the documentary, China’s communist leaders now seem to have banned it. [...]

Willy Lam, a political analyst at the Chinese University in Hong Kong, said: “They are really serious about this except the problem is really entrenched.

“It is intertwined with all aspects of industry and agriculture and so forth, and it’s a really difficult problem to tackle”. (*BBC News* 2015)

The (mis)management of ecological risk is due precisely to the fact that environmental protection is intertwined with all aspects of industry and agriculture and the provision of energy. It is part and parcel of the structural problem generated by the Leninist legacy of the political system. The same debate that opposes ‘efficiency’ (the generation of wealth) to ‘equity’ (social justice, the redistribution of the wealth created) opposes ‘efficiency’ to ‘ecology’. The meritocracy rewards efficiency. Environmental protection requires control over industry, including limitations on pollution and factoring in the cost of environmental protection. Ecological concerns interfere with the creation of wealth. This was made clear in the case of the Xiamen incident.

According to the *Southern People Weekly*, some local officials still feel regret regarding the project’s possible relocation, because it means a

loss of possible GDP growth, a factor that still important when assessing local officials.

“Xiamen is the second biggest city in Fujian, but its GDP is lower than the third biggest city -- Quanzhou. This puts great pressure on officials in Xiamen. All the cities in China are pursuing quick GDP growth and Xiamen is no exception”, said Xu Guodong, a professor with the Law School at Xiamen University. (China.org.cn 2008)

In such circumstances, the enforcement of environmental protection standards could come at the cost of one’s own career (Ran 2009). At the same time, any movement toward greater transparency in the decision-making process or in policy-making – a vital prerequisite for informed citizen participation in these processes – could be seen as a threat to stability. Citizens’ response to this situation takes place through the social media, despite government’s efforts at control. There are informal media and there are official media. The official media promote the official line of the Party and the government. The official line also uses the social media. Chinese netizens have created the derogatory term ‘fifty-cent party (or faction or army)’ (五毛党 *wǔmáo dǎng*) to describe people who promote the official line through posts on the social media, allegedly being paid a small amount per post. So the Party and the government are caught on the horns of another dilemma: to protect citizens’ rights (by giving priority to rules-based governance, 法治 *fǎzhì*) or to preserve stability (control power, 维稳 *wéiwěn*).

At this stage in the period of transition from rule by a Party with a Leninist legacy toward rule by a governing party (Golden 2014, 2015), the problem has now become a trilemma. The Party and the State, which are basically isomorphic, must negotiate and/or arbitrate the often contradictory demands of Society and of the Market. The construction of an ecological discourse or an ecological civilisation or an ecological Marxism or an ecologically civilised society responds to a need felt by almost all sectors of society and government. Climate change and environmental degradation are manifest problems in China. The response to ecological risk is both ideational and legislative, but the structural problems endemic to both industrialisation and the Leninist legacy impede the translation of an ecological discourse into ecological policies. China is certainly not alone in this problematical situation and perhaps Lu Feng is right to call for a ‘civilisation revolution’ (文明革命 *wénmíng gé mìng*) in order to transform ‘ecological civilisation’ (生态文明 *shēngtài wénmíng*) into the solution to ecological risk.

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## **Small and Micro-Scale Hydropower in Japan A Solution to Energy Transition?**

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**Abstract** Although it has abundant water resources (small and micro-scale hydropower), whose potential is high according to surveys, Japan did not benefit much (compared to solar PV) from the Feed-in-Tariff scheme implemented in 2012 to more effectively support renewable energies. In a country whose energy self-sufficiency has always been low and is even lower since the Fukushima accident, this may seem somehow surprising. Based on available surveys, literature on renewables, some interviews with smart communities' local authorities or researchers in Japan, this paper aims at discussing what the main issues relevant to explain this paradox are. It argues that reaching the government estimates towards 2050 will probably need more actions, incentives and, moreover, a simplification of regulations, especially those on water management, whose complexity is a major break to local promoters to engage in small and micro-scale hydropower projects, while local production/local consumption probably is one of the main issues for further development.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 1.1 Japan's Water and Renewable Energies Context. – 1.2 Aim and Limits of the Paper. – 2 The Japanese Energy Background and the Evolution of Hydropower Generation. – 2.1 The Historical Background. – 2.2 SSMH Generation: Definition and Operational Sites. – 2.3 Estimating Further Potential. – 2.4 Government Scenarios: from Large to Small Hydro. – 3 Small-scale Hydropower Promotion and Development: Between Incentives and Regulations. – 3.1 Energy Legal and Promotional Framework: from Renewable Portfolio Standard to Feed-in-tariff. – 3.2 Water Legislation and Management. – 4 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Japan. Small and micro-scale hydropower. Renewable energies. Feed-in-Tariff. Water management and regulation.

### **1 Introduction**

Hydropower is an old and mature industry that played an important role in the electrification and modernisation of many countries, including Japan. Overtaken by thermal or nuclear power generation, it remains the largest renewable energy (RE) worldwide, accounting for more than 16% of the electricity generated and, moreover, for some 85% of the total production of renewable energies (IEA, International Energy Agency, 2016).<sup>1</sup>

1 Cf. URL <https://www.iea.org/topics/renewables/subtopics/hydropower/> (2017-02-24).

Quite diversified an industry, it can be divided into several categories according to the size (large, medium, small, mini, micro), but also according to the type and/or function of the infrastructure: run-of-river (few or no storage capacity), reservoir (storage capacity) and pumped storage power plants (PSP).<sup>2</sup> All this depending on configuration or topography, as the International Energy Agency (IEA) states: “the boundaries between these categories can be blurry, as plant configurations are numerous and have characteristics that fall under multiple categories, thus making a complete classification challenging” (OCDE/IEA 2015, 151). Although other RE can also be categorised: PV rooftop panel/mega-solar, isolated wind turbine/turbine farm, or on-shore/off-shore, the case of hydropower appears more complex. Also, even though it is a renewable energy, it is not a new one, which means that hydropower as a whole is not included in RE promotion schemes as it is the case of solar, wind etc. However, since global warming and the reduction of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions have become important stakes, leading to a greater interest for RE, a distinction is made between large , which is not included, and small/micro scale, which is included.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1 Japan’s Water and Renewable Energies Context

The industrial development, the rapid economic growth and the correlated modernisation of the country on the one side, and the large urbanisation accompanying the population increase on the other side jointly contributed to a huge increase in electricity demand, which until the '50s was for more than a half satisfied by hydropower generation, Japan being well provided with water.

Indeed, with some 2,700 rivers coming down from mountains, 600 lakes, some of which being rather large, and abundant precipitations,<sup>4</sup> Japan – which is poor in fossil fuel resource – appears, on the contrary, rather rich as far as water resources are concerned. According to the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), statistics<sup>5</sup> based on an average of 1,971-2,000 annual precipitation in Japan is approximately 650 billion m<sup>3</sup>, of which approximately 230 billion m<sup>3</sup> (35%) is lost through

2 Water can be pumped up from a lower level reservoir to a higher one for release at a later time or come from natural inflows.

3 According to countries, the generation volume over which a plant is considered as large might differ as we will see later. The absence of distinction in the past and of a clear definition makes statistical analysis difficult.

4 They are not balanced all over the year and often take the form of torrential rainfall leading to disastrous floods (in the past but even still now).

5 See URL [http://www.mlit.go.jp/tochimizushigen/mizsei/water\\_resources/contents/current\\_state.html](http://www.mlit.go.jp/tochimizushigen/mizsei/water_resources/contents/current_state.html) (2015-04-12).

evaporation. Of the remaining 420 billion m<sup>3</sup>, which is theoretically the maximum amount that can be used by humans, the amount effectively used is approximately 83.5 billion m<sup>3</sup>, roughly 20% of inventory of water resources (2,004 numbers). Around 88% is obtained from rivers and lakes while some 13% is obtained from groundwater. Approximately 15% is used for industry and 19% for domestic purpose while agriculture accounts for some 66% of the total. This is due to the importance of rice paddy in Japanese agriculture and the correlated irrigation needs that led to the construction of kilometres of waterways. These are today, in addition to other types, seen as a large potential for small/micro scale hydropower (thereafter SMSH) further development

Climate change imperatives and the need for an energy transition are on the agenda in Japan as elsewhere. Hydropower, whose share in the electricity mix has declined over time – the country having turned to oil then nuclear power generation since the '60s –, again attracts more attention from policy makers, especially since the Fukushima accident has accelerated the interest for RE.

Actually, while Japan, strongly hit by oil shocks in the '70s, has started early researches on RE, their share in the electricity mix remained quite low (especially if we exclude large hydro). It is only after the Fukushima accident that, among other measures to come such as a complete reform of the electricity sector, a Feed-in-Tariff (FiT) has been implemented to more effectively support RE development. SMSH has been included in the scheme aside all other new RE (solar, wind, geothermal, biomass). However, although it helped new projects to come into being at the local level, this did not lead, like for solar PV, to a huge expansion of infrastructures. In a country that is rich in water but whose energy self-sufficiency has always been low and is even lower since Fukushima, it may seem somehow surprising.

## 1.2 Aim and Limits of the Paper

Based on available surveys, literature on RE, some interviews with smart communities' local authorities<sup>6</sup> or researchers in Japan, this paper aims therefore at discussing what the main issues relevant to explain this paradox are. It will concentrate on SMSH that, apart from technical issues, is receiving little attention in the academic literature.

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews did not specifically focus on small/micro scale hydropower. They were part of a research program on smart communities, based on studying smart-grids experimentations at the local level, including energy saving and introduction of RE, mostly solar energy or biomass (cogeneration). The scarcity of micro hydropower projects in experimentations raised questions that this paper tends to answer.

Indeed, most papers or books on RE in Japan<sup>7</sup> tend both to analyse policies or evaluate achievements compared to other countries and/or to explain the reasons for solar relative success under the FiT. Wind usually serves as a counter example due to its fast development in some countries such as Denmark or Germany compared to its contrasting straggler situation in Japan. PV generation – which is the FiT winner – or eventually wind – which is sharing some difficulties with SMSH – will be used as a reference in some parts, but our aim is not to compare SMSH with any other RE.

Also, entering in detail into all the hydropower categories would go beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, the distinction is made between large and SMSH, while reference to the type or function is indicated only when relevant. Pump storage type, which is excluded from the FiT and usually assimilated to large hydro, also appears out of the limit of the paper even though numbers might be agglomerated in some of the surveys used whatever in terms of installed or potential capacities. This does not mean pump storage and, more broadly speaking, hydropower as storage capacity for other RE is not an important issue as we will briefly see in conclusion. Quite the contrary, it would be worth to do researches specifically dedicated to this issue.

The paper is organised as follows. Point 2 will describe the situation of hydropower both in its historical and present situation and in its distribution between large and small installations. Through surveys and government scenarios, it will then estimate what the potential for future development is. Point 3 will look at the legal/regulation and institutional frameworks, first in terms of incentives (RPS and mainly FiT) and second, on the opposite, in terms of breaks to its expansion. The regulatory issue, namely the role of water regulation, whose complexity makes it difficult or risky for local communities' promoters to engage in, will be given a special attention. Finally, point 4 will conclude on some challenges for SMSH or more broadly speaking for RE future development.

## **2 The Japanese Energy Background and the Evolution of Hydropower Generation**

Since 1951, the electricity business in Japan is in the hands of 10 regional power utilities (EPCOs-Electric Power Company, cf. box 1), which entertain deep relations with MITI (Ministry of International Trade and

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<sup>7</sup> Among others see: Ikki, Kurokawa 2001; DeWit, Iida 2011; Huenteler, Kanie, Schmidt 2012; Moe 2012, 2014; Lovins 2014; Midford 2014; Dent 2014; Mizuno 2014; DeWit 2015.

Industry)/METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) bureaucrats whose great majority are pro nuclear (at least they were before Fukushima). These vested interests as argued by De Wit and Iida (2011), or the collusion between industry and bureaucracy, also called the ‘nuclear village’, have always played in favour of a *status quo*, promoting nuclear power and suppressing renewables as Jeff Kingston (2012, 2014) states.<sup>8</sup> The historical background of the electricity sector and the evolution of the energy strategy of Japan have to be understood keeping this in mind.<sup>9</sup>

Box 1. The electricity utility business: history and liberalization

The electricity utility business grew along with the modernization and development of the industry and before World-War 1 some 700 electric companies were competing of the market. After the War, they merged into five major electric companies which later, during World-War 2, were integrated into a power generating and transmitting state-owned company (Nihon Hassōden Kabushiki-gaisha, or Nihon Hassōden K.K.) and nine state-controlled distribution companies. After the second war, the electric utility sector was restructured again and 9 regional private companies were established in 1951 while a 10th one has been added after Okinawa retrocession to Japan in 1972. Each general but regional power company was given full responsibility to supply electricity to its region but benefited from a monopolistic position on its territory. Two frequency systems coexist in Japan: 50 Hz for Hokkaido, Tohoku and Tokyo EPCOs and 60 Hz for the others.\* Transfer between regions being limited EPCOs have the responsibility to balance supply and demand in their respective areas. This structure did not change over time even though some deregulation occurred in recent years. In 1995, independent power producers (IPP) were allowed to provide electricity wholesale services; in 2000, electricity retail supply was liberalized for users which demand exceeded 2 MW; in 2004 this volume was reduced to more than 500 kW, and again in 2005 to more than 50 kW. Despite these successive liberalization attempts, newcomers’ share remained very limited at 3.53% in FY2012\*\* and EPCO still are de facto in a monopoly situation in their region.

Following the Fukushima nuclear accident which clearly enlightened the weaknesses of the electricity business, a more comprehensive three-phased reform has been voted at the Diet in November 2013. It has been implemented in April 2015 with the creation of a Nationwide Transmission System Operator (TSO) for coordinating cross-regional electricity supply and of a New Regulatory Authority to establish rules for grid utilization. The second phase has been scheduled for April 2016 with full liberalization of the retail sale of electricity, while the third one obliging power companies to spin off their power transmission and distribution sections into separate units will take effect in 2018-2020.

\*At the time of Fukushima accident, the conversion capacity was of 1,035,000 MW.

\*\*For more details on the past steps in liberalization of the electricity sector cf. Mizutani 2012.

8 The ‘nuclear village’ is composed of politics (in fact LDP-Liberal Democratic Party), bureaucracy (mainly MITI/METI in charge of energy) and industry (utilities, big corporations or nuclear vendors and their representative organisations), but, according to Kingston (2012), also media and academia. However, such relationships are not limited to energy, this ‘iron triangle’ existing in many sectors.

9 Japan is not the only country where such relationships between utilities and state can be enlightened. Hasegawa (2014), for example, emphasises the similarities with France quoting the book *La vérité sur le nucléaire* by Lepage (‘The Truth about Nuclear Power’, 2011).

## 2.1 The Historical Background

Electricity production from water started early in Japan and can be traced back to Meiji era when techniques from the industrial revolution were introduced leading to the construction of modern and higher dams,<sup>10</sup> or large water control devices. This allowed an increase of the agricultural land, a drastic decrease of the intensity and frequency of floods, and the start of power generation. In 1888, the first private plants were built to generate power to be used locally. In 1907, a first public facility started operating in Yamanashi prefecture and supplied Tokyo at some 75 km distance while few years later, in 1914, the *Inawashiro* plant supplied Tokyo at a distance of 225 km (Dent 2014). In the '20s, technological advances led to the construction of dams and weirs with modern designs. Although contributing mainly to irrigation, they played their role in developing hydropower (cf. Roy 2006).

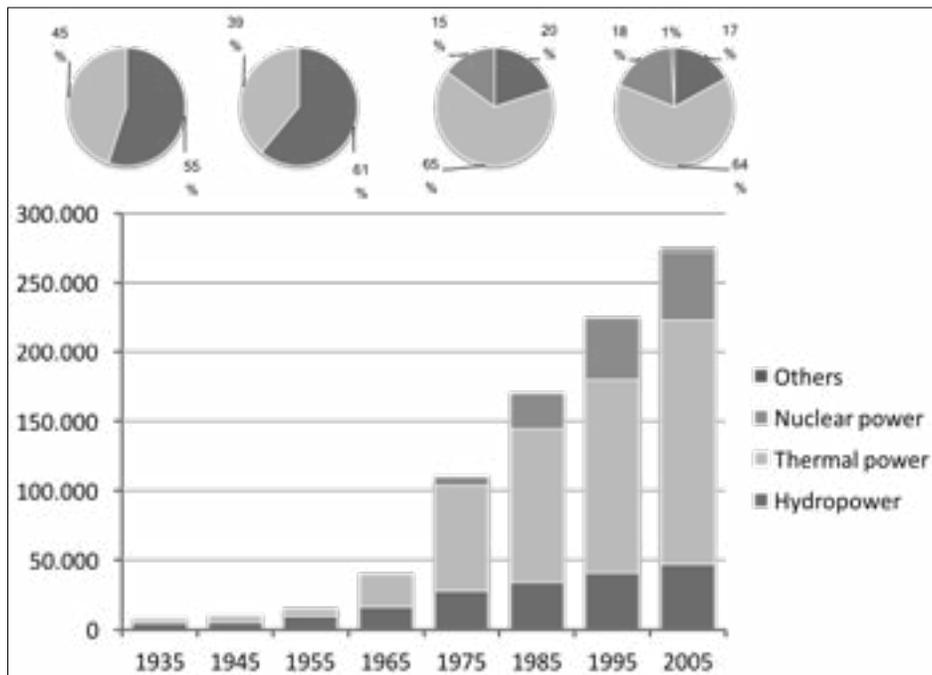
With thirteen generation plants in operation at the end of the '30s, hydropower represented 55% of the level of power generation that was still low in 1935. Most were run-of-river type supplying based-load electricity or small regulating pond type supplying peak-load electricity. In the '40s, agricultural cooperatives actively promoted small-scale hydropower development to introduce electricity in rural areas (Inoue, Shiraishi 2010). After World War 2 (1945-1955), multipurpose dams (flood control, water supply and hydropower generation) appeared and the government gave priority to large scale hydropower generation that, shared in the mix, raised to 61% in 1955 with some 10,000 mW installed capacities, one of the highest volume of the world (Dent 2014).

However, in the '60s, to address the massive increase in electricity demand, Japan turned to oil (later to LNG). In addition to the very low price of oil, building thermal generation plants took less time even though it was able to produce higher electricity volume. Therefore, although electricity generated from oil might be a little more expensive - 10 to 17 yens/kWh against 8 to 10 for hydro (Inoue, Shiraishi 2010) - they appeared to be better able to cope with the increasing demand. Therefore, although hydropower generation capacity doubled between the '50s and the '80s, its share decreased over time and in 1963 fossil fuel power generation took the lead to finally exceed hydropower generation in the electricity mix (fig. 1).

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<sup>10</sup> The first one, using concrete, was 30m high, while the first for power generation was completed in 1910: *Chitose* no. 1 Dam in Hokkaido (JCOLD, Japan Commission on Large Dams 2012).

Figure 1. Transition in output from each power resource in Japan (FY)



Source: JCOLD (s.d.)<sup>11</sup>

However, this led to a high dependency rate on imported fossil fuel (76% in 1973). The oil shocks revealed the country’s energy vulnerability but the government main response was to accelerate the construction of nuclear plants. In the meantime, however, new large scale hydropower plants were also built. Large national research programmes such as ‘Sunlight’ (1974) or ‘Moonlight’ (1978) were launched, addressing both issues: energy efficiency and RE (as an alternative to oil). These programmes integrated in the ‘New Sunshine’ programme in 1993, even though they focused also on geothermal, clean coal and hydrogen,<sup>12</sup> and were mainly concentrated on solar energy,<sup>13</sup> which had some supporters within MITI due to their

11 FY stands for fiscal year. In Japan, the fiscal year starts on April 1st and ends the next year on March 31st. So FY2005 correspond to April 2005 to March 2006.

12 Wind was not a priority at that time even though some research started in 1978 but with smaller budget (cf. Mizuno 2014).

13 See Ikki, Kurokawa (2001) for more details on these programmes and solar historical development.

estimation of exports potential.<sup>14</sup> The support to solar industry continued over time giving to Japan a leadership in terms of the PV installed or in terms of production, but the increasing electricity demand – especially in the residential and business sectors – led to search for more high volume generation solutions. In 2005 subsidies for residential PV purchasing have been cut and the interest for solar slowed down. As a result, Japan was overtaken by Germany as global leader for PV installed or generated capacity and by China for world production and exports, although Japanese companies have recently regained some of the lost distance.<sup>15</sup>

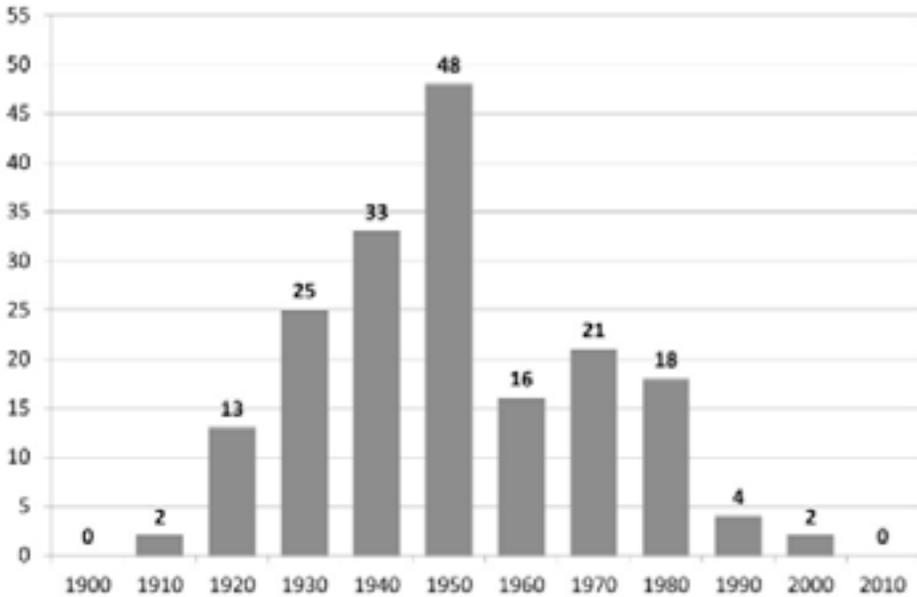
To address the energy dependency and global warming issues in the late 1990s-early 2000s, Japan's main strategy was again to increase its nuclear production and hydropower share felt to some 17% in the mid-2000s. Sure, with 34,270 mW capacity (17%) and 60 million mWh (7%) supplied in 2005 (JCOLD sd), Japan was still one of the country where hydropower generation is important. But, as figure 2 shows, most large hydropower generation plants have been installed up to the '80s. Since the '90s, the sector got few support from government. This did not prevent power companies and J-Power<sup>16</sup> from building some new infrastructure, but with 1162 hydropower plants in Japan (2005), it has been considered that almost all possible sites had already been exploited. The remaining possible ones were said to be in remote areas making construction difficult and, therefore not economically efficient.

14 See Moe (2012) who analyses why solar industry, linking energy policy to industrial policy of MITI, could develop, whereas wind (remaining outside the vested interest structure) could not.

15 For a complete but summarised description of solar development in Japan, see Dent (2014, 183-8).

16 After World War 2, when *Nihon Hassoden K.K.* was dismantled and split into 9 private companies (cf. box 1), they had not enough funds to invest in R&D. In 1952, the Electric Power Development Company (EDPC) was established as a government agency for this purpose. In 1997, it was privatised and in 2004, it went public and was listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. Now J-Power (Electric Power Development Co, *Dengen Kaihatsu Kabushiki-gaisha*) is a wholesale electric utility mainly producing electricity from hydraulic (58 hydropower plants, around 20% of hydropower market) and coal (7 thermal power plants) resources. It also has a few wind farms and is investing in geothermal.

Figure 2. Number of sites according to year of operation start (+ 30 mW and pump-storage excluded)



Source: NEF 2014, 8

Apart from this techno-economic reason, large hydropower dams have often been seen as a symbol of pork-barrel politics due to collusion between politicians, bureaucrats and construction companies (Johnston 2011). If adding the environmental impact of large hydro, whatever in terms of water quality, or in terms of deterioration in the river environment, biodiversity and landscape, although it is a renewable energy, it does not have a good nor an eco-friendly image. This is of course one of the issue that matters with population tending to oppose to new construction.<sup>17</sup> In addition to environment, the advantages the community could enjoy from the power companies' project is not always foreseen. A project that was 'good for Japan' had more chance to be accepted in the past,<sup>18</sup> but now it also has to be 'good for the community' to get local population cooperate in its development.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> A NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) reaction as described in the literature for nuclear plants also worked for hydropower plants (on the impact of NIMBY, see Lesbirel 1998; Scalise 2004).

<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, subsidies were given to localities accepting the construction of a plant, in that sense it was also economically good for the community (see Hasegawa 2014)

<sup>19</sup> Based on interviews.

The recent controversy about the *Yanba* dam in Gunma prefecture seems a good illustration. Indeed, the *Yanba* dam, which is in fact an old project first dedicated to flood prevention before hydropower generation had been added, has become a symbol of a huge financial and political mess. Started more than 60 years ago, the project, which had already cost a lot and seen population relocated after having abandoned their long fight, was halted by the DPJ when it came to power in 2009. Population who had already endured the social damages was expecting economic benefits from the dam construction and again opposed to the decision. It just restarted in 2015 and is scheduled to be terminated in 2019.

Even though new dams construction and large hydropower plants seem to have reached their limits and even if, as usual, increasing nuclear share was at stake before Fukushima, the global warming imperatives (re)opened opportunities. Actually, compared to other sources, hydropower, which does not emit CO<sub>2</sub> during production, is also emitting less for facilities operating over the lifetime of a plant: 11 g CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh for hydropower, 25 g for wind, 38 g for solar PV<sup>20</sup> (KEPCO). Around mid-2000s, the Japanese government launched surveys to estimate existing and additional potential for new hydropower development. Surveys confirmed that large hydro projects potential was quite limited, but emphasised the huge number of untapped sites for small to micro scale facilities.

## 2.2 SSMH Generation: Definition and Operational Sites

There is no official definition of small-scale hydropower in Japan. According to IEA (2010), large hydropower plants are those generating more than 300 mW, while for example the New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO) put the limit at 100 mW or more (Inoue, Shiraiishi 2010). For its part, the New Energy Foundation (NEF, 2014)<sup>21</sup> uses a distinction between less or more than 30 mW in its surveys (cf. table 1). Depending on organisations and even on surveys or schemes, the definition may vary making comparison difficult although subcategories are often done according to power output.

If taking the IEA definition – usually used by the Natural Resources and Energy Agency (ANRE) of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

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20 Nuclear stands at 20 g CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh. In terms of comparison, coal, which emits 864 g CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh during production, stands at 79 g for facility operation, while oil is respectively at 695 g and 43 g (KEPCO, [http://www.kepco.co.jp/energy\\_supply/energy/newenergy/water/shikumi/index.html](http://www.kepco.co.jp/energy_supply/energy/newenergy/water/shikumi/index.html) (2015-12-23).

21 New Energy Foundation, created in 1980 to promote new energies, proposes policies and supports development. For example, the NEF administrates an interest subsidy program for the construction of hydropower plants.

(METI) – operational SMSH plants (under 10 mW) are 1,369 (2012) with a total installed capacity of 3,518 mW, generating annually 18,802 million mWh (Esser, Liu, Madera 2013).

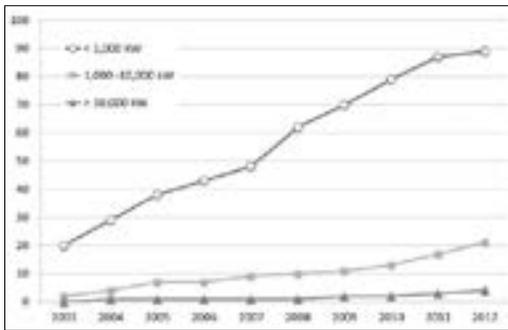
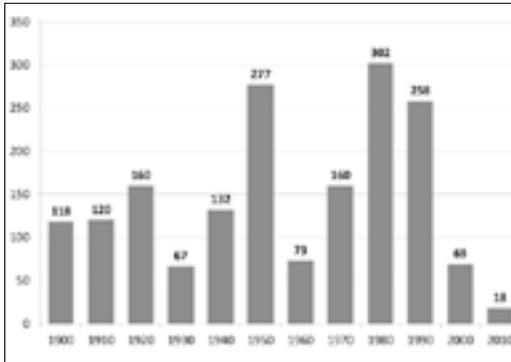
Table 1. Classification of hydropower generation facilities by power output

Classification	IEA	NEDO	NEF
Large hydropower	> 300 mW	> or =100 mW	> 30 mW
Medium hydropower	10-100 mW		
Run-of-river	100-300 mW	10-100 mW	
Dam and reservoir			
Small hydropower	< 10 mW	1-10 mW	< 30 mW
Mini hydropower	/	0.1-1 mW	
Micro hydropower	/	< 0.1 mW	

Source: IEA 2010; Inoue, Shiraishi 2010 for NEDO; NEF 2014

According to NEF, there were 1,754 small and medium facilities (less than 30 mW) in operation in Japan in 2010. As figure 3 (up) shows, there are two periods before and after the '60s with around half of them constructed in each. The '60s mark a cut in construction of small-scale facilities probably because of the priority given to large-scale ones since the '50s. After the oil shock, a new wave of construction occurred both on a large (fig. 2) and small scale (fig. 3 up) due to Japan oil dependency and revealed vulnerability coming out from the shock. But what is interesting to note is that rather few were constructed in the 2000s, although global warming was already on the agenda. This seems to confirm that utilities were considering that all efficient sites had been tapped but also that the priority of the time remained nuclear power's further development. However, as figure 3 (down) shows, while SMSH new infrastructure (especially less than 1,000 kW) were quite few in early 2000s, the number of sites developed regularly increased all along the decade for a total output capacity (excluding > 30 mW sites) of 9,627 mW and a total generated volume of 47.25 billion mWh (table 2). Since the 2000s and more over the mid-2000s, SMSH development has been conducted locally by organisations: private companies (out of the 10 power companies), NGO, local bodies (municipalities, public corporations<sup>22</sup> etc.) or even individuals.

<sup>22</sup> Land-use Improvement Unions in Japan created under the Land Improvement Act in 1949 to promote the 'modernisation' of rice field arrangements and that have exclusive rights to use irrigation water have developed most hydropower facilities constructed during last decades. Some of the Unions are now starting to expand their water rights to generate electricity from irrigation channels. See for example the case of *Nasunogahara* Land-use Improvement Union's (NLIU) in Tochigi Prefecture (Suwa 2009).



Figures 3-4. Number of site per year of operation start (less than 30 mW, pump-storage excluded, between 1900s and 2010s) (since the 2000s by size). Source: NEF 2014, 8, 24

Table 2. Hydro electricity generated from existing sites of less than 30 MW

	Already developed		
	Number of sites	Power (mW)	Volume (mWh)
Less than 1,000 kW	495	209	1,325,855
1,000 to 3,000 kW	423	755	4,239,359
3,000 to 5,000 kW	166	625	3,289,008
5,000 to 10,000 kW	285	1,928	9,947,390
10,000 to 30,000 kW	367	6,110	28,453,747
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,736</b>	<b>9,627</b>	<b>47,255,359</b>

Source: NEDO 2014, chapter 8, page 19

### 2.3 Estimating Further Potential

The renewed interest for renewables in the 2000s and the concern about limits of untapped hydropower sites led several organisations to conduct surveys in a way to estimate the real potential capacity of SSMH the country could rely on. According to NEDO (March 2004), Japan had 2,717

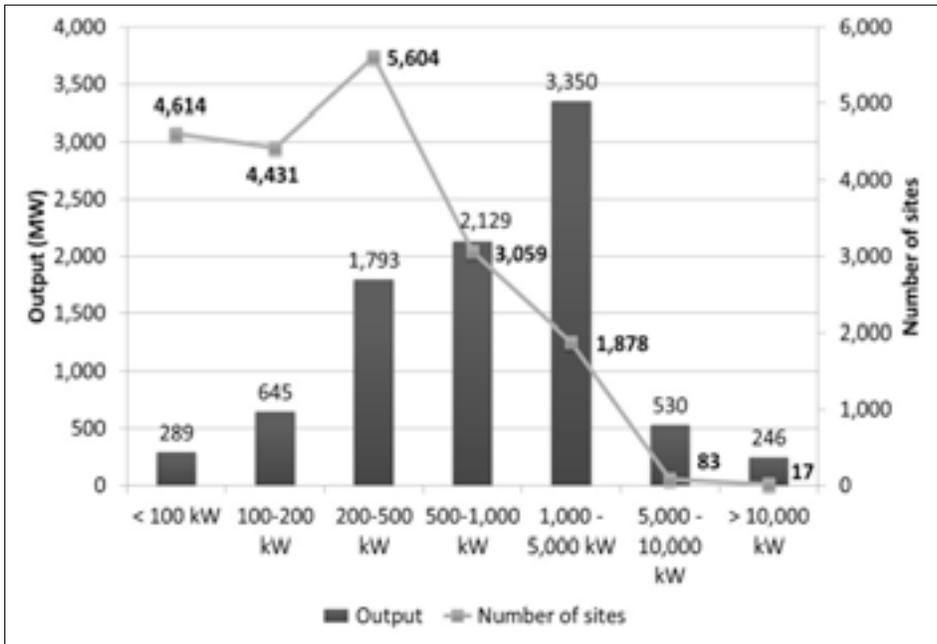
sites not yet tapped with a power output of 12,000 mW (Inoue, Shiraishi 2010). Most of these sites were considered as having an output of less than 30 mW. In March 2009, NEF carried out another survey to estimate the potential by using untapped heads<sup>23</sup> in already existing dams, conduits and so on, which were not taken into account in the former survey. Dams or other hydraulic structures aiming at flood control, irrigation or water regulation have a head that could also be used for hydropower generation. These heads remained often untapped because they are usually lower (generally less than 5 m high) than those used by large hydropower plants (generally above 15 m high). As lower head means lower power output per unit of water flow, their generation capacity is of course lower, questioning their economic efficiency. Recently, however, new technologies<sup>24</sup> have been developed to make low head sites more economically viable. This survey identified 1,389 sites with a still untapped head for a total power generation output of 330 mW (around 27,449 million mWh), among which 958 having a power output of less than 100 kW were micro-scale sites. Inoue and Shiraishi (2010) consider that these surveys might not give an exact image of the real potential of hydropower since the first survey excluded mountain streams and small rivers that were presumed to be economically inefficient, while the second one was based on interviews with property owners and did not include the energy produced from running water in channels.

Finally in 2011, the Ministry of Environment (MOE 2012) conducted a survey on renewable energies including hydropower, which shows that some 19,686 untapped sites in river channels were existing in Japan for a total of 8,982 mW output capacity. But, as figure 4 shows, most identified potential sites are small scale ones with an output of less than 5,000 kW. As stated by the World Small Hydropower Development Report (Esser, Liu, Masera 2013), Japan's agricultural waterways (irrigation) have a total length of 400,000 km. If considering their exploitation, their theoretical potential is estimated at 5.7 billion mWh, meaning with an improvement of run-of-river generation technologies but more incentives, SMSH development could grow further.

23 The vertical difference between high water and low water levels is called 'a head'.

24 Such as, for example, variable-speed turbines that reduce production and installation costs or very low head turbines that reduce the cost of infrastructure.

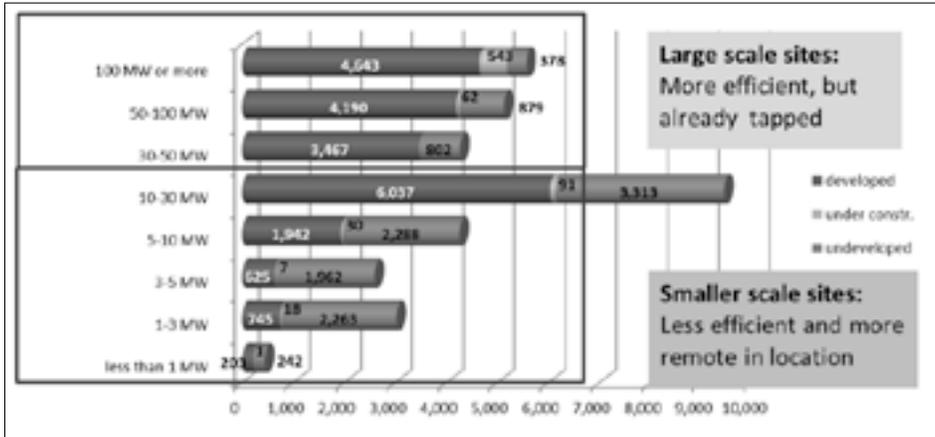
Figure 5. Hydropower potential (in river channels, excluding existing facilities)



Source: MOE 2012, 73

Based on data by METI/ANRE, for its part J-Power seems to confirm that large scale sites are mostly tapped but, as figure 5 shows, 3,313 sites are considered to be still undeveloped in the category 10 to 30 mW that according to NEF’s classification still belongs to SMSH although under IEA’s or NEDO’s ones it is in the medium-scale hydropower category.

Figure 6. Development of hydropower generation in Japan



Source: J-Power 2013 (data from METI, ANRE, [www.enecho.meti.go.jp/category/electricity\\_and\\_gas/electric/hydroelectric/](http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/category/electricity_and_gas/electric/hydroelectric/)) (2015-05-09)

Although both estimations are not comparable (river channels/untapped existing heads), what is also interesting to note is the difference in the number of sites of less than 1 mW output estimated at 242 by METI (and J-Power), while the MOE counts 17,708 potential sites in river channels. This might be an illustration of power companies’ strategy for which micro-scale facilities and river channels are not efficient enough to be taken into account. Indeed, under a certain output, introduction to grid appears too expensive to power companies while local production for local consumption is not considered as a distribution alternative.<sup>25</sup> This seems confirmed in J-Power presentation on hydro and geothermal development in Japan stating that “previous subsidies and Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) schemes were not enough to promote development of smaller sites” (2013, slide 3). Like most renewable energies whose generation volume is small, small-scale hydro has the demerit for companies that, distribution infrastructure’s cost being the same whatever the size of the facility, the smaller it is, the higher the cost per unit is. Solar roof-top panels do not really face such a difficulty, since it is easy to connect to grid through the house or building connection. On that issue, SMSH, often located in rather remote areas far away from high consumption centres, shares the same difficulties as wind.<sup>26</sup>

25 Although decentralised systems have been experimented in Smart Communities demonstrators (Faivre d’Arcier, Lecler 2015) Japanese law does not allow exchanging electricity between neighbours, making it necessary to connect any renewable energy generation system to the grid.

26 For a detailed analysis in the case of wind, see Mizuno 2014.

## 2.4 Government Scenarios: from Large to Small Hydro

According to the above mentioned surveys on hydro potential in Japan, several scenarios were elaborated by MOE (2012) to estimate the contribution that SSMH could have in the future in the domestic electricity generation, depending on the incentive schemes which could be implemented.

The first scenario proposes 3 different simulations per type of facility and depending on tariff or subsidies (table 3):

- scenario 1.1 simulates the potential with a fix price at 15 yens/kWh and a purchase period of 15 years;
- scenario 1.2 also simulates the potential with a fix price at 15 yens/kWh but with a purchase period of 20 years;
- scenario 1.3 simulates the potential with a fix price at 20 yens/kWh and a purchase period of 20 years.

The second scenario simulates the potential in the price condition of scenario 1.2 but with technologies upgrading and leading to a large reduction in installation costs.

For their part, supported scenarios estimate the potential integrating incentives for equipment cost with an objective of a PIRR (Pooled Internal Rate of Return) higher than 8%.

- support 1.1 considers that 1/3 of cost is subsidized while price is fixed at 15 yens/kWh (before taxes) for 15 years purchase period;
- support 1.2 also considers that 1/3 of cost is subsidized but that price is fixed at 20 yens/kWh (before taxes) for 15 years;
- support 1.3 also considers that 1/3 of cost is subsidized but that price is fixed at 20 yens/kWh (before taxes) for 20 years.

The second supported scenario is based on a reduction of 50% of generation cost and 20% of engineering works, subsidized at 1/3 with price fixed at 15 yens/kWh for 20 years.

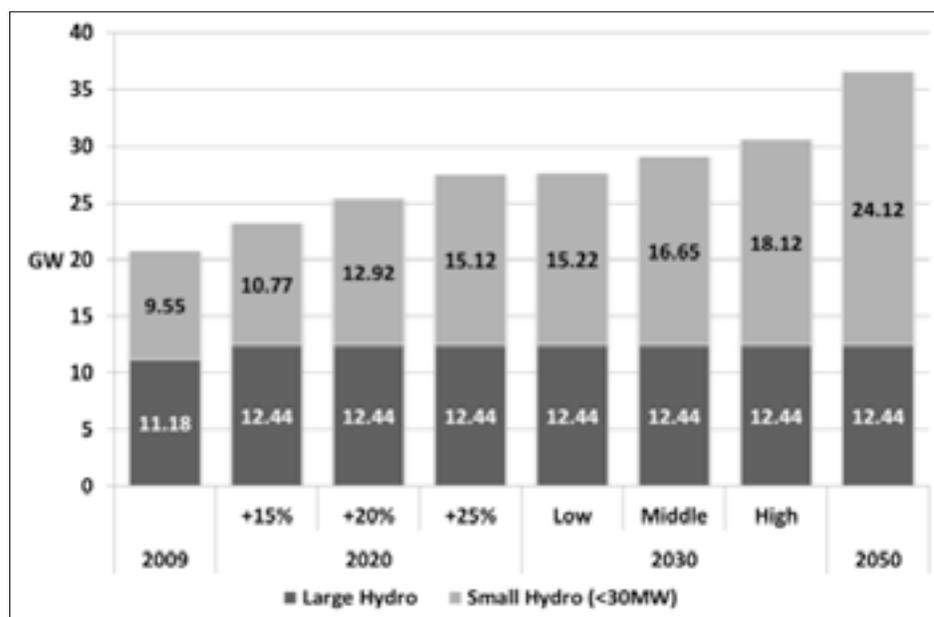
Table 3. Hydropower potential according to incentives type (mW)

	Existing	Potential	Introduction potential scenarios				Introduction potential / type of support scenarios			
			Scen. 1.1	Scen. 1.2	Scen. 1.3	Scen. 2	Support 1.1	Support 1.2	Support 1.3	Support 2
Run-of-river	16,550	13,980	900	2,130	2,840	4,060	2,430	4,410	5,170	7,100
Agri channels	320	300	160	200	200	240	220	250	260	290
Conduits, industrial water	180	160								
Total	17,050	14,440	1,060	2,330	3,040	4,300	2,650	4,660	5,430	7,390

Source: NEDO 2014, 12

According to MOE (2012), if all potential sites of less than 30 mW are developed from now until year 2050, then small hydro could represent 14,570 mW, meaning that the output capacity would have been multiplied by 1.5 compared to 2009. NEDO (2014), based on above MOE scenarios, has computed some estimations to 2020-2050 (fig. 6). These projections clearly show that potential is on SMSH side that, depending on incentives, might exceed large hydro in 2020 or later. Considering the evolution since these scenarios were done, achieving such results seems however difficult.

Figure 6. Comparing large and small hydro potential: 2020-2030 and 2050. Simulation based on 2009 numbers and above scenarios



Source: NEDO 2014, chapter 8, page 15

### 3 Small-scale Hydropower Promotion and Development: Between Incentives and Regulations

After the oil shocks, numerous laws focusing on energy saving, promotion of alternatives to oil and introduction of renewables have been enacted,

often then amended or revised<sup>27</sup> but, while Japan has become a leader in energy efficiency that has been a priority of public policies, RE did not really progress. The shock provoked by the Fukushima accident positively created a window of opportunity to change the strategy and the structure inherited from the past.<sup>28</sup>

In the immediate post Fukushima context, the DPJ, running the country at that time, announced a progressive phase-out of nuclear power plants. EPCOs have been weakened and some METI bureaucrats' beliefs have shaken. With the complete stop of all nuclear plants and the dependency rate on imported fossil fuel having grown up, from a 62% in 2010 to an 88% peak record in 2014, but also with the population opposition to nuclear restart<sup>29</sup> or at least in favour of a phase out over several decades (Midford 2014), RE were more seriously put on the agenda with, as it was mentioned before, the implementation of a FIT that succeeded the 2002 Renewables Portfolio Standards Law, which was little constraining for utilities. Also, although not directly addressing RE promotion, the three-phased electricity business reform (cf. box 1) is supposed to help their introduction.

### 3.1 Energy Legal and Promotional Framework: from Renewable Portfolio Standard to Feed-in-Tariff

The Law on Use of New Energy by Electric Utilities also called 'Renewables Portfolio Standards Law' (RPS Law), which was promulgated in June 2002,<sup>30</sup> made it an obligation for electric power companies to use a fixed amount (set for 8 years but revised every 4 years) of new energies: solar, wind, SSMH (stations up to 1 mW capacity), biomass and geothermal. The target for 2010 was set at 12.2 million MWh corresponding though to a very low standard of 1.35% of national electricity supply (Kawabata 2009, slide 9).

27 Law Concerning the Rational Use of Energy (1979) amended in 1983, 1993, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2008; Law Concerning Promotion of Development and Introduction of Oil Alternative Energy (1980); Law Concerning Special Measures for Promotion of New Energy Use (1997), amended in January 2002; Law Concerning the Rational Use of Energy and Recycled Resources Utilization (2003); Bill on the Promotion of the Use of Non fossil Energy Sources and Effective Use of Fossil Energy Source Materials by Energy Suppliers (released in March 2009).

28 Some authors are sceptical about the capacity to change the system, see for example Samuels 2013.

29 In a country that is not accustomed to them, huge demonstrations against nuclear took place and lasted even after LDP return to government. See among others Kindstrand, Nishimura, Slater 2012; Hasegawa 2014.

30 See DeWit, Tani (s.d.) for an analysis of RPS Law adoption.

Three options are offered for them to fulfil their obligations:

- generate power by renewable resources by themselves;
- purchase new energies from others;
- have another utility take over their obligations.

A report was compiled in 2007 by the RPS Law subcommittee and recommendations were done leading to some improvement in the law, among which: SMSH and geothermal power generation categories were expanded, namely to include power generation using water for river maintenance with a capacity of 1,000 kW or less. New energies utilization target has been raised at 16 million mWh for 2014 (Kawabata 2009, slide 9), a still quite low level.

The 'Act on Special Measures concerning the Procurement of Renewable Electric Energy by Operators of Electric Utilities' (no. 108, August 2011)'s goal is to establish a 'Feed-in-Tariff' in Japan by constraining electric utilities to purchase electricity generated from renewable sources (solar, wind, SMSH, geothermal and biomass) based on a fixed-period contract with a fixed price decided by METI. It took effect in July 2012.<sup>31</sup>

In order for a supplier of Renewable Electricity to benefit from the Act, the suppliers have to obtain the approval of METI by complying with criteria set in 'implementing regulations' (also drafted by METI).<sup>32</sup> The price and term for power purchase agreements vary according to the type of renewable, the installation mode and scale of the facilities and some other factors (table 4). A 'Procurement Price Calculation Committee' was set to advise METI about the right pricing. The Act allows operators of electric utilities to charge extra fees to end users, in proportion to the amount of energy they use (surcharge fixed at 1.58 yen/kWh in 2015). The Act also set exceptions to the obligation to purchase the full amount of Renewable Electricity generated by suppliers if there is "a likelihood of unjust harm to the benefit of operators of electric utilities", "a likelihood of the occurrence of damage to securing the smooth supply of electricity" or "a just reason as set forth in the Implementing Regulations" (for more details see Graffagna, Mizutani 2011 or Anderson Mori & Tomotsune 2012).

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**31** Since 1992 electrical utilities used to buy renewable energy from local producers through a voluntary basis system (surplus electricity purchase menu to foster solar power). The menu was amended in 1996 to also include wind power (DeWit, Tani s.d.)

**32** Hydropower facilities eligible to certification are those of less than 3 mW output as a total of power generators installed. Pumped-storage facilities are excluded.

Table 4. Japan's Feed-In-Tariff for Hydropower compared to photovoltaic since implementation in 2012

		(yen / kWh)	2012	2014	2015	2016
<b>Hydropower</b>						
More than 1,000 kW /under 30,000 kW	Installing fully new facility	25.2	24	24	24	24
	Utilizing existing canals					
More than 200 kW /under 1,000 kW	Installing fully new facility	30.45	29	29	29	29
	Utilizing existing canals					
Under 200 kW	Installing fully new facility	35.7	34	34	34	34
	Utilizing existing canals					
<b>Photovoltaic power</b>					29*	
More than 10 kW		42	32	27**	24	
Under 10 kW	When generators are not required to install output control equipment	42	37	33	31	
	When generators are required to install output control equipment			35	33	
Under 10 kW (solar cogeneration)		34	/	/	/	

\* April to June 30th

\*\* From July 1st

Source: DLA Piper 2012 for the year 2012; METI/ANRE 2015 for the years 2014 and 2015; METI home page for 2016: [http://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2016/0318\\_03.html](http://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2016/0318_03.html) (2017-10-05)

NB For Hydropower: purchase period is 20 years. For PV of 10 kW or more: 20 years (for non-household customers); for PV of 10 kW or more 10 kW or less: 10 years (for household customers)

Fixed at an attractive level, the tariffs incited not only households but also companies to invest in new energies. The number of applicants has been important and between July 2012 and March 2016 a total cumulated capacity of 88,750 mW has been approved by METI under the FiT, of which some 33,140 mW have been installed.<sup>33</sup> PV projects represent most of the part of approved capacities, the great majority of which concerns small PV generating less than 10 kW (roof-top panels etc.). But on the other end of the scale 1,265 projects of more than 2,000 kW (mega-solar) have also been approved. As a result, the PV capacities installed and registered under the FiT between July 2012 and March 2015 are huge (table 5). This

33 See Table 5, NB 2 for more precision about these numbers.

increase in solar energy to be integrated in the grid led 5 power companies (to start with Kyushu Electric Power Company) using exceptions allowed by the Act to announce a suspension of new FiT agreements during fall 2014.<sup>34</sup> For anti-nuclear movements, the timing of Kyushu Electric was in question, the announce having been made only few days after the approval of the Nuclear Regulation Authority to restart two reactors in its Sendai plant (Kagoshima prefecture). Activist heavily criticised the ‘as usual collusion’ between METI bureaucrats, power companies and politicians, including Prime Minister Abe whose position in favour of nuclear is well known (see *The Japan Times* of 17th October 2014 and 2nd January 2015). In response, the METI/ANRE has revised tariffs for solar and also partially amended the FiT scheme.<sup>35</sup>

Table 5. PV and hydro power capacity approved under FiT and capacity installed since July 2012

(Unit: mW)	Annual Certified Renewable Energy Capacity under FiT				Annual Operational Renewable Energy Capacity under FiT			
	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015
Photovoltaic < 10 kW	1,420	1,270	1,100	860	970	1,310	820	850
Photovoltaic > 10 kW	15,990	36,410	17,180	5,710	700	5,740	8,570	8,310
Wind	800	240	1,250	550	60	50	220	150
Small hydro	70	230	360	120	0	0	80	70

Source: From Japan Renewable Energy Foundation (JREF) based on METI/ANRE Renewable Power Plant Certification Status, online (<http://www.renewable-ei.org/en/>) (2017-10-05)

NB 1. The photovoltaic capacity (10 kW and over), that was registered but cancelled afterwards, is not included on the data of registered renewable energy capacity under FiT.

NB 2. Until the end of March 2014, cumulative capacity of operational facilities included all the facilities having started operation from July 2012. This includes plants not registered under FiT. From April 2014, cumulative operational capacity represents only the capacity of the facilities registered under FiT.

Although all other renewables including small-scale hydropower (table 5) also benefited from FiT, capacities installed or registered under the

<sup>34</sup> Kyushu, Okinawa, Hokkaido, Shikoku and Tohoku Electric Power Companies estimated that, if the power capacity from all applications were to be connected to the grid, the total power flowing through the grid would make it difficult to maintain a stable electricity supply, the capacity exceeding the daytime power demand during fair weather hours in spring and autumn (for more detail, see Edahiro 2014; JREF 2014).

<sup>35</sup> A partial amendment of the FiT scheme was adopted by the National Diet in 2016 and will be effective in April 2017. Among others, it introduces an authorisation system for solar PV projects that includes a procedure to check the project feasibility and a requirement for maintenance and inspection during the project.

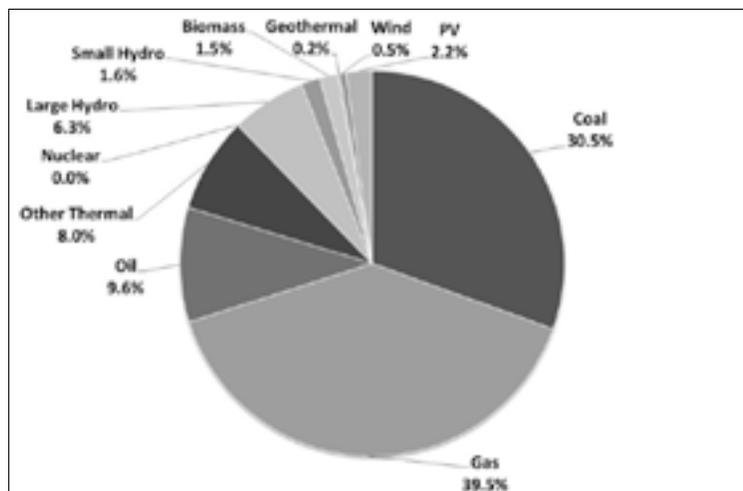
scheme remain far from those of PV. Of course, if we include large hydro-power capacities that are not eligible under FiT, hydropower (large 7.1% and small 1.7%) is still the more important renewable source representing 8.9% of the electricity generated in FY2015 while photovoltaic (large mega-solar and small PV) stands at 3.3% (fig. 7).<sup>36</sup> Altogether, electricity generated from renewable sources (large hydro excluded), whose share was quite small (3.5% in FY2009 before Fukushima and 4% in FY2012), progressed faster since FIT, and finally have reached 7.3% in 2015. But, while a great number of potential sites for SMSH projects have been identified by surveys as we have seen before and, although they were not affected by any tariff change, the FiT incentive impact is quite small, even smaller than for wind (see table 5).

Several reasons can explain why incentives worked for solar generation to a much larger extent than for SMSH. It may come from a lack of support from power companies for whom, considering that most 'economically efficient' hydro site had already been tapped, restarting nuclear power was indeed a better option, anyway more suitable with usual vested interests. Another reason might be financial; the engineering and equipment costs (initial costs), which are high in case of hydropower facility,<sup>37</sup> might explain why local promoters of renewables have often preferred investing in solar to address the global warming issue. Tariff, which is lower if compared to solar especially until last FiT revision, might not be attractive enough, while purchase period of 20 years appears short if we consider the lifetime of facilities.

**36** 0.3% in FY2010 (ISEP, JSF 2011) and 0.7% in FY2012 (ISEP 2014).

**37** Even though investment cost heavily depends on type and infrastructure size.

Figure 7. Domestic electricity generation by source, FY2015



Source: ISEP 2016, URL <http://www.isep.or.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/fig3.gif> (2017-10-05)

Even though all these factors play their role in explaining why the impact of FiT was limited as far as SMSH is concerned, the regulatory framework also has to be taken into account to fully understand the problem. A SMSH project not only has to deal with energy constraints, but also has to go through water legislation to get all needed authorisation. These being quite complex and time consuming, SMSH projects' leadtime is much longer than PV's, making the investment more risky. This creates a real bottleneck to SMSH development and partly explains why, among the projects registered under the FiT since 2012, very few are in operation several years after (see table 5).

### 3.2 Water Legislation and Management

For an hydro facility, whatever its size, the resource is water and, indeed, water use rights are strictly regulated in Japan. Also, the most numerous untapped sites remaining for small to micro-scale projects are run-of-rivers or irrigation channels type; they are also concerned by laws dedicated to rivers, water supply for agricultural use, and environment legislation, making the landscape even more complex.

River administration can be traced back to the Edo era when measures had been taken to prevent flood, but at the time it remained locally administrated. After the Meiji restoration, the centralized administration

led to enact the first river law or 'old River Law' (1896). The law was then revised several times to adapt to changes, but in the '60s it appeared necessary to review it fundamentally. The new River Law was then enacted in 1964. It was revised several times without major changes. The law covers all aspects of river administration. Consistent with river administration since the early times, the law is motivated by the two main objectives: to control river flooding and to ensure availability of river water for daily and industrial use (for a complete analysis of the river law see IDI 1999). Under the law, rivers are classified in two main categories with sub-groups and different administration levels: 'Class A river systems' and 'Class B river systems'.

Class A refers to those systems that are important for the national economy and people's lives and that are, therefore, administrated by the Minister of Construction (MLIT now). Class B concerns other rivers systems administrated by the prefectural governors. Class A is further subclassified as 'Trunk rivers' and 'Others'; 'Others' being also administered, except for approval of certain specified water rights, by the prefectural governors. Also, some sections of small tributaries of both class A and class B rivers might be administrated by the mayors of cities, towns, and villages. Class A includes 13,798 rivers grouped in 109 river systems (approximately 87,150 km) while class B includes 6,931 rivers grouped in 2,691 river systems (approximately 35,720 km). Some small rivers are not included and are administrated by mayors. The River Law stipulates that any utilization of land and river water within the sections defined by the River Law must obtain approval from the designated river administrator.

The River Law serves as basis for water management but, once water is withdrawn from the river channel, it is managed under different other laws.<sup>38</sup> Finally, SMSH facilities might also relay on the 'Environmental Impact Assessment Law' (no. 81, 1997),<sup>39</sup> which aims at ensuring that proper consideration is given to environmental protection issues relating to a project that changes the shape of the terrain or involves the construction of a new structure.

All these laws are of course not under the same jurisdiction as figure 8 shows. Measures concerning water resources are implemented by a number of government ministries (and several bureaus inside) and agencies.

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**38** Water supply law, industrial water law, industrial water supply business law, water pollution control law, sewerage law, specified multipurpose dam law, water resources development promotion law, law concerning special measures for reservoir areas, law concerning the Regulation of Pumping-up of Groundwater for Use in Buildings etc. to name only some of them.

**39** Environment Impact Assessment Law (EIA) applies to the upper scale of SMH category: 22,500 kW-30,000 kW power plants; or reservoir area of 75 ha-100 ha, EIA class 2; see MOE (s.d.). Wind is also requested EIA while PV is not (Mizuno 2014).

The MLIT is in charge of the overall development of water resources:

- development of comprehensive water resources policies such as the Comprehensive National Water Resources Plan and the Water Resources Development Basic Plan;
- water resources development, and maintenance and management of river facilities;
- utilization and conservation of river water;
- development and management of sewerage facilities.

The MOE for its part is in charge of:

- development of guideline, policy, and planning on water conservation;
- water pollution measures (river, groundwater, etc);
- ground subsidence measures;
- environmental Quality Standards setting.

The Ministry of Health of:

- supervision of domestic water supply utilities;
- regulation on domestic water supply facilities.

The METI of

- supervision of industrial water supply utilities;
- regulation on industrial water supply facilities.

The Ministry of Agriculture of

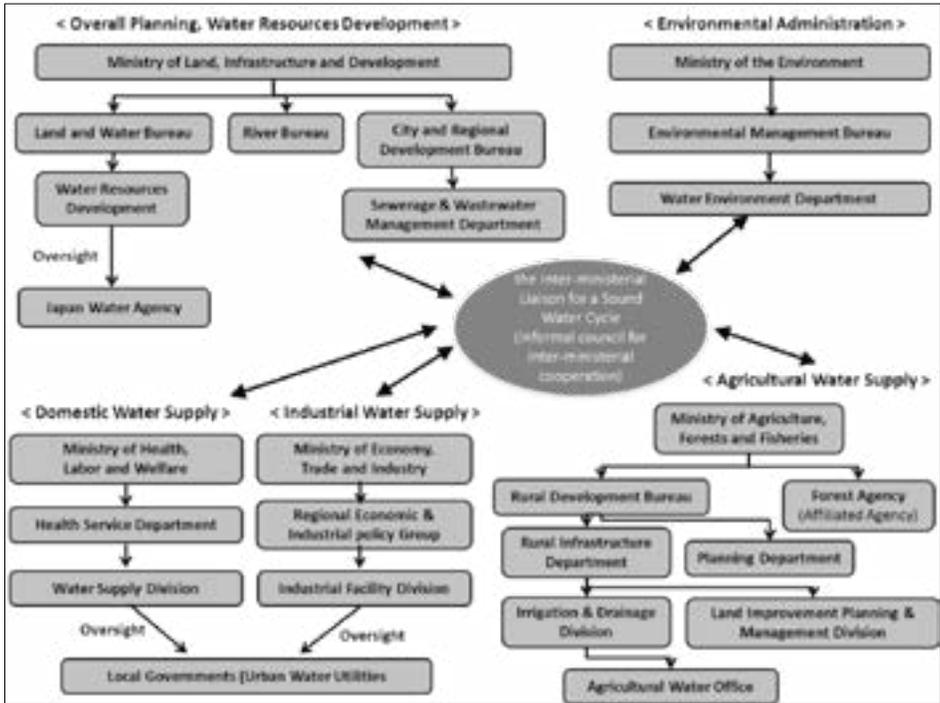
- regulation on agricultural water;
- conservation of Forest for water resources;
- and, at the bottom, local governments operate, maintain and manage urban water utilities and existent facilities and, as we have seen before, some rivers.

The Japan Water Agency, which is an 'Independent Administrative Agency',<sup>40</sup> is also involved in water management. The Agency is in charge of providing a Stable Supply of Safe, Quality Water at a reasonable price. Therefore, it is engaged in the construction and refurbishment of major dams for water utilization (for domestic, industrial and agricultural water supply) and river management purposes (flood control, maintenance and promotion of normal functions of water flow), etc.

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40 Supervised by: MLIT; Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare; Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; and METI.

Figure 8. Water regulation and management structure



Source: World Bank 2006, 5

Although the Water Resources Department of MLIT acts as the overall coordinator in adjusting measures for water supply and demands reservoir area development, an Inter-ministerial Liaison Council (Informal council for inter-ministerial cooperation) has been created to study how procedures could be simplified.<sup>41</sup>

But, for the moment, in such a complex and fragmented responsibilities landscape, getting all the needed information and authorisations is a kind of obstacle course for SSMH projects promoters. This tends to make the preparation phase very long lasting and finally increases implementation cost. Suwa, for example, considers that “a lack of awareness among policy makers, together with overly restrictive regulations for agricultural water usage, is currently making smaller hydropower generation commercially unattractive” (2009).

41 His missions are said to be meant to: “Form a basic awareness on necessary measures and policies for a sound water cycle” (World Bank 2006, 5).

## 4 Conclusion

Water, which Japan is rather well provided with, is a resource the country could rely on to ensure a better energy security, reduce importation of primary resources and limit CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. The post-Fukushima context appears as favourable to further development as SSMH now is promoted like all other renewables, namely through the FiT. But, despite the fact that surveys have shown the potential is high, the expansion remains quite limited, especially if compared with PV whose registered projects as well as operational capacities have grown fast since FiT implementation in July 2012.

Japan's power utilities own hydropower plants since a long time and large manufacturing corporations such as MHI, Hitachi or Toshiba who clearly have relations with METI are also involved in manufacturing equipment and facilities for hydropower generation. Hydropower, whose plants construction has been in the past eligible for subsidies like thermal and nuclear ones (Hasegawa 2014), has been an insider of the vested interest structure (Moe 2012), but untapped sites are for the most part micro-sites meaning that generated volumes are very small, often too small to interest power companies for whom integrating electricity to the grid would generate too high per kWh costs. Therefore, utilities' rather positive attitude to certain hydropower categories might not be extended to low production volume, remote areas location and uneasy connection to grid SSMH projects, even more if they are run-of-river or irrigation channels types, meaning that they do not have any storage function.

In fact, power companies, facing the obligation to integrate on the grid more electricity from new renewables,<sup>42</sup> have interest in developing hydropower, but the type they are the most interested in is pump storage facilities. Thanks to their fast ramping up capability, PSP which Japan has the world's largest installed capacity<sup>43</sup> (NHA 2012), can be used to instantly balance supply and demand, ensuring grid reliability. Using electricity produced by other energies when demand is low, and restituting it to the grid when demand is high, they work as storage capacity. According to US NHA, it is foreseen as "the only commercially proven technology available for grid-scale energy storage" (2012, 2), while for Eurelectric, "hydropower provides the most efficient energy storage technology, and the only existing large-scale storage technology" (2015, key messages). Although Japan seems to promote storage batteries more than PSP, the

42 Government forecasts for 2030 are based on a return to nuclear to 20-22% of the electricity mix, 22-24% for RE including large hydro meaning 14-15% without.

43 Some 26GW (NHA 2012). PSP developed in Japan in the early '90s to adjust supply from nuclear or thermal generation to demand.

latter might play an important role in a further development of new RE especially after the full implementation of the electricity reform.

For the moment, NGO, citizens associations and local authorities appear to be the most interested in valuing local water resources, but water regulation makes it necessary to get water rights before launching any project and to prove water quality (such as land and environment) will not be endangered by the structure build so as the land and environment. Water (and agricultural land, environment) management is, as we have seen, complex in Japan and obtaining all needed authorization appears as an absolute puzzle that takes a lot of time. The lead-time of projects, much longer than in the case of solar, is an issue that projects' promoters are pointing out.<sup>44</sup>

For example, Fukushima Prefecture has set the goal of increasing the total output capacity of micro-hydropower plants from the pre-disaster level of 14,400 kW to 40,000 kW in FY2030. As of October 2014, only six projects have been certified under the FIT system. "This is partly due to utilities restricting access to the power grid, and partly to complicated procedures for obtaining water rights" wrote Ueda Toshihide, a senior staff writer of Asahi, based on interviews with local micro-hydro projects holders in the prefecture (Asahi shinbun, 1st October 2014).

The issue for SMSH projects actually is local production/local consumption. This is of course possible but what to do with surplus if any? Community micro-grids have been experimented and some derogation has been given to test electricity exchanges between a group of houses like in Kitakyushu's smart community project.<sup>45</sup> But, apart from such experiments, electricity regulations do not allow individuals to exchange between or to sell it to neighbours. Also, FiT is an incentive if electricity is sold to power companies at an attractive price, but if electricity is consumed locally, the only incentive is to reduce the bill from the grid usage. The unbundling (reform 3rd phase) should ease new entrants to propose their services while smart-grid technologies and the diffusion of smart-meters, home energy management systems (HEMS) etc. should also bring a certain decentralization of distribution and the introduction of more RE. If this move should favour the local production/local consumption approach and so be suitable to further SMSH expansion namely in rural areas, the impact on price (electricity + related services) for customers remains unclear.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> According to Mizuno (2014), this is also a problem for wind, which is of course not concerned with water legislation but also has to deal with a complex regulation framework.

<sup>45</sup> Based on the interviews and observations of Kitakyushu's smart community.

<sup>46</sup> Some voices advocate that unbundling will lead to fragmentation of the sector in terms of services and value chain, implying new business models, more local energy policies and management, but also a need for coordination and for regulation changes. See for example Fuentes-Baracamontes (2016), who discusses this business model, cost and regulation is-

Although Japan has numerous rivers, long irrigation channels, abundant precipitation and a certain number of multipurpose dams whose heads remain untapped, reaching the government estimates towards 2050 even in the lowest scenario, will probably need more actions, incentives and simplification of regulations, for local or small promoters to invest in SMSH. Big companies (power companies, etc.) have the legal forces to go through such complex procedures, but individuals or even rural associations do not. Recognised as one of the major breaks to further expansion of SMSH but also of wind although the concerned laws concerned (Mizuno 2014), a revision of procedure now is on the agenda, while the electricity reform with its second phase liberalization of retail but moreover with its third phase unbundling is expected to have a great impact on the local production/local consumption, but it is still too early to know.

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# **The Social Construction of Seawater and Seascape in Japanese Fishing Communities**

## An Interpretative Framework of Agency and Sense of Place

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**Abstract** This paper gives a preliminary overview of the processes of social construction of seawater and seascape in Japanese fishing communities. Attention is directed to the interactions of local fishermen with their maritime territories, exploring also the modalities in which seawater is contextualized and negotiated in relation to a disparate constellation of symbolic values, embodied practices and economic activities. A theoretical framework, based on the social construction theories, is also provided to define the role of seascape and seawater as powerful agents that produce culture and interact with social practices.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Seascape as Sensorial Landscape. – 3 Relationality of Seascape. – 4 The Symbolic Power of Seawater. – 5 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Japanese fishing communities. Seawater. Seascape. Environmental anthropology. Landscape phenomenology. Folk religion.

The sea is multiple, it moves, and it is dense and cohesive. Its multiplicity lies in its waves; they constitute it. They are innumerable; the sea-farer is completely surrounded by them.  
(Canetti 1978, 80)

## **1 Introduction**

Starting from a sea-set multi-sited ethnography located along the coastal and insular areas of Ise Bay and Shima peninsula,<sup>1</sup> this paper explores the socio-cultural interactions between local fishermen and seascape, explor-

**1** The ethnographic research period took place from 2008 to 2009, then between 2014 and 2015. The main coastal and island villages where research was conducted are the fishing communities of Kamishima, Kuzaki, Sugashima, Tōshijima, Sakatejima, Kuzaki, Ijika and the city of Toba (all located in Mie prefecture).

ing also the modalities in which seawater is contextualized and negotiated in relation to a disparate constellation of symbolic values, cultural practices and economic activities.<sup>2</sup> Despite the vast amount of anthropological literature on the cultural perception of landscape and seascape, in the context of Japan, critical research following this perspective has not been produced yet. There are, therefore, methodological precautions adopted in this introductory essay. Firstly, it was given greater prominence to the theoretical approach than the ethnographic context in order to provide an overall picture to a research topic that has been exclusively and extensively described but not theorised in Japanese Folklore Studies (cf. Hiroyuki, Schnell 2003). Secondly, this paper is an attempt to consider seascape and seawater as two physically interdependent but culturally independent elements, since there is not any critical distinction that could be drawn between physical representations of a 'natural seascape' and symbolic representations of a 'cultural seascape' (cf. Ingold 2000). Echoing also the thoughts of Tilley, "[seascape] is not something 'natural' and opposed to people, but totally socialized. It is a symbolic form, a series of signs relating to the [...] past on which people draw in day to-day experience and through which they live" (1994, 38).

Following this perspective, the contribution of this paper is to give, firstly, a preliminary overview of the cultural dimensions of seawater, mindful that fresh water or other aqueous phenomena demand their own specific interpretive approach (cf. Helmreich 2011). Water is a fundamental environmental element invested with a 'total meaning', which has historically occupied an ambiguous place in anthropological categories, especially in broader discourses on "nature" and "culture" (Strathern 1980, 181; Strang 2004, 4; also quoted in Helmreich 2011, 132). As Helmreich observed, "water oscillates between natural and cultural substance, its putative materiality masking the fact that its fluidity is a rhetorical effect of how we think about 'nature' and 'culture' in the first place" (2011, 132). Although the models of modernity have imposed an "indifferent look to water" (Van Aken 2012, 11), it is still invested by many forms of symbolic valorisations and it is "experienced and embodied both physically and culturally" (Strang 2004, 4). From an anthropological perspective one of the main characteristic of water is its "authoritativeness" (Solinas 2002, as quoted in Breda 2005, 3), because it is not "purely a *resource* [...] rather an *active subject*, even a *creative agent* in some cultures" (3; Author's italics). Recognising the authoritativeness of water means carefully comparing water to a ritual rather than a natural element (4), as being trafficked and frequented as

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2 I would like to thank the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) and, in particular, the Director Dr. Sudo Ken'ichi, Professor Taku Iida, and Professor Kazunobu Ikea for helping me during my ethnographic research. Greetings are due also to Dr. Yoshitaka Ishihara, Director of the Toba Sea-Folk Museum.

a busy intersection (Rosaldo 1989, as quoted in Breda 2005, 4; Van Aken 2012). Far from being a mere, residual, passive factor, or limiting natural element in shaping biologically human life (Strang 2004; Van Aken 2012), water is articulated in a socially network of shared meanings.

Bearing also in mind that salinity is one of the main distinctive features of seawater, determining various physical characteristics and aspects of the chemistry and of biological processes within it, the meanings encoded in the saltiness of water emerge from an intimate interaction involving practices and other cultural forces that contribute to produce a “socially built environment” (cf. Lawrence, Low 1990). Seawater is generally recognised as “water from the ocean, that is salty”<sup>3</sup> and the presence of salinity, which characterises its identity and distinguishes seawater from other typologies of waters, offers also a discursive analysis of the practices of cultural construction and social organisation, which transform an aqueous environment into the anthropological category of landscape. Such perspective is even more evident by using the holistic term of ‘seascape’, which is generally defined as “an area of sea, coastline and land, as perceived by people, whose character results from the actions and interactions of land and sea, by natural and/or human factors” (Briggs, White 2009, 5). According also to Pungetti “landscape is the visible interaction of abiotic, biotic and human processes developing on the earth surface over time. The interaction of these processes on the coast, sea and adjacent waters constitutes the seascape. Coasts outline the link between landscape and seascape” (2012, 52).

Taking the above-mentioned issues into consideration, this paper focuses on a series of key anthropological questions: in which way are the individual natural elements, such as seawater, which compose the environmental and geographical features of a seascape, linked to the cultural practices? And what social values could they determine? How does seascape become a complex cultural and social process involved in active relationships between people? This series of questions is connected to a broader interpretative model related to the ‘social production theories’ (cf. Lawrence, Low 1990), which take the main concepts of habitus, locality and structuring (cf. Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984) and tend to highlight the impact of social action on a given environment. Taking into account that it is obviously impossible here to focus on the countless modalities of the exploitation of marine aquatic environments by human groups in a particular context and at a particular time, this paper aims to give some examples of patterns of interpretation, values, norms, practices and beliefs, which are embedded in encompassing political-economic, cultural structures and

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3 URL [http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/sea-water](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/sea-water) (2017-01-05).

constraining forces of ecological adaptations related to seawater. From this perspective, seawater is, therefore, presented in a kaleidoscopic flux, transformed into culturally meaningful phenomena because of its material qualities (namely, transmutability, reflectivity, transparency, fluidity) which are, at the same time, *inherent* and *reactive* to seawater (cf. Strang 2004).

In what follows, this paper proposes a scheme of some interrelated key categories that define the previously mentioned idea of authoritativeness of seawater, and are here summarised into three analytical perspectives, namely: seascape as a sensorial landscape, relationality of seascape and seawater as a powerful symbol. All these categories demonstrate how the sea – a term understood in this paper as a broad interpretative category that includes both seawater and seascape – becomes a place and agent with a power capable of imprinting “a pattern of knowing, acting and being” (Brown, Humberstone 2015, 23) on Japanese fishermen. In conclusion, the idea that seascape is therefore “a place with character, agency and personality” is stressed (Anderson, Peters 2014, 9), in which seawater plays a role of powerful connecting link between seascape and local fishermen.

## 2 Seascape as Sensorial Landscape

The physical setting of Japanese archipelago is characterised by an elongated shape in north-south direction, which has played a fundamental role in moulding the country’s natural landscapes (Karan 2005, 9). Japanese archipelago has also a long and irregular coastline, which is characterised by a variety of coastal features, and lowlands overlooking the sea. In other words, from a geographical point of view, Japanese people have objectively a sort of ‘maritime outlook’. The perceived landscape and seascapes are a refined interpretation of observed patterns across specific cultural patterns and, in the context of fishing communities, seascape typically represents a socially constructed place (cf. Hirsch, O’Hanlon 1995), especially when it is considered as an *operative* place. As result of considerable accumulated adaptive experiences, Japanese fishing communities located in the rugged coastlines or in the small islands still exhibit a highly nuanced ecological sophistication, which offers a critical understanding of the maritime environment related to the perception and the cultural organisation of the territory. That is, through the ‘fluid knowledge’ of daily practices, seascape is covered by a ‘mantle of symbols’.

Two salient aspects could be found in general discourses around landscape: firstly, seascape, as just seen, is considered as a ‘cultural process’ (Lai 2000, 9; see also Ingold 1993), in which the social, technical, symbolic, economic aspects are closely tied to ecological ones (Lai 2000, 9); secondly, landscape could be reconnected to discourses on the ‘geography of the senses’ (Rodaway 1994, 9), which considers “four senses (touch, smell, hearing

and sight) in turn, identifying their distinctive contributions to geographical experience at individual and social levels, in different historical, cultural and technological contexts" (Rodaway 1995, 9). Leaving aside for now the first aspect, which constitutes the main framework of a given social organisation, I use the expression 'sensorial landscape' to indicate and summarise the idea of fusion of experience and sensuous knowledge of space, which produce a practical knowledge of place, based on habitus (Bourdieu 1977).

According to this perspective, then, the expression "seascape as sensorial landscape" clearly shows the well-established anthropological approach to the dialectical relationship between local environment and human perception of place, which expresses the existential and phenomenological reality of place, focusing on the sensory dimensions, such as, smell, feel, sight or colour (Richardson 1982, 1984, Lawrence-Zúñiga, Low 2003). The concept that better expresses this practice of moulding the sensorial and practical experience into microgeographies of daily life is the "embodied place" (Richardson 1982, 1984), a model to understand the creation of place, which is defined as "the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form" (Lawrence-Zúñiga, Low 2003, 2). In this context, one of the main cultural device of territorial identification that creates an "embodied place" is the language, which expands the territory out of its 'objective reality' showing how the experience has sedimented in a cumulative way, and bringing with it a layering of notions and practices of place (Duranti 1992; Csordas 1994; Lawrence-Zúñiga, Low 2003).

Based on these premises, I now present some brief examples from my research experience in the area of Ise Bay and the Shima peninsula, to make an 'ethnographic synthesis' of the role of language in encoding the local environment as a means for sustaining the integrity of local knowledge systems and, on the cultural and sensorial perception of seascape and its culturally dominant and characterising element: seawater. I did fieldwork in Kamishima, a small island located at the entrance of Ise Bay, between Mie prefecture and Aichi prefecture. Asking information from any inhabitant of Kamishima on the main business activities of this fishing community was perhaps the easiest part of my ethnographic interviews. Often, especially when interviewing fishermen, I began with questions like, "What species are fished in Kamishima?", "How is the local fishery?", "How fishery has changed over the last twenty/thirty years?", "People who works in the boats are related to each other?", and so on. As it often happens during the early stages of ethnographic research, these apparently simple questions helped me to look for a point of contact, a topic of common interest. In some cases, however, this approach could also be a backfire, causing me some embarrassment: "What colour is your sea?" asked me an old fisherman with a passion for painting. Not knowing exactly what to answer, the fisherman began to describe *his sea* using local terms that were not always easy to understand. One of these terms was *aka ami* (liter-

ally 'red sea'), which indicates the reddish colour of the surface of the sea, when the schools of *kōnago* ('sandfish' or *Ammodytes personatus*) came up to the surface attracted by the glitter of some rods used in a complex traditional fishing technique called *kōnago sukui*.

The *kōnago sukui* represents, along with *takoryō* (octopus fishing), the main activity carried out by Kamishima fishermen and is called *otoko no shigoto* (men's work), which is to be distinguished from fishermen's diving activities. According to the local fishermen, the nets were lowered into the sea not far from the coasts of Kamishima and only one boat carrying three fishermen was used. The schools of sandfish were identified thanks to the cormorants, followed by seagulls, which flew over the schools of fish when they reached the surface, colouring the water of red. The role of the birds was also important to understand how deep the *kōnago* was allocated: if cormorants still flew over the *aka ami*, it meant that the fish had not yet reached the surface. In this case, fishermen threw the rocks into the sea to scare *kōnago* dividing them into smaller groups so that they quickly reached the sea surface. The experience encapsulated in the memories of this fisherman shows how seawater is not reducible to a technical vision: it is obviously part of a technical event where, however, the technique is a condensate of practical knowledge, senses and social institutions. As my informant told me, to practice *kōnago sukui* is necessary to have a 'good view' (*me ga yoku*), 'intuition' (*satoru*) and a good 'technique' (*jukuren*), and required a complex cooperation between fishermen.

Another similar example, where senses and knowledge of place are strongly related to the fishermen's practical experience, is the traditional fishing technique of *taro zame* (basking shark). The main fishing areas, where local fishermen use a pear to catch *taro zame*, are the coastal area of Atsumi Peninsula, in south-eastern Aichi prefecture, and offshore area of Enshu sea. During March and April, seawater temperature came to 13-14 degrees and the behaviour of seasonal wind trend is a 'meteorological signal' for local fishermen for the beginning of shark fishing season. That is, when strong northwest wind is getting weak in March and south wind (*maze*) starts blowing. Fishermen catch *taro zame* in a fishing area where 'green bay' water and offshore 'blue water' of Kuroshio (the north-flowing ocean current on the west side of the North Pacific Ocean) are mixed making a junction line at the mouth of Ise Bay. As local fishermen explained, seawater at Ise Bay contains freshwater from the rivers, where the presence of large masses of plankton attracts sharks, thus giving fishermen the opportunity to fish them with a harpoon. Even in this case, the perception of water colours is part of a traditional ecological knowledge, intensified senses and practical skills, including distinctive signs and symbols associated with this environmental system (Berkes, Folke 1998).

Finally, I will present a brief example of the perception of seascape and seawater from an 'internal' perspective: the case of the fishermen

of the coastal village of Kuzaki, located in the Shima peninsula, where they generally dive to fish *awabi* ('abalone', *Haliotis sorensen*) and seaweeds near the coast or offshore. In this context, seawater represents a way in which these fisherwomen have given a cultural meaning to their 'sea world': not coincidentally, the word with which they are called is *ama*, 'sea women'. As being completely surrounded by seawater, *ama*'s fishing technique represents a vivid example of the "complicity between the body and the environment and the two interpenetrate each other" (Shields 1991, 14). It follows that underwater diving is related to a sensuous knowledge of place, which is based on the strength, visual acuity and physical resistance.

The so-called 'fifty seconds battle' (*goju byō no shōbu*) is a folk expression used by these fisherwomen to indicate how they bet on each short dive to catch as many abalones as possible using particular diving techniques. *Isobue* (ocean whistle) is a particular breathing technique, for example, used by *ama* when they return to the sea surface. This fishing technique, as any diving activities, requires also the visibility of the sea bottom. In Ise Bay and in the coastal area, the seabed is particularly sandy and, during storms or when strong seasonal winds are blowing, the sand raised by marine currents hinder the fishing of *awabi*. *Ama* use a saying to explain this phenomenon: "The sand blows from the bottom of the sea" (*sunaga soko kara kuru fuite*), i.e. an expression that explains not only how these divers have elaborated a detailed knowledge of the morphological characteristics of the sea bottom, but also refers, more indirectly, to how they have a particular sensuous ordering of space. Sea bottom becomes, therefore, an 'embodied map' traced thanks to their ability to see and memorise, for example the holes (*ana*) in the rocks where abalones are hiding, or to the ability to predict the intensity and direction of the winds that blow on the sea surface based on the type of sea current that flows on the sea bottom.

What 'emerges' from the examples is that seascape is part of a broader performative network of human and non-human relations acted out in practice. It is a submerged world, in which the meanings conferred to seascape and seawater are derived from a fusion of human senses and practice brought together through the orientation and movement of the fishers on the given maritime territory. The cultural heritage of the *ama* - an example of gendered local knowledge secretly transmitted from mother to daughter according to matriarchal customs - represents the different modalities of perception of seascape, offering also a discursive analysis of the different ways in which these female fishers' body "reads the different places" (Ligi 2003, 262), moving in symbolically and physically ordered spaces, that operate as "mnemonic devices for the individual" (262). Seascape, in this case, could be an example of a "structured and structuring spatial unit" (262), which defines the categories of interpretation of space, thanks to an



Figure 1. *Ama* operating in the coastal area (Kuzaki, 9th December 2014)

interactive process between local fishermen and their environment. This could be linked also to the reflections of McGann and Torrance:

The structures of the world allow the structures of the observer to exist, while the structures of the observer allow the structures of the world to be conceived and perceived. It is this complex interplay between the world and the subject which gives rise to meaning [...] of the world [...]. The enactive mind is not a passive recipient of information from the world, but actively engages with its environment [...]. Cognition is not tied into the workings of an 'inner mind' [...], but occurs in directed interaction between the body and the world it inhabits. (2005, 184)



Figure 2. A group of *ama* (Kuzaki, 10th December 2014). A man, known as *tomae*, keeps watching over the diving women. When *ama* are almost out of breath and ready to ascend, they tug on the rope attached to their waist so that the *tomae* pulls them to the surface using a pulley system on the boat

### 3 Relationality of seascape

In the wake of these previous reflections, another main characteristic of seascape is to be an example of socio-relational space (Tilley 1994), a type of space defined through a very broadly diversified social experiences within a given territory. As Tilley points out,

Space has no substantial essence in itself, but only has a relational significance, created through relations between peoples and places. Space becomes detotalized by virtue of its relational construction and because, being differentially understood and produced by different individuals, collectivities and societies, it can have no universal essence. [...] The experience of space is always shot through with temporalities, as spaces are always created, reproduced and transformed in relation to previously constructed spaces provided and established from the past. Spaces are intimately related to the formation of biographies and social relationships. (1994, 11)

It follows that the specificity of seascape in fishing culture is an essential element in understanding the meanings of space in a subjective dimension according to the symbolically constructed life worlds of social actors. Yet, seawater, as the main constitutive element of maritime seascape, has intrinsically a *relational* character, because it represents a complex social, political and environmental arena: that is, it is both the *means* and the *place* of fishing production. In both cases, seascape is the key element that determines a complex space of interaction, which is structured in close relation with the events of the social life of a fisherman. This connects us, in the first analysis, to the vast literature on the issue of territoriality, management models, resource access regulations, property rights etc., which constitutes the cross-cultural and historical universe of fishing (Acheson 1981; Durrenberger, Pálsson 1987). This inherently relational dimension between maritime environment and culture in fishing communities transforms seascape into a powerful social medium: it is enhanced by the cultural point of view just as a mediator of multiple meanings, interconnecting fishermen, fishing territories and specific economic systems. Let us consider, for example, fishing territories that are defined not only on the basis of coordinates established by precise economic policies, based on a particular tradition of fisheries management (cf. Durrenberger, Pálsson 1986), but they also *project* to the seascape the social interactions and the cultural practices related to fishing. The key concern of this perspective is the way in which seascape constitutes space as “[centre] of human meaning, [its] singularity being manifested and expressed in the day-to-day experiences and consciousness of people within particular lifeworlds” (Tilley 1994, 14).

In the ethnographic context of Japanese fishing communities let us think about, for example, the traditional and informal fisheries management systems of the island community of Kamishima where religious rituals are strategically performed by local fishermen. The Kamishima’s *takotsubo kumiai* (Fishery Association for Octopus Pots) is a small organisation that focuses mainly on management of local fishing territories for the traditional octopus fishery. According to some interviewed local fishermen, the richest area for fishing octopus is about 12-16 km far from the island and local fishing territories are divided into forty fishing lot areas, called *kujidate*. The ritual practice of allocation of fishing lots still requires a particular organisation in order to maintain a balance and to prevent internal conflicts. Since the fishing lots are not all equal in richness of marine life, these are reassigned each year through a special ceremony, called *kujitate*, which takes place twice a year (10th September and at the end of the year) at the *yadomato*’s house, a fisherman charged annually to coordinate the octopus fishing activities. Schematically, the ceremony can be described in the following way: some fishermen prepare some boiled rice (*kome*) above a wooden tray (*bon*), on which some wooden sticks (*kuji*) are

arranged, bearing the names of the fishing lots. After the ritual purification concerning in the sprinkling of sake on the four corners of the tray, fishermen take in turn a *kuji* relying on the order of the previous *kujitate* in a tense atmosphere.

*Kujidate* is a typical example of practice of territoriality performed in small-scale fishing communities, which is crucial to determine the social and economic implications in the relations between Kamishima fishermen. What is interesting to note, however, is how these fishermen track 'invisible boundaries' on the seascape surrounding their community, which are not exclusively derived from their local strategies of fisheries management. The boundary is perceived by the fisherman also in its symbolic dimension, which expresses a *relational* idea (Cohen 1985, 12), encapsulating "the identity of the [fishing] community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction" (12). Moreover,

[boundary] may be physical, expressed, perhaps, by a mountain range or a sea. [...] But not all boundaries, and not *all* the components of *any* boundary, are so objectively apparent. [...] They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of their beholders. This being so, the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite side of it, but also by people on the same side. (12)

That is, boundaries are perceived by local fishermen but may be 'imperceptible' to others.

Seascape is, therefore, a mosaic of interactions socially created and recreated through life activities, economic and power negotiations. If it is considered also from a 'figurative' perspective, this is even more evident when one takes into account the maps representing fishing territories and features of the local topography drawn by local fishermen. Mapping is "a means of projecting power-knowledge" (Corner 1999a, 214) and fishermen's mapping practices, besides constituting an example of practical geographical knowledge, represents an example of "an open and inclusive process of disclosure and enablement" (250). Apparently less detailed and precise than a geographical or nautical map, these maps "inaugurate new grounds upon the hidden traces of a living context" (215), highlighting the 'essential elements' of social interactions between fishermen and seascape: vernacular names, fishing boundaries, notes and personal considerations, drawings of marine currents, wind directions and other meteorological phenomena refer to an embodied dimension of seascape, a 'de-constructed' physical place that is 're-constructed' according to precise cultural logics.

## 4 The Symbolic Power of Seawater

One last consideration should be given to the symbolic dimension of seawater seen through the religious practices. In Japanese religious tradition, water is generally considered to be one of the main ritual element, especially in Shinto tradition (Bocking 1995, 94), and its symbolic power is particularly emphasised, for example, by the practice of *misogi*, a “ritual of physically cleansing one’s body and spirit in cold water” (Evans 2001, 126). From a historical perspective, there is a strong link between seawater and these ritual ablutions. According to De Leeuw and Rankin “*misogi* was originally practiced in the ocean [and] still forms part of a modern program of Shinto-based exercises. It is also practiced in some localities [where] the spiritual leaders who performs these rituals enters the ocean himself to practice *misogi*” (2006, 91-2). In the coastal and island fishing communities of Ise Bay, seawater still represents one of the main ritual elements in local festivals and domestic rituals, because it is considered to be a powerful symbol of purification, a ‘physical and mental filter’, through which, in the first instance, the material and spiritual well-being of fishermen and their communities must pass.

According to my fieldwork research data, there are approximately four main categories of festivals and rituals directly connected to the seawater. In the schematization that follows, a brief outline of the religious practices directly related to the symbolism of seawater is proposed.

1. *The ritual practices of ‘enshrining seawater’*, i.e. propitiatory rites to ensure good fisheries. For example, fishermen in Yukiura village (Kumano-shi) pray for a big catch at Okunishisama shrine on a cliff close to the port. This ritual before sailing out is called ‘enshrining seawater’: fishermen draw seawater with a well bucket, wash their mouth with it as a symbol of purification, then they pour seawater on the edge of a fishing boat to purify it as well. If fishermen get a big catch, they offer fish to the god Okunishi-sama at the local shrine as a gesture of gratitude. Similarly, in Nigishimaura (Kumano-shi), fishermen pour seawater on the sacred rock called *Jingu-sama* (another name for *ryūjin*, dragon god) at a port before going to fish. Finally, in Wagu area, *ama* perform a ritual of warding off evil spirits before diving: they cast a spell, then splash seawater and hit the fishing boat using a chisel (*awabi okoshi*). According to the local folk tradition, these rituals were created to avoid the demons of the sea, such as, *tomokazuki*, a ‘fake *ama*’ that drowns *ama* who dive alone, *bōshin* (ghost boat) or *hikimōren* (sea ghost).
2. *Seawater scattering*, i.e. ritual uses of seawater to perform exorcisms or pray for big catch. The ritual practice of seawater scattering is performed at the island of Kamishima, where a parish

guild organiser or a representative of local guardian god goes to the beach or port and draws seawater during the morning on New Year's Day. This water is offered to a household *kamidana* (domestic Shinto altar) and to the guardian god to congratulate for New Year's Day. Another case in which it presents a very similar ritual pattern is *mifune matsuri*, a fishing boat festival performed at the Kōchi shrine in Koza village, in Wakayama prefecture. During this festival, shrine parishioners draw seawater with a pail, put it at their house gate and purify their house every day before and during this festival. It is common to have a 'seawater scatterer' in front of a festival procession in seashore villages: this person holds a pail with seawater and leads a procession purifying the road with this water scattering with a branch of *sakaki* (*Japanese cleyera*). Another example of ritual purification can be found in archery festivals (*jinji*), performed during the New Year's Day, in which seawater in a pail is scattered with *sakaki* branch to purify the archery ground. This ritual is called *shio harai* (purification with seawater) and is very popular in Kumano-nada seashore area. For example, in Yukiura (Kumano-shi) a 'seawater scatterer' draws seawater with a pail and purifies houses one by one a day before the festival begins. One of the most famous seawater scattering festival is the *shiokake matsuri* (seawater scattering festival), which takes place on June 1st at Wagu Oshima island. At the start of the festival, a fishing vessel transfers a talisman (called Mandofuda, Mando talisman) received from Ise Jinju Shrine to Oshima Shrines in Wagu Oshima island. During the morning, abalones caught by *ama* and fishermen of the island are offered for maritime safety and big catch. After the prayers, a local shinto priest and one from Ise Jingu board the talisman and set off toward the mainland. To celebrate this ritual event, fishermen and *ama* use buckets and scoops to splash each other with seawater to propitiate a good fishing.

3. *Immerse ritual objects into the sea*, i.e. the ritual practice of *kaijō togyo* (which approximately means 'transfer a sacred object from an enshrined place to the sea'), is often organised during festivals in the local fishing communities. During this event, a local god is transferred from his Shinto shrine to a sacred spot at a festival site with a ship via the sea. In other cases, carry or immerse ritual objects in the sea acts are instead forms of exorcism. It is the case of the *yarimashobune* (roughly translated as 'ward off boat'), a rite organised at Kamishima on 8th December: a group of old fishermen called *inkyoshu* make a small boat during the morning, which is then carried on the main streets of the village where local residents purify their body with a bunch of cogon grass, and put it inside the boat. Later, this small boat is placed on a fishing vessel and left to

sink into the open sea (fig. 3.). Another important example of this category is the Katsuura Hachiman Festival performed at Katsuura Port (Nachikatsuura, Wakayama prefecture). Five *kaitenma* boats (sculling boats) start sailing clockwise at the port in the evening. Fishermen row the boats and, after several rounds, they stop rowing and jump into the sea for purification. Afterwards, a portable shrine (*mikoshi*) carried by a group of young fishermen approaches the port and, finally, is carried into the sea. Two ropes are tied to the *mikoshi*: one for the rowers of the *kaitenma* boats and another for a group that is waiting on the beach. *Kaitenma* boats rowers start rowing offshore, while the other group on the beach pull the rope to hold the *mikoshi*. After the ritual tug of war ends, the *mikoshi* is put on a boat and is brought to the shrine. This ritual event could be interpreted as a 'fight' to propitiate a big catch at sea or a rich harvest on the land.



Figure 3. Yarimashobune while being transported in a fishing boat (Kamishima, 8th December 2014)

4. *Shio gori*,<sup>4</sup> or ritual purification with seawater. Seawater purification is still performed in many coastal areas where fishermen, who play an important role in the local festival, plunge into the sea. Generally held during the New Year period, these ablution practices are designed to put a person in a state of ritual purity, eliminating what

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<sup>4</sup> The Japanese terms *kori* and *misogi* have similar meaning. *Kori* is described in the Kōjien dictionary as “before praying for Shinto and Buddhist gods, clean oneself with cold water” (1998, 1011).

is unclean and thereby making possible the contact with the sacred, and to allow fishermen to resume their working activities. There are generally three main types of *shio gori*: rituals performed singularly or collectively, and those that could include also non-human ritual actors. A collective ritual of purification called *sou gori* (collective purification) is organised in Ago (Shijima): a big banner of the Fujisan-Asama Shrine is set up on the beach, then all villagers purify themselves plunging into the sea. Purification rituals could involve also animals, as in the case of Mifune festival in Shingu (Wakayama prefecture), in which horses are led into the sea to be ritually purified one day before the festival begins.

According to the canonical fieldwork methodology, this schematization of ritual practices undoubtedly does not offer any chance of theoretical deepening in the strict sense. However, on the basis of these ethnographical observations, it could highlight a few salient points about the relationship between fishermen and their maritime territory. Seawater is a socially indispensable element whose meaning echoes the ritual experience of the participants, while seascape consequently becomes a culturally defined ritual place, in which participants are literally embedded. As it has been said, seawater has the ritual function of increasing productivity, eliminating impurities, or warding off malevolent entities or dangers at sea, becoming also the main element through which a 'symbolic compenetration' between ritual actors and seascape takes place. In the most direct sense, seawater could simply mean a cultural sign of a local fishing tradition, part of an intimate and functionally-oriented knowledge of local maritime environment. According this perspective, Geertz's theory persuasively illustrates how symbols generate a map of reality, presenting worldviews, beliefs and ethos relating to a general and coherent order of existence (1966). However, it is possible to expand the Geertzian model, affirming that such religious symbols and their ritual performances could also be placed in the context of their production. On this point, Abu-Lughod is openly adjacent to Bourdieu (1977) arguing that, rituals, festivals and symbols are not simply "dispositions that generate and structure practices and representations but are themselves structured by such things as material conditions characteristic of a class condition" (1990, 88). It follows that, seawater symbolism in Japanese fishing communities is placed within a given historical context, which is materialistically determined by the control and use of the maritime territory. Yet, seawater symbology is therefore a structured and structuring cultural device: it is 'structured' by particular historical processes that vary depending on the circumstances of social actors embedded in a given environment and, at the same time, it structures a particular socio-economic context.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has focused on the idea that seawater is a powerful embodied cultural and material element, which defines seascape as “a not-objectified arena” (Brown, Humberstone 2015, 5). This research has also sought to show how seascape and seawater reflect “the self-definition of cultural groups” (Garkovich, Greider 1994, 2), such as Japanese fishing communities, through the use of social constructions (cf. Berger, Luckmann 1967, as quoted in Garkovich, Greider 1994, 2) that are “symbols and meanings that [...] reflect what people in cultural groups define to be proper and improper relationships among themselves and between themselves and the physical environment” (Garkovich, Greider 1994, 2). If “the sea is more than a metaphor” (Brown, Humberstone 2005, 22), because “[it has] real material and ideological effects on persons and social relations” (Tilley 2004, 222), it can therefore be assumed that seascape “is not merely the [sea]world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. [Seascape] is a way of seeing the [sea]world” (Cosgrove 1989, 13).

Based on these observations, the focus is upon the so-called theory of landscape agency, a theoretical framework in which “the emphasis shifts from landscape as a product of culture to landscape as an agent producing and enriching culture. Landscapes as a *noun* (as object or scene) is quieted to emphasize landscape as *verb*, as process or activity” (Corner 1999b, 4). Built upon a phenomenological approach to place that links landscape and human actions, landscape agency “refers to the material effects that places can have on human practices and social relations” (Allerton 2012, 74). As seen in the previous sections, seascape has agency through bodily practices, sensuous knowledge, or practices of organisation and classification of the maritime territory, while seawater is substantially “a medium of meaning and material relation” (Mosse 2003, 939), which can be contextualized in the broader theoretical framework of ‘agency of material world’. In conclusion, such a dynamic and recursive relationship between seascape, seawater and fishing communities demonstrates how “[seascape] is an instrument of cultural power”: as Mitchell observes, it “[elicits] a broad range of emotions and meanings that may be difficult to specify” (2002, 1). Such a multiplicity of veiled meanings could be summarised in a Japanese nautical proverb (*kotowaza*) that, with exquisite practical wisdom, exerts the subtle power of the sea: *itago ichimai shitawa jigoku* (hell is under the hull of a ship).

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# **Cultural and Scientific Diplomacy**



# **China According to China**

## **Web-Based Nation Branding of Chinese Culture, Geography and History**

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**Abstract** Confucius Institutes (CIs) are administered by Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), an organisation affiliated to People's Republic of China (PRC)'s Ministry of Education. One of the main stated purposes of Hanban is the promotion and diffusion of Chinese culture and Mandarin language abroad through CIs activity, both cultural and didactic. In this respect, the Confucius Institute Online (CIO) website, with contents available in Chinese, English and other languages, serves as a powerful instrument in pursuing Hanban's mission. As CIs are partially influenced by the PRC Ministry of Education in their policies and activities, they are thus subject to scrutiny on grounds of political motivation and are object of controversy. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate how the CIO website illustrates the main features of Chinese culture, history and geography. In doing so, the present analysis will contribute to a better understanding of the *modus operandi* adopted by Hanban when describing PRC in terms acceptable to PRC itself.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Concept of Soft Power and its Extension to PRC's Cultural Diplomacy Programs. – 3 The Confucius Institute Online Website: Structure and Contents. – 4 The Confucius Institute Online Website: Contents Analysis. – 5 Conclusions.

**Keywords** China. PRC. Cultural diplomacy. Soft power. Web-based charm offensive. Confucius Institutes. Hanban.

## **1 Introduction**

In the first part of this paper, I will present my general theoretical framework, which borrows many of the analytical 'tools' from the conceptual 'toolbox' given by cultural studies (Barker 2012, 108-9). I adhere to the concept of 'soft power' proposed by Nye (2004, 2006) and applied specifically to the Chinese context (2005, 2011, 2012). Secondly, I will describe the main features of the CIO website, with particular attention to the sections that give a defined outlook on Chinese culture, geography, and history. I will dedicate particular attention to the 'Self Learning' and 'Experiencing Culture' sections, being them the richest sections of the CIO website from the point of view of the discursive practice on Chinese

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### **Studi e ricerche 12**

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identity through representation of its own culture, geography and history.<sup>1</sup> The website itself can be intended as a 'discursive' device able to boost the capability to acquire, maintain and increase soft power for PRC. In accordance to this perspective, in the third section of this work I will analyse the website contents with particular attention to the phenomenon of 'orientalism' as described by Said (1978, quoted in Barker 2012) and of 'reorientalism' and 'reorientality' as described by Schmidt (2013). My aim is to give a report on the representation of China's cultural, geographical and historic features that emerge from the CIO website material. This kind of issue could represent the actual Achilles' heel of the whole project, threatening to hinder PRC's attempt to move its charm offensive (Pan 2006; Kurlantzick 2007). On the basis of the results of my analysis, I will offer an evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies applied by Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban)<sup>2</sup> in the construction of the CIO website, as well as the possible heterogenesis of ends to which such an operation could lead.

## 2 The Concept of Soft Power and its Extension to PRC's Cultural Diplomacy Programs

Soft power, as stated by Nye (2011, 11), is a multi-faceted concept and its definition, in a similar way to the one of 'power' and of its manifold forms,<sup>3</sup> "is surprisingly elusive and difficult to measure". In opposition to hard power, this form of influence is more subtle and difficult to grasp and maintain. Soft power is not measurable and is more difficult to be obtained and used in comparison to traditional power. A country's soft power assets lead other parties to define the given country as attractive, potentially admirable and enviable. The principal aim of soft power is to allow its holder to obtain a certain result or outcome without threats, display of economic

1 In this context I will refer to the Foucaultian term 'discourse' and to its productivity in the context of knowledge creation as defined by Barker (2012). Discourse is as an act of production of meanings, definitions and by extent narratives that are considered trustworthy and 'true', due to the role and position of the social actor performing the act itself, might it be a statutory body or a scientific or intellectual elite.

2 'Hanban' is the short common name for 国家汉语国际推广领导小组办公室 *Guojia hanyu guoji tuiguang lingdao xiaozu bangongshi*, officially translated in English as 'Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language'.

3 According to Boulding (1989, 15, as quoted in Nye 2011, 10), "power is the ability to get what we want". A corollary to this definition is given by Nye (2006): "power is the ability to alter the behavior of others to get what you want. There are basically three ways to do that: coercion (sticks), payments (carrots), and attraction (soft power)" (URL <http://foreignpolicy.com/2006/02/23/think-again-soft-power/>) (2013-09-04).

and/or military might, or promise of any other potential retaliation. The other end often does not need to be convinced, as soft power had already prepared a secure path for the achievement of its desired goal. One of the elements that may lead to a soft power increase is a country's economic strength, even though this particular form of power can be used in a way that could be either hard or soft. Among the features that can tentatively be identified as able to guarantee a more reliable source of soft power, culture, political values and foreign policies are amongst the main features that can ensure an increase in a country's soft influence (see Nye 2006).

The government of PRC has stated in many occasions its concern about the issue of soft power and its desire to control its derived influence. In his report to the seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on 15th October 2007, Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and President of the PRC, stated as follows:

In the present era, culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength, and the Chinese people have an increasingly ardent desire for a richer cultural life. We must keep to the orientation of advanced socialist culture, bring about a new upsurge in socialist cultural development, stimulate the cultural creativity of the whole nation, and enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests, enrich the cultural life in Chinese society and inspire the enthusiasm of the people for progress.

On 29th November 2014, Xi Jinping, the current General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and President of the PRC, addressed the members of the Central Foreign Affairs work conferences stressing the importance of soft power for PRC's diplomatic relations (as quoted in Swaine 2015, 8-9):

There is a need to win understanding and support from various countries in the world for the Chinese dream, resolutely maintain territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, safeguard development opportunities and development space, strive to bring about a deep convergence and mutual beneficial cooperative network. At the same time, we need to raise our soft power and tell good stories on China's development.

On this regard, one of the main strategies adopted by the PRC's Government has been the foundation of the Confucius Institutes (Nye 2005; Breslin 2011, 10). Confucius Institutes belong to a non-profit cultural institution regulated and administrated by Hanban, an organisation affiliated

to PRC's Ministry of Education, founded in 2004. The official constitution and by-laws of the Confucius Institutes (Hanban 2014) state that:

Confucius Institutes devote themselves to satisfying the demands of people from different countries and regions in the world who learn the Chinese language, to enhancing understanding of the Chinese language and culture by these peoples, to strengthening educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other countries, to deepening friendly relationships with other nations, to promoting the development of multi-culturalism, and to construct a harmonious world. [...] Adhering to the principles of mutual respect, friendly negotiations, and mutual benefit, the Confucius Institutes shall develop and facilitate the teaching of the Chinese language overseas and promote educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other international communities.

Confucius Institutes operate worldwide, in the same way of other cultural institutions like Dante Alighieri Institutes, Goethe Institutes, Cervantes Institutes and Alliance Française. Each Confucius Institute can collaborate with local schooling institutions in order to found branches called 'Confucius Classrooms'. Confucius Classroom are smaller centres that offer Chinese language and culture courses. At the present time, according to the figures reported in one of the pages of the CIO website, circa 1,100 between Confucius Institutes and Classrooms are registered as active (CIO 2014a). Unlike other cultural institutions, Confucius Institutes have often been met with suspicion. Influenced by the PRC Ministry of Education in their policies and activities (Hartig 2010, 1), Confucius Institutes are thus subject to scrutiny on grounds of political motivation and are object of controversy. The refusal of some universities to host a Confucius Institute in their facility has its base in the concern about the peculiar arbitrariness of the teaching strategies adopted: the fear that such a strong and influential language and culture school could affect the freedom of research induced some universities to decline the offer of funds granted by Hanban. The suspicion or the actual report of human rights violation in the context of hiring practices lead some universities to abandon the partnership with the PRC Ministry of Education (Ramzy 2014). One of the most recent episodes regarding Hanban controversial *modus operandi* is the 'Braga Incident'. What Pan (2006) might have been suggesting as a possible point in the Confucius Institutes Headquarters agenda, the attempt to weaken Taiwan's international cultural influence, became factual when a page regarding the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, based in the Republic of China (ROC), was allegedly torn from many copies of the book of abstracts of the XX Biennial Conference of the European Association of Chinese Studies (EACS), held in Braga and Coimbra (EACS 2014).

In light of the above-mentioned considerations, the following analysis of the official CIO website is a contribution in the general study of Hanban and Confucius Institutes work and, on a wider perspective, of the PRC cultural diplomacy programme and rush for soft power. As stated in the *Confucius Institute Annual Development Report 2014* (Hanban 2015), CIO website registered users were stated around 3,250,000. According to the report, 280,000 students enrolled to at least one of the 24,519 courses and 891 teachers were employed in order to offer a competitive web-based real time didactic service. The necessity of the website analysis is due to the strong potential that such a platform offers in terms of accessibility, ramification and diffusion of both teaching and educational materials. The nature and contents of the said materials can be analysed as the result of a discursive practice in which the producer of the discourse can not only forge the very concept and meaning of 'China' but also spread it through one of the most powerful and accessible means of communication.

### **3 The Confucius Institute Online Website: Structure and Contents**

CIO website is active since 2009 and it has been labelled as "the most expensive website in history": in 2010 the Ministry of Finance of the PRC published a report on the winning bid for the website development and maintenance: its estimated cost was approximately 35.2 million Yuan (5.6 million dollars, almost 5 million euros) (Henochovicz 2012).

Until year 2013, the website URL address was [chinese.cn](http://chinese.cn) and it mainly featured Chinese language materials and Chinese culture educational articles. This version of the CIO website presented itself as a Tower of Babel, offering contents translated in 46 different languages. According to the European Confucius Institutes Conference held in Bologna in May 2013, the number of languages should have been increasing and the website contents should have been available in 57 different languages.

From 2013 on, the online platform has been converted into a learning-oriented portal with the current URL address [chinesecio.com](http://chinesecio.com).

The present version of CIO website offers fewer language options: the languages have been reduced to 7 options (in the order: English, Chinese, French, Korean, Japanese, Russian and Spanish), even if some contents (such as documentaries and short educational articles) are provided in languages not currently listed, for example Thai and German. The general user accessing the website home page can choose between the sections

“Learning Chinese”, “Experiencing Culture” and lastly “More”.<sup>4</sup> This third option gives direct access to a miscellaneous cluster of links such as the news page, the official website blog, information about Hanban and Confucius organised competition ‘Chinese Bridge’, and to a mapping of the Confucius institutes and classrooms. The main body of the home page depicts a bone china teacup with blue decorations filled with green tea, placed on top of an operating laptop computer browsing one of the pages of the website itself. Particular stress is put on the didactic function of the portal, with two buttons that lead directly to the “Live class” and “Self-learning”.

The “Self-learning” section offers a vast selection of short documentaries and reading materials organised either in entire courses or single lessons, and divided into categories: “Difficulty Level”, “Learner Category”, “Format”, “Content Category”, and “Language”. The contents are organised under the following labels: “Culture”, “Travel”, “Business”, “Entertainment”, “Leisure”, “Animation”, “Movies” and “Teaching Resources”.

The “Experiencing Culture” section offers the user the possibility to choose between different sections: “Culture Discovery”; “Culture Courseware”; “Culture Videos”; “Culture Gallery”; “2009-2011 Cultural Resources”. Contents for each section are organised into a wide array of categories: “Food”, “Travel”, “Folk Custom”, “Chinese Kung Fu”, “Drama and Opera”, “Tea and Wine”, “TCM” (Traditional Chinese Medicine), “Literature and Arts”, “People” and “Cultural Heritage”.

The macro section “Culture Discovery” is the richest in number of articles focusing on the main features of China, with regards to its culture, geography and history. Every sub-section offers articles both in Chinese and in the language chosen by the user. In the “Food” section it is possible to peruse a large amount of texts regarding one of the most important and renowned items of Chinese material culture: regional cuisines in all their manifold variety. The “Travel” section offers a wide array of articles introducing the reader to the PRC’s main geographical features: the sub-sections are organised accordingly to geographic areas. Every item offers a general survey on the geographic features of a specific city or area, as well as touristic suggestions about sightseeing opportunities, places of interest and historical sites. The “Folk Custom” section presents a wide selection of articles related to traditional festivals and folk crafts, while the “Chinese Kung Fu” offers an insight into the different schools that keep Chinese martial arts alive. The “Drama and Opera” section features a number of introductory articles about Chinese theatrical arts as well as several synopses of some of the most known traditional plays, such as the Kunqu Opera *The Peony Pavilion* or the Beijing Opera classics. The “Tea

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4 All the assertions in this paragraph and in the following ones, whereas not differently stated, are based on the contents of the CIO website.

and Wine” and “TCM” categories are rich in contents about many highly prominent items of Chinese material culture, from tea and wine production and consumption to theoretical and practical information about traditional Chinese Medicine. The “Literature and Arts” and “People” sections are the most branched ones: the first gives an insight on folk literary, musical, artistic, handicraft and performance arts, while the latter presents a list of historical characters’ biographies, spacing in a time-line that goes from the pre-Qin historical period down to present years. The “Cultural Heritage” section is divided in two different categories: tangible and intangible traditional Chinese culture.

In conclusion, the CIO website offers a platform that presents itself as leviathan in dimensions and potentiality. The educational and didactical material, available for free and in great amounts, could cover every aspect of Chinese geography, history and culture. Hence, theoretically speaking, the platform could well serve as a flawless device for both the purposes to contribute to the PRC’s soft power enhancement on a cultural and diplomatic basis, as well as to pave the ground for discursive practice.

#### **4 The Confucius Institute Online Website: Contents Analysis**

As stated before, the CIO website has been an enormous investment by the PRC’s Ministry of Education and Hanban. The large amount of funds allocated to the development of the web platform has kindled the fire of Chinese netizens’ protest, who argued that the same amount of money could have been directed to other more compelling issues, such as the improvement of the national educational system (Henochowicz 2012). Beside the economical point of view, the CIO website presents other problematic aspects. Technical issues related to the connection are generally a common problem, especially when using free online services. During the virtual fieldwork necessary to the data collection for this paper, I encountered several page-loading problems, both from private and university internet server connection. Whether it is arguable that the connection speed can make the difference if a user tries to access video documents, the loading procedure of a preview page with only small images and text could last several minutes. This kind of issues has persisted throughout the years: I started analysing the CIO website contents in 2013 and, to the present day, I have not detected sensible improvement.

Beside the debatable technicalities, a number of the analysed sections present content-related problems: apparently, there is not a strict update schedule at work. Numerous sections, e.g. the “Tangible Cultural Heritage”, have not new contents since 2014, with the total amount of items available limited to five. These articles present an issue of linguistic nature as well. Considering that the majority of the potential users could approach

any Confucius Institute or their web-based counterpart in order to engage with Chinese culture (Hartig 2010, 7), the lack of translation can prevent the comprehension of any article contents, frustrating its main educational purpose. Although it is not possible to put under scrutiny the nature of the contents and the topics covered in the several articles, the final result is a general heterogenesis of ends.

In the attempt to valorise China's symbolic capital, the content editors of CIO website could not avoid to stumble upon some clichés. According to Schmidt (2013, 656-60), the representation of Chinese culture features hides the inherent peril of actually giving a portrait of an 'idealised Other'. Notwithstanding the positive purpose of offering a good picture of China and 'Chineseness', the outcome ends up being the result of a process of 'reorientalism'. The tendency to keep the description of China's geographical, historical, and cultural features to its very surface creates an idealised and beautified 'front region' (Goffman 1976, 114) that has no connection with the real 'back region' on which it should supposedly be based. Even though it is not realistic to expect from an allegedly government-run cultural agency to confront itself with sensible or problematic topics, a certain inclination to address controversial subjects is detectable only peripherally. There is a tendency to offer a naïve and stereotypical portrait of ethnic minorities that live inside the borders of the PRC, as well as the redefinition of the Country's national borders (CIO 2014b). This kind of cultural divulgation cannot be interpreted as an efficacious way to render the widely praised ethnic cultural variety of PRC's different minorities and it is not an efficacious way to understate an international controversy or to mitigate the general opinion on domestic issues.

To name a significant example, as detectable in (CIO 2006), 'Taiwan' is straightforwardly defined as "台湾省", *Taiwan shen*, literally 'the Province of Taiwan'. The geographical representation of a Country through its border depiction in maps has never been objective and unilateral. With the introduction of satellite cartography, the issues related to border tracing and territorial claims did not get less thorny, to the point that Google company is compelled, due to different territorial laws, to render national borders accordingly to the Country in which the Google Maps service is accessed (Sparkles 2014; Yanofski 2014). Such a statement as a territorial claim finds little resonance or relevance in the context of students' reading material, but is nonetheless conveying controversial and non-verifiable information to possibly unaware users. On the subject of Chinese intangible culture, the selection of featured articles is limited to a few items and has not been updated since 2014 (CIO 2014c). The texts describe (without any translation available) the supposed core-features of folk art and Chinese traditional craftsmanship, namely: the abacus, the shadow puppetry theatre, paper cutting, New Year pictures, and guqin zither. If compared with the analogue section present in the old CIO website, this version is

poorer in contents and the selection of topics confirms the doubts cast by Goffman's work.

These considerations are connected to one of the main problems associated with soft power. According to Nye, a country, in order to obtain and maintain a might of attraction, must in the first place respond to a requirement of consistency. In Nye's words, "what China seems not to appreciate is that using culture and narrative to create soft power is not easy when they are inconsistent with domestic realities" (Nye 2012). Even if there is not a direct backfire to the PRC's choices on how to promote its indisputable cultural prominence, these very strategies achieve far less than could be expected.

## 5 Conclusions

Soft power is the ability or possibility to alter another party's behaviour without recurring to a display of hard power, which is instead a more tangible and quantifiable mean of direct or indirect coercion, for instance through military or economic might. Soft power can be acquired in different ways. A Country willing to enhance its soft power can do so by developing and strengthening its cultural diplomatic strategies, although this is not the only required element. Political values and fair foreign policies are other components that might grant to a Country a great asset of soft power when combined with cultural attractiveness.

The PRC's Government is no stranger to the concept of soft power, and in the last decade has shown itself willing to gain and use such form of influence. With regards to cultural diplomacy and valorization, a huge effort has been made in order to make Chinese culture more relevant and diffuse its features worldwide. Since 2004, the Confucius Institutes and Classrooms project has been one of the means through which Chinese language and culture have been made more popular and more accessible in almost every Country. While the number of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms surpasses a thousand units by now, the whole project has been backed by an online platform, the CIO website since 2009. This website provides original contents and teaching materials for both educational and cultural purposes.

In 2010 the Hanban/Confucius Institutes online counterpart has been labelled as one the most expensive websites in the world. Its contents are, as a matter of fact, almost uncountable and written articles, short documentaries and photographic material cover a wide variety of topics. Although the potentiality of such a gigantic website are easy to appreciate, a number of features make it far less efficient than it could be.

The geographical, historical, and cultural features presented in the contents of this web-based archive are not immune to the general critiques

moved to Hanban. While the foundation of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms is under scrutiny due to the domestic and foreign issues connected to the PRC itself, the contents of CIO website resonate with the same problems. Moreover, a critique can be moved on the basis of a process of constant 'reorientalism' and beautification of a shaky 'front region'.

In a wider perspective, soft power cannot be achieved on the ground of only one of its basic elements. Without the will to question the importance of a Country's cultural credit to the world, the lack of consistency between the idealized picture of China given by Hanban/Confucius Institutes and the stance of the PRC in both domestic and foreign issues cannot lead to an actual gain of soft power.

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# **How to Carve Out a Town** **A Multi-Level Perspective** **on Hanoi's Japanese Quarter**

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**Abstract** Between Kim Ma, Dao Tan and Linh Lang streets, in the central district of Ba Dinh in Hanoi, lies what has been called a 'Japanese quarter' (*nihonjin gai*). The aim of this paper is to shed light, based on qualitative analysis, on the dynamics that led to the formation of a 'Japanese' neighbourhood and the response of the local community as a result of the government of Japan's cultural policies and thriving economic and diplomatic relations.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Expatriate Communities: Encountering Resistance or Adaptation? – 3 The Ba Dinh 'Japanese Town'. – 4 The impact of Doi Moi and Globalisation on Hanoi's Urban and Social Architecture – 5 Japan's Successful Nation Branding in Vietnam. – 6 The Strengthening of Japan-Vietnam Relations. – 7 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Cultural policy. Japan. Hanoi. Vietnam. Development cooperation.

## **1 Introduction**

The so-called 'Japanese quarter' (*nihonjin gai*) lies between Kim Ma, Dao Tan and Linh Lang streets, in the central district of Ba Dinh in Hanoi. The area is strategic: as a matter of fact, it is close to two major business hotels and diplomatic facilities such as the Japanese embassy and, furthermore, it is convenient to reach both the city centre and the outskirts where many Japanese firms have their branches and manufacturing plants.

In the last few years, Japanese restaurants, hotels, supermarkets, service apartments, night clubs and agencies that provide services to the Japanese community have proliferated here, mainly as a consequence of the increased Japanese presence (in particular, people and capitals) in Vietnam and in the country's capital (MOFA 2016b). This paper discusses the birth of the Kim Ma Japanese neighbourhood from a social, cultural and political point of view. How, and to what extent, have flourishing bilateral relations between Japan and Vietnam, combined with the success of Japanese institutions' cultural initiatives in Asia, reshaped the geography

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### **Studi e ricerche 12**

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of a local community in downtown Hanoi? Contrary to other cases in the history of expatriate communities (Cohen 1977), as matter of fact, the Japanese presence in Kim Ma, a relatively poor suburb that is now the object of urban redevelopment projects, does not appear to have raised any opposition from the local community; rather, it has caused the local community to react promptly to the demand of new services and, therefore, to adapt to it.

## 2 Expatriate Communities: Encountering Resistance or Adaptation?

Today Hanoi Ba Dinh district hosts what is known as the city's *nihonjingai* or 'Japanese quarter'. Even though Japanese settlements are not new to Vietnam – in the seventeenth century, there was one in Hoi An –, this more recent phenomenon might be analysed in light of the growing economic and political interdependence between Vietnam and Japan since the early 2000s. Even though the number of Japanese residents is not so high as to justify the existence of a Japanese quarter or even 'Town', Ba Dinh's 'Japanese quarter' is a pretty unique case. Along with Trung Hoa-Nhan Chinh 'Koreatown' in the southwestern peri-urban area of the capital, as a matter of fact, Hanoi's Ba Dinh 'Japanese quarter' appears one of the few ethnically and culturally connoted areas in the Vietnamese capital today.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, contrary to other Southeast Asian capitals and large cities such as Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, and Ho Chi Minh City, where the Chinese diaspora has been more substantial than elsewhere (Mathew 2012), Hanoi does not have a Chinatown.

The case of Hanoi's Ba Đình "Japanese town" appears to be differ from other areas inhabited by communities of foreign citizens, as the above mentioned "Koreatown". Here "clusterization" and "exclusion" have not been observed. In fact, the Ba Dinh "Japanese town" does not appear to be completely "gated" or "edged" from outside. Geographically, then, the Japanese quarter is located in relatively central position. Lastly, it has been possible to identify local actors actively trying to promote Japanese expatriate's integration in Hanoi.

Cohen (1977) offered a generalisation of the so-called 'expatriate communities'. Expatriates might be defined as voluntary migrants who decide to move abroad for business, diplomatic reasons, study or research, or leisure and are, thus, 'transient' in the host country. They do not see their

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1 The colonial French Quarter, built under the French Protectorate of Indochina, might be considered to be the precursor of such expatriate communities, but for reasons of conciseness will not be part of the disquisition.

careers inextricably bound to the place where they go or, in case they are employed in a multinational company, are sent. However, they represent their country's interest in the host country. When in the host country, expatriates "carve out for themselves - or have carved out for them - an ecological sub-system of their own" (Cohen 1977, 77) that separates them from the host society. Expatriates communities are, as a matter of fact, almost totally exclusive of members of the host societies and, for this reason, their social relations are mostly confined to co-nationals or local élites. On the other hand, members of the host society may perceive expatriates as the symbol of continuous disparities between the developed and underdeveloped world (10) and become the target of the hostility of local nationalist elites.

The fact that they are, wittingly or unwittingly, engaged in the creation and perpetuation of dependency relationships means that they often represent interests opposed to those of the host country and may, therefore, become a party to a structural conflict over and above that generated by their personal demeanour. (72)

In light of these facts, the present paper will address the following research questions: why did the presence of a community of Japanese expatriates in Ba Dinh not cause any apparent opposition or hostility from the local community, but rather adaptation to it?

Some events at the macro-level (in particular, the strengthening of Japan-Vietnam relations in the last decade) might have affected the emergence of phenomena on the micro-level (the formation of a 'Japanese quarter' in central Hanoi). In other words, in this paper it will be argued that the absence (so far) of opposition from the local community might be attributed to a) the Japanese government 'charm offensive' in strategic states in Southeast Asia; b) internal transformations of the urban, cultural and social environment of Vietnam's capital; and c) the strengthening of the Japan-Vietnam diplomatic and economic relations. The fact that nationalistic resistance against expatriates and foreign properties has emerged in recent years, following international disputes involving Vietnam and a third country, reinforces this hypotheses (e.g., the anti-China riots in 2014).

### 3 The Ba Dinh ‘Japanese Town’<sup>2</sup>

Since 2012 the number of Japanese nationals entering Vietnam has been on the rise. As data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) show, Vietnam has been among the countries that have seen a major increase in the presence of Japanese nationals in the last five years, +20.2 percent in 2012 and an average of 8-9 percent in the following years.<sup>3</sup> The number of Japanese residents in Vietnam has consequently increased soaring up to 14,695 individuals in 2016, up from the 9,313 registered in 2012. A third of them live in the capital.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the number of Japanese tourists has also grown to more than 740 thousand individuals in 2016, up by 110 percent from 2015.<sup>5</sup>

In this context it might be possible to place the development of the Ba Dinh ‘Japanese quarter’. The area attracts mainly Japanese expatriates, mostly men, assigned to Hanoi for a mid to long-term period. The area has also become very popular with Japanese men on business trips to Hanoi. However, contrary to the above-mentioned ‘gated communities’ and KDT-Ms, Hanoi’s *nihonjin gai* (or ‘Japanese Town’ as it is called by Vietnam’s English-language news outlets)<sup>6</sup> is integrated in the existing streetscape of

2 Information included in this paragraph have been collected through direct observation, unstructured interviews and informal conversations with hotel and shop employees of the area as well as Japanese expatriates. Other information have been retrieved in Japanese language free-press publications such as *Sketch Vietnam* and *Sketch Vietnam Pro*, which are distributed at the entrance of hotels and supermarkets of the area and provide Japanese expatriates with news and practical information on daily life in Vietnam.

3 Even though the number of Japanese residents in Vietnam is relatively low (14,695), the increase on annual base is notable. According to the MOFA survey, other countries where the Japanese presence has numerically increased in the same period are South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and France (MOFA 2016b).

4 This is an estimate based on MOFA’s latest available data (2012) on the Japanese residents in Hanoi. On a total expatriate population of 9,313, more than 3,600 people were registered in Hanoi by the Japanese authorities. It is fair to say, then, that with the general increase of Japanese residents in Vietnam, the ratio of Japanese nationals in Vietnam has, adopting a conservative approach, remained stable, if not increased.

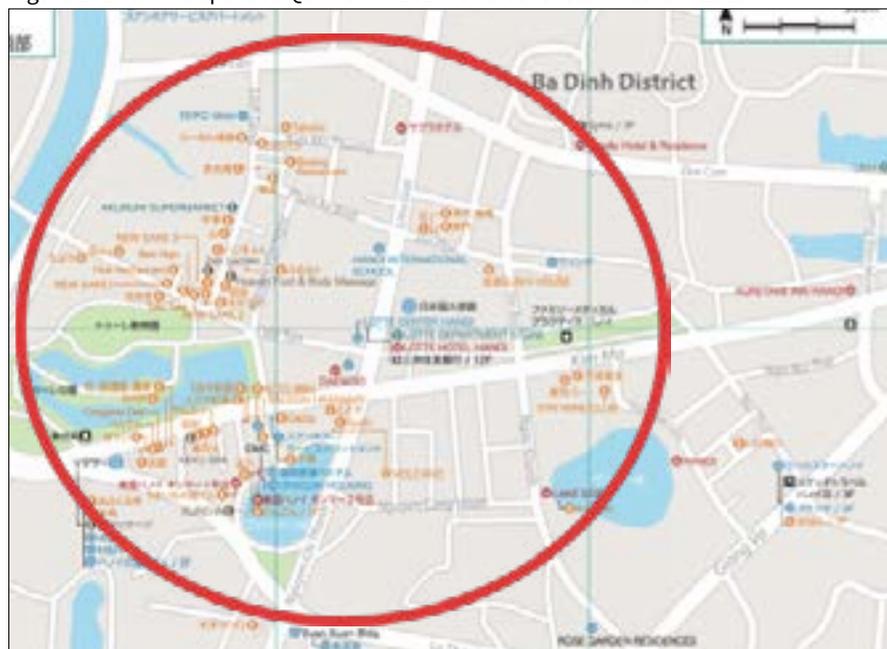
5 With more than 10 million touristic presences at the end of 2016, international tourism to Vietnam has grown steadily since 2012. Tourism from neighbouring China is the main drive behind it (2.9 million entries were registered in 2016), but tourism from South Korea (1.54 million entries) and Japan (740,592), have been on the rise. See Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Tourism Statistics-International Visitors to Vietnam: <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/cat/1501/1> (2017-10-05).

6 The term ‘Japanese town’ is, as a matter of fact, not official, given its scattered nature and its relative newness. It might be found online, in English in local news websites as the English-language VietNamNet (<http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/business/124036/hanoi--a-peaceful-land-for-expats-to-live-and-do-business.html> (2016-01-18) or in Japanese (ハノイの日本人町, *Hanoi no nihonjin machi*) as in Azumaya Hotel (a Japanese-style business hotel’s website) ([http://azumayavietnam.com/concept-3/#\\_](http://azumayavietnam.com/concept-3/#_)) (2016-01-24).

a Western neighbourhood of the Ba Dinh District. Its main road, Kim Ma, is one of the major communication route - Lieu Giai - connecting the capital's city centre to the Noi Bai International Airport. Its boundaries are constituted by the alleys of Doi Can to the North, La Than to the South, Tran Huy Lieu and Van Bao to the East and the riverside alley of Buoi to the West. The area is roughly 8 square kilometres wide.

For its strategical position in the Western part of the city, in the last two decades the area has become economically and diplomatically important. The Daewoo Hotel, opened in 1996, along with the Daeha Business Center, has attracted both businessmen and tourists from abroad. The Korean-owned Lotte Center, opened in September 2014, is one of the favourite shopping and leisure destinations for expatriates and the local upper-middle class. The area also accommodates among the others, the Embassies of Australia and Japan, two major aid donors of the SRVN. As a result, it is not rare to meet foreigners, especially expatriates and tourists, in this area, among local inhabitants. Figure 1 has a map of the Ba Dinh *nihonjin gai*. Coloured in orange are Japanese restaurants and bars in the area; in red hotels and in blu housing services and other points of interest (such as the Japanese embassy, the International School and the Lotte Center with a hotel, a branch of the Mitsui Sumitomo Bank, and a big supermarket selling imported foodstuff). Finally, in brown are identified entertainment spots, like spa, karaoke, kyabakura (Japanese style night clubs) and message parlours.

Figure 1. Ba Dinh 'Japanese Quarter' in 2016. Source: Sketch Vietnam 2016



While Kim Ma and Lieu Giai are now major traffic routes overlooked by a few modern buildings (as the Daewoo Hotel or the RMIT University building on the opposite side of the road), the core of the Japanese quarter lies in Linh Lang, a small street that cuts through a modest and still underdeveloped neighbourhood. At the time of the visit (January 2016) – beside newly built four-floor apartment blocks, shops and services for the expatriate community – the area still presented unpaved roads and shanty houses. During daytime, a local market on Linh Lang contributes to the liveliness of the area.

Such a diverse and contrasting urban landscape might be the result of a period of suburban expansion and alterations to the existing housing facilities during the building boom of the early and late '90s (Ho Dinh Duan, Shibayama 2009). The construction of new high-standard residential complexes in formerly agricultural areas caused the growth of the urban area and the development of a peri-urban zone that started to attract urban élites<sup>7</sup> (such as people in key positions in the public administration, in public and private firms, professionals) and resulted in a mixing of social groups (Welch Drummond 2012, 82-85).

The area's urban development is, as a matter of fact, still quite recent and might be traced back to the late '90s and early 2000s. In this period, the Vietnamese government identified the real estate as a strategic economic sector that could attract more foreign capital into the SRVN. To this end, in 2003 a new land law<sup>8</sup> was enforced in order to include authorised foreign firms and institutions and Vietnamese nationals living abroad among the subjects entitled to apply for land use. As a result of this new regulation and of subsequent decrees empowering local People Committees on the issues of land leasing, allocation and price determination, between 2007 and 2008 half of all the SRVN's inward FDI flowed indeed to the real estate sector (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Vietnam 2007; Provost, Kennard 2016; *Than Nien News* 2015; VILAF 2009). In July 2014 the Vietnamese government further relaxed existing rules on foreign ownership of houses and apartments. Previously, only foreign nationals or operators that the local authorities deemed able to contribute to the SRVN's national development were allowed to buy prop-

7 In their study on post-communist Russia, Hughes, John and Sasse (2002) define urban élites as a social grouping holding a high degree of influence in its society (thus having a commensurate quantity of resources available). This group is "composed of people who have key positions in powerful organisations, such as private firms, business associations, local/regional governments and administrations and central/state government agencies. Even though the elite often can be fragmented and divided, it usually acts as a single organism, sharing values and framing public policies" (John, Hughes, Sasse 2002, 398).

8 Vietnam's Land Law can be consulted at: <http://www.vietnamlaws.com/freelaws/Lw13na26Nov03Land%5BX2865%5D.pdf> (2017-10-06).



Figure 2. Ba Dinh ‘Japanese Quarter’ in 2006

erties in the country. With the 2014 law, this constraint was abolished (*Than Nien News* 2015).

No public records on the development of the Ba Dinh ‘Japanese town’ could be retrieved. However, basing the analysis on informed interviews and secondary sources, it has been possible to trace its origins. Two maps (one issued in 2006 and the other one in 2016) provided by *Sketch Vietnam*, a magazine for Japanese expatriates in Vietnam, offered some elements to the analysis. As a matter of fact, it might be possible to say that the first Japanese dining and leisure facilities were in place already in 2006. Figure 2 provides an overview on the area of the Ba Dinh Japanese quarter in 2006.

According to the map, Japanese restaurants (signed in orange) were only 6 against the dozens identifiable in figure 1. On top of it, the lack of housing facilities, such as serviced apartments, excluding the already mentioned Daewoo Hotel, is remarkable. As figure 2 shows, in 2006 the Japanese establishments were concentrated on the main alley of Kim Ma. It was only after 2010 that it extended to Linh Lang and surroundings. Here, in 2010, a Japanese food retailer, Akuruhi Supermarket, opened. The company was established in 1998 in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) by a Vietnamese entrepreneur, Phan Thanh Tan. The shop supplied imported Japanese food and seafood to Japanese restaurants and hotels in HCMC

and in the country. The company succeeded in its business and opened a branch in Hanoi. The shop retains its functions as supplier of imported groceries to local Japanese restaurants and hotels. According to Akuruhi workers interviewed during the visit in January 2016, the supermarket also attracts Japanese expatriates living in the area and the local middle class. It can be said that groceries and comestibles imported directly from Japan are, as a matter of fact, considered to be safer and better than those sold by local retailers to the local residents interviewed during the research. At any rate, the opening of Akuruhi might have contributed to the expansion of the 'Japanese town' toward Linh Lang.

The increasing inflow of Japanese expatriates to the area has spurred a new demand for accommodation and services. Newly built complexes of serviced apartments and hotels for Japanese on business trip proliferated. Rents and room fees are respectively around 1,000 USD and 50 USD per night, well above what would be commensurate to the average Vietnamese GNI per capita of 1,890 USD (WB 2014). At the same time, private agencies started to act as intermediaries between the Japanese community and local landowners and institutions, managing apartments or helping Japanese expatriates fulfil bureaucratic procedures.

Companies like Hanoi Living (owned by the Osaka-based realtor Daiwa Real Estate) or Owl Culture offer this kind of support, employing Japanese nationals or Japanese-speaking Vietnamese nationals. They aim to reduce the 'Vietnam risk', i.e. the problems connected with the difficulties to adapt to the new life abroad, which Japanese expatriates might experience during their stay in the country, providing information and services (Hanoi Living 2014). Owl Culture was established in 2015 by a Vietnamese woman in her twenties with three-year experience as a student in Japan. The agency offers information and support concerning life in Hanoi (e.g. finding a housemaid, uncontaminated food, as well as visa applications for family reunifications), Vietnamese language courses and field trips outside the capital for its members, in the spirit of fostering the integration of Japanese expatriates in the local community.

#### **4 The Impact of Doi Moi and Globalisation on Hanoi's Urban and Social Architecture**

Scholars agree that the market-oriented reforms of the Doi Moi (renovation) period (1986-87) accelerated Vietnam's modernisation and internationalization and propelled the country's rapid economic growth (Waibel 2004; Beresford 2008; Fforde 2009; Cling, Razafindrakoto, Roubaud 2013). This period of reforms and quick economic growth had an impact on Vietnamese cities and on the capital's urban and social landscape. Waibel

(2004), in particular, put it in the context of the historical evolution of the city from the colonial period up until recent times. Both under the French rule in the late XIX and early XX centuries and in the period of state economic planning (a period of approximately three decades between 1954 and 1986), the city underwent several transformations, e.g. the creation of spacial divisions between the French and native areas or, later, the construction of uniform residential areas outside the Ancient Quarter on the Soviet model (Waibel 2004, 33-5). After 1986, the new market-oriented economic policies further spurred the city's growth that started attracting foreign and domestic investors.

Vietnam's economic growth has spurred consumption and accelerated social mobility (ADB-Asian Development Bank 2010; Welch Drummond, Thomas 2003; Kharas 2011). The early and mid-'90s saw the rise of a "salaried urban middle class" formed by "mixed incomes" families where at least one component worked in the public and the other in the private sectors (Fforde 2003, 50). In the following years, the process of economic opening continued having an impact on the social and urban architecture of the city: a social grouping constituted by highly educated professionals with a relatively above-average income level has emerged, their social status being defined by a common set of consumption habits (King 2008, 96).

New needs and demands were put forward as this upper-middle class emerged through the early 2000s. The government responded planning 'new urban areas', or *khu do thi moi* (KDTM), integrating housing and commercial spaces, in peripheral areas of Vietnam's capital. The building of KDTMs in the '90s was a centrally planned process seeking to respond to the demands of a privileged segment of the urban population interested in "capturing the rent" of the redevelopment of periurban areas (Boudreau, Labbé 2011, 219). As a matter of fact, the development of KDTMs in Hanoi has favoured "dynamics of exclusion" of the local communities in light of growing economic disparities across the Vietnamese society resulting, for instance, in the rise of the so-called "gated communities" (288). These might be defined as self-sufficient housing and commercial compounds built in suburban areas in the proximity of major transport routes and business infrastructures. Examples of "gated communities" have been observed all over in Asia since the late '80s. Citing the cases of other metropolitan centres in Southeast Asia such as Bangkok, Singapore and Jakarta, Rimmer and Dick (1998) argue that the gated communities have emerged as a countermeasure against any form of 'social discomfort' that might derive from the coexistence with other ethnic and racial groups in urban environments. Apart from attracting the local new rich, KDTMs have attracted communities of expatriates. This phenomenon was not new nor peculiar to Hanoi. Wu and Webber (2004) have in fact described the "clustering", i.e. the isolation from the existing local urban architecture, of foreign housing in the northeastern and eastern parts of Beijing. Here, the

increasing demand for expatriate housing in the late '90s and early 2000s led to a transition towards a "new spatial order" (Webber, Wu 2004, 212) of the city reflecting the unequal distribution of economic means among the local and expatriate communities (2004, 212).

An example of "gated communities" in Hanoi is the Ciputra International City apartment complex, built on a former farmland in the northeastern part of the city by the Indonesian realtor Ciputra, with a built-in school and winery, the Ecopark, in an area lying West to the capital. The extra-luxury compound will be completed in 2020 and will offer its residents a private university (Provost, Kennard 2016). Another example is, to a certain extent, the so-called 'Koreatown', a borough lying in Trung Hoa-Nhan Chinh District, some 20 km outside Hanoi's city centre. The area is dominated by the Keangnam Landmark Tower, a seventy-storey tall tower built by a consortium of the South Korea-based realtor Keangnam and South Korean Woori Bank for an investment of slightly more than one billion USD. It features apartments, a five-star hotel, offices and retail spaces and is to date the tallest building in the Indochinese peninsula (*Korea Times* 2007, *VietNamNet* 2012).

## 5 Japan's Successful Nation Branding in Vietnam

Beside the development of peri-urban areas to host Hanoi's affluent classes, the birth of a Japanese quarter in central Hanoi has much to do with the success of Japanese culture in Vietnam. In the last decade, Japanese culture promotion organisations such as the Japan Foundation (JF) have been very active in 'branding' Japan in order to create a 'competitive identity' through the promotion of export (tangible and intangible) products in the attempt to expand its influence abroad with possible political and economic returns (Anholt 2009).

The JF opened a branch in Hanoi only in recent years. The Japan Foundation Center for Cultural Exchange in Vietnam (*Betonamu Nihon bunka kōryū sentā*) was established in 2008 as the fifth JF centre for cultural exchange in Southeast Asia. The main task of the Center is to support Japanese language education in Vietnam. Beside offering on-site language courses for students of all ages, the Center has dispatched Japanese language experts in the country and promoted training sessions for local teachers. In cooperation with the Vietnamese Ministry of Education, the JF has been supporting Japanese language teaching in high schools through a ten-year project. In addition, the centre has promoted cooperation with research institutes dealing with Japanese studies and offers a wide range of cultural activities such as stage performances, art exhibitions and film festivals (JF, 2012). JF data show that in 2012 the number of learners of Japanese in Vietnam amounted to more than 46 thousand people, up by

more than 50% from 2006. A total 47% of them learn Japanese in school or university, while more than half learn Japanese independently (JF 2012, 2014).<sup>9</sup> Japanese Student Service Organization (JASSO)'s data reveal that the number of Vietnamese nationals entering Japan have steadily increased from 2005. The most notable increase is that of Vietnamese students enrolled in Japanese institutions of higher education. In 2004 they were slightly more than 1,500 people while in 2014 the figure was up to 11,174 and in 2015 (latest data available) 20,131. In 2015, the SRVN became the second largest provider of foreign students in Japanese Universities after the People's Republic of China (PRC). Also notable is the rising number (18,751) of Vietnamese nationals studying Japanese in language schools in Japan in 2015 (JCCI 2016).<sup>10</sup>

Several initiatives of PR and promotion of Japanese goods have been taken by Japanese trade associations and by the Japanese government under the 'Cool Japan Initiative'. In recent years, the Japanese government has doubled its efforts to promote centrally directed cultural policy initiatives as an integral part of the country's growth strategy. In June 2010 a Creative Industries Promotion Office was established within the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) in order to promote Japanese 'cultural industries' such as design, animation, fashion and movies abroad. The ideas behind the establishment of the Office were that of supporting these sectors as the driving force towards "the nation's future economic growth" and, at the same time, that of counterbalancing China's and South Korea's more assertive (and onerous) cultural policies (*Japan Times* 2010). In December 2012, the initiative was included in the new Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government's comprehensive growth strategy. Prime Minister Abe Shinzō appointed LDP Policy Research Council Director Inada Tomomi as Minister in charge of 'Cool Japan' Strategy. The cabinet then launched a Cool Japan Promotion Committee in 2013 and a 37.5 billion JPY public-private fund (The Cool Japan Fund). The aim of the Japanese administration was to support a comprehensive marketization of "Japan-specific goods and culture as a whole" (*Nikkei shimbun* 2014), such as food, rice wine and manufactured goods, or cars and consumer electronics, fashion, as well as 'contents', e.g. anime or computer games abroad (METI 2014). In January 2016, METI and PR Agency Vector launched a business matching initiative for Japanese businesses looking for local partners for investments in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). On the sideline of the event, a Cool Japan Pavilion was set up in order to exhibit Japanese products,

9 See for details *Nihon kokusai kōryū kikin* (2014) (URL <https://www.jpff.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/area/country/2014/vietnam.html>) (2016-02-26).

10 Data available online at URL <http://www.jcci.or.jp/international/latest-reports/2016/0711094914.html> (2017-02-12). See also JCCI 2015.

arts and crafts (Cool Japan World Trial 2016). HCMC is also the venue of a three-day Japan-Vietnam Fest dedicated to cosplay, anime and manga (*Vietnam Bridge News* 2016). Every year in Hanoi, instead, the Japanese Business Association in Vietnam (JBAV) offers support to groups willing to organise various events, featuring Japanese street food, folk dances and musical performances in Vietnam's major cities.

It might be said that such PR activism might have succeeded in their aim. Recent reputation surveys have, as a matter of fact, shown that a 'positive view' is shared by a majority of Vietnamese. A 2016 MOFA-Ipsos survey<sup>11</sup> targeted at 10 ASEAN countries, including Vietnam, reveals that 88% of Vietnamese consider Japan a friendly country. In addition, a strong 41% consider Japan as a more reliable country than the US and Russia (20%). Only the 2% of the respondents declared to trust China. In particular, a majority of Vietnamese respondents (75%) consider Japan as a crucial economic ally for Vietnam while a 60% of the respondents admitted to being fascinated by Japan's culture. Specifically, most Vietnamese (67%) are interested in Japanese lifestyle and thinking, Japanese cuisine (59%), and tea ceremony (58%). 45% of interviewees declared to be interested in manga and architecture, while only 38% was interested in Japanese animation. Japanese language is also popular among the other foreign languages and has a higher number of perspective students than Chinese and Korean (30% and 22% respectively) (MOFA-Ipsos 2016, 17-33).<sup>12</sup>

## 6 The Strengthening of Japan-Vietnam Relations

The success of Japanese culture in Vietnam can hardly be considered a coincidence. Instead, it can be seen as a consequence of the strengthening of the bilateral relations. Since the early '90s, Vietnam has attracted capitals in form of aid and investment from Japan. After the opening of the Vietnamese market in the late '80s, Japanese goods – especially cheap electric home appliances, motorbikes and cars – started being shipped to Vietnam. As seen above, in the early 2000s, also cultural exchanges – mostly from Japan to Vietnam – grew. More recently, the Japanese Vietnamese partnership was further energised after the emergence of subsequent territorial spats with the People's Republic of China. These factors combined have contributed to the rise of a widespread popular appreciation of Japan. In

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11 The survey involved 3,055 respondents (roughly 300 people per country) living in major cities in the ASEAN region, aged 18-59.

12 Similar results are provided by Dentsu's 'Japan Brand Survey', a study conducted on 4,000 people from 20 countries, aged 20-59. Vietnam appears to be the second most favourable country toward Japan, only after Thailand. Regarding cultural products, Japanese robotics has taken over food, cuisine, anime and manga (Dentsu 2016).

this paragraph, an overview of the strengthening relations between Japan and Vietnam will be provided. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRVN) has been among the top four recipients of Japan's aid only since 2001. Japanese Official Development Assistance has provided around 1.2 trillion yen to Vietnam since 2009 (fig. 3). Japan's aid initiatives in Vietnam are aimed at a) carrying out loan-based infrastructural and poverty reduction projects; b) grant assistance to scholarships and environment-linked projects; c) technical cooperation (MOFA, 2014).<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 3. Japan's ODA to Vietnam 2009-2014 (in 100 million yen)**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Loan Aid</b>	<b>Grant Aid</b>	<b>Technical Cooperation</b>	<b>Total year</b>
<b>2009</b>	1456,13	35,11	88,21	1579,45
<b>2010</b>	865,68	35,54	85,50	986,72
<b>2011</b>	2700,38	55,20	123,97	2879,55
<b>2012</b>	2029,26	17,20	102,97	2149,43
<b>2013</b>	2019,85	14,65	102,78	2137,28
<b>2014</b>	1124,14	1481	76,67	2681,81
<b>Total</b>				<b>12414,24</b>

Source: MOFA 2016

The impact of Japanese ODA on the Vietnamese economy became apparent in 1992, when Tokyo offered Hanoi a 370 million US \$ bilateral aid package after a fifteen-year hiatus.<sup>14</sup> It came at the height of a period of market-oriented reforms, known as *Doi Moi*, launched under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam Secretary General Nguyen Van Linh, and the normalisation of diplomatic relations with the world. The most critical achievement of the 'Renovation' period was perhaps the end of a two-decade-long US-imposed trade embargo. In 1995, less than a year after, Vietnam joined ASEAN and secured a stronger relationship

**13** In detail, among a) projects are National Highway N.1, North-South Express way, Hanoi's Noi Bai airport, power plants, etc.; among b) projects: Poverty Reduction Support Credit, Human Resource Development Scholarship; Afforestation in Central and South Vietnam; among c) projects: training in food, education, public health and fund management sectors. Further details on the entity of Japanese aid in Vietnam can be found on Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs website at the link: <http://web.archive.org/web/20160222020845/http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/data/pdfs/vietnam.pdf> (2017-02-09).

**14** Japan had provided war reparations to South Vietnam and aid to North Vietnam (the present-day SRVN) since 1973, when the two countries normalised their diplomatic relations. Japan eventually suspended aid to Vietnam in 1979, after rising tensions between the SRVN and Cambodia. However, Japan had remained one of the few non-Communist countries that maintained diplomatic relations with the SRVN despite the 1975 US embargo, in the hope that they could serve as a 'bridge' with the US. See Shiraiishi 1990.

with Japan and other south-east Asian countries. In 1998, Vietnam became member of the APEC and finally, in 2007, after lengthy negotiations, the country entered the WTO, thus ensuring fairer access for Vietnam exports to the international market (Kokko 1998, 319-21). In the meantime, in 2003 the Vietnamese government published its Comprehensive Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction (CSGPR), a document establishing the socio-economic measures the country would have promoted in order to spur economic growth and reduce poverty.<sup>15</sup> The country started attracting foreign investments. Japan has been among the top investors in the country with South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. As shown in fig. 4, Japanese FDI to Vietnam have been on the rise since 2006 with a peak of approximately 3.3 billion US dollars in 2013. In 2013 and 2014, the volume of investments has decreased and stabilised at 1.6-1.3 billion USD (JETRO 2016). The most important Japanese investor in Vietnam is SE, a construction company that won the bid to build the Bach Dang Bridge on the Ha Long-Hai Phong Highway Project (JICA 2016).

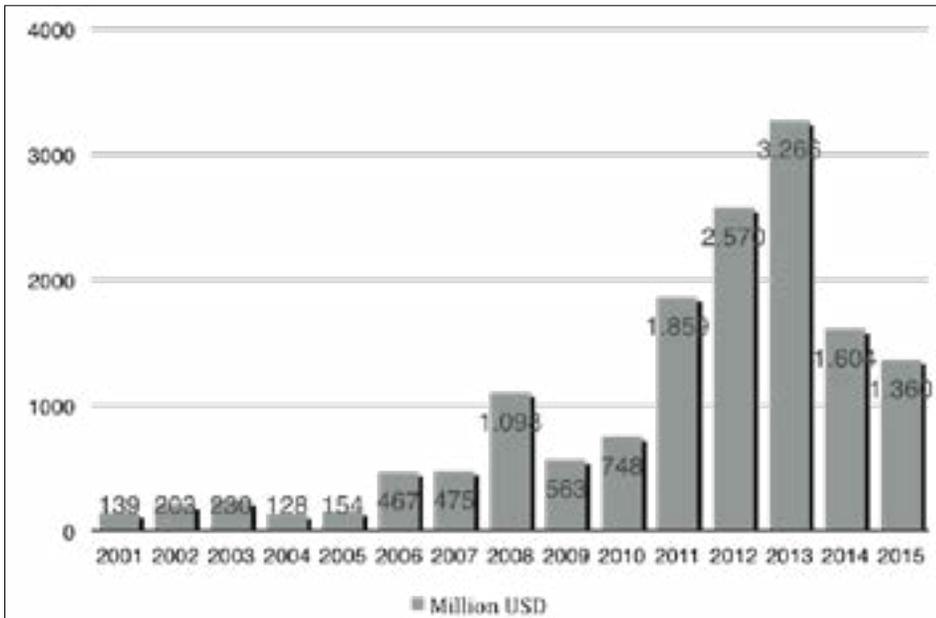


Figure 4. Japan’s FDI to Viet Nam (2001-2015). Source: JETRO 2016

15 This document, drafted in accordance with the World Bank (WB), helped Vietnam to keep the flow of aid from the WB and multilateral donors stable.

Along with economic exchanges, several political acts have shaped Japan-Vietnam bilateral relations in the last decade. The starting point of a strategic partnership between the two countries might be found in the Japan-Vietnam Joint Initiative launched in 2003 under the Koizumi administration. The rising role of Vietnam as a strategic international partner for Japan was stressed by the signing of a Joint Statement toward a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia between VN's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzō in October 2006. The document underlined the importance of a coordinated effort to promote economic cooperation and mutual understanding through cultural exchanges and scientific cooperation (MOFA 2006).

The 2006 mutual agreement was revived under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)'s Kan administration in October 2010 (the decade-long dispute on the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, the Senkaku-Diaoyu dispute in 2012, and the Haiyang Shiyou 981 standoff in 2014). These events have contributed to reinvigorating and expanding the partnership including areas like Defense and National Security.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, they have revived hostile sentiments towards China in many sectors of the Vietnamese society. In May 2014, after a Chinese oil rig was moved close the disputed Paracel Islands, major riots erupted across Vietnam. The turmoil resulted in the killing of 21 people and in damages to more than 350 production sites, mostly Taiwanese-owned (*South China Morning Post* 2014). Nearly 1,000 Chinese citizens were, however, repatriated in the aftermath Anti-Chinese demonstration in major cities, since Hanoi and HCMC had to be removed in order to avoid further incidents (*The Guardian* 2014).

Having itself economic interests in the South China Sea, namely for trade routes and raw material supply, Japan has in recent years expressed its support to Vietnam and pledged cooperation in order for the latter to build up Vietnam's coast patrolling capabilities (Drifte 2016,18).

<sup>16</sup> The complete statement of the Japan-Viet Nam Joint Statement on the Establishment of the Extensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000031617.pdf> (2016-02-28). It might be worth noting that for Japan the agreement was signed by Abe Shinzō, who in his first term as Japanese PM promoted the 2006 Partnership. Back in power in 2012, Abe also decided to pay his first official visit to Vietnam in January 2013. In an interview with the Vietnamese newspaper *Tuoi Tre*, he stressed that one of the reasons behind his decision were Japan and Vietnam's "common concerns" in Asia Pacific (probably referring to China's growing assertiveness in the area) and the importance of Vietnam as one of Japan's strategic partner in south-east Asia. The Japanese PM also cited his personal friendship with Vietnamese PM Nguyen Tan Dung (*Tuoi Tre* 2013, URL <http://tuoitrenews.vn/politics/6406/japan-pm-on-why-he-chose-vietnam-for-1st-visit>) (2017-10-05).

## 7 Conclusion

This article has attempted to justify the popularity of Japanese culture looking at linkages between micro-level phenomena at a national and local level (such as the emergence of a Japanese quarter in Hanoi) with macro-level events at a global scale (Japanese central cultural policies, diplomatic agreements based on common gains and the perception of common threats between the governments of Japan and Vietnam).

In other words, the emergence of a *nihonjingai* in Hanoi is better understood in the context of radical economic, social and urban changes ushered in by the Doi Moi since the late '80s. The opening of the country to the global flows of capital, and its integration in the international community, attracted investments from abroad. Incomes have grown as a result of this influx and poverty has been radically cut especially in Vietnam's major urban areas (Hanoi and HCMC). In response to the demands for new residential areas for the 'rising middle class', the Vietnamese government promoted the urbanisation of peri-urban areas. New high end residential and commercial complexes have also attracted expatriates who started arriving in Vietnam for business reasons. In this context, the Japanese expatriate community has grown in Hanoi since the early '90s and especially through the last decade, in coincidence with the growth of capital flows from Japan to Vietnam in form of aid and FDI. As a consequence of improved economic relations, Japanese cultural promotion organisations have succeeded in projecting a positive image of Japan in Vietnam. Concurrently, Japan-Vietnam diplomatic relations have also become stronger in consequence of perceived threats from China.

Much deserves to be further researched on the dynamics of interaction between micro- and macro-level phenomena as those described above. However, through the case of the Japanese quarter in Hanoi, the article has provided a general outlook on how expatriate communities can integrate in an existing urban architecture without (at least apparently) causing opposition in the local community but rather cooperation. As the 2014 anti-China riots have shown, however, the absence of hostility is made possible by a generally positive perception toward a certain community of expatriates and the country they represent. And this can be reached through effective communication or imposition.

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## **Fooling the World or Fooling Itself: China's Spectacular-Oneiric Society** An Intervention from a Critical Chinese Studies Perspective

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**Abstract** Since the '90s, China's economic power has grown massively, and with it the authorities' desire to control and craft its global image. Yet, despite policed Internet and surveillance of its citizens, contestation of the authorities' control has come from social, ecological and cultural activists. Since the start of the century, China has staged the Olympics, had a Chinese woman win the Miss World competition, and claims to wage a 'war on terror'. A spectacle of a peaceful, harmonious and 'normal' country – a 'China dream' – is projected. This article seeks to apprehend the reality behind the dream and to show how China's current condition is the result of a historical domination by, but also voluntary engagement with, the 'West'.

**Keywords** China. Spectacular society. Science. Technology. Postcolonial. Modernity. Globalization.

Whatever the future evolution of China, it is certain that it will totally destabilize the existing fragile world disorder.

Cornelius Castoriadis, June 1995<sup>1</sup>

Since the turn of this century, China's economic power has grown massively, and with it the desire to control and craft its cultural image abroad. This has even given rise to a cultural diplomatic offensive to displace long-standing foreign discourses on and about China with a cultural imaginary and a historical narrative generated by the Chinese authorities themselves. The imposition of an official narrative of history, and thus of the present and the future, has been achieved internally by an increasingly policed Internet – witness the recent closing-down of celebrated dissident micro-

<sup>1</sup> Castoriadis 2013: 'Quelle que soit l'évolution à venir de la Chine, il est certain qu'elle déstabilisera complètement le fragile désordre mondial existant'. All translations are by the Author.

bloggers' Weibo accounts - and by close surveillance of cultural activities, and abroad by China's soft power cultural diplomacy initiatives via its network of Confucius Institutes.

But what constitutes the nature of the reality that is China, a reality that cultural diplomacy seeks to mask? The China of the twenty-first century has integrated the technic-economic world, indeed China is also responsible for shaping this 'disorder', as Castoriadis has it. This article seeks to apprehend the reality behind the dream and to demonstrate how the current condition of China is the result of a historical domination by, but also voluntary engagement with, the 'West'.

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Since the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 - now out of living memory for some forty per cent of the population - China's authorities have vigorously advanced the country's integration into the world technic-economic system, gaining membership of the world's major organisations of economic and political power, modernizing the military, preparing to put a person on the moon, and claiming to be engaged in the 'war on terror'. Yet despite these aspirations to global 'normality', the government has not yet managed to control and suppress dissent and despite all its efforts the Chinese culture that the world most appreciates is not that which is promoted and sponsored by the state, but that which is unofficial and fractious.

In 2014, the central authorities condemned to long prison sentences a number of academics, the most well-known of whom is the Chinese Uighur economist Ilham Tohti. In the same year, the people of Hong Kong demonstrated massively their unwillingness to accept an undemocratic future in what became known as the Umbrella Movement. In 2015, a campaign was launched against 'Western' values and the use of 'Western' textbooks in universities. Its recent - between October 2015 and the time of writing - manœuvres to stifle external dissenting voices (the 'abductions' and the subsequent televised confessions of five Hongkong bookseller-publishers, the televised confession and expulsion of Swedish national and human rights activist, Peter Dahlin, the traducing and expulsion of the French journalist, Ursula Gauthier over an article about the CCP's treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang) indicate the far from 'soft-power' lengths to which the authorities will go to control the flow of information in, and about, China, even when such actions are detrimental to its global image.

These are the contemporary realities that academics involved in China studies in Europe have a duty to contrast against the efforts of China's authorities to project an image of China as peaceful, harmonious and 'normal'. But China's vexed investment in modernity can be traced back

to the mid-19th century, and in terms of its modern nation-state incarnation to the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1919, students who were contesting the weakness and betrayal of China's delegation at the World War 1 Versailles peace congress, which saw Germany's colonies in China handed over to Japan rather than handed back to China held up banners echoing the intellectual and political activist Chen Duxiu's call for Mr. Confucius to be replaced by Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science: 德謨克拉西先生 *demokelaxi xiansheng* and 塞恩斯先生 *saiensi xiansheng*.<sup>2</sup>

But what exactly had Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, the originator of the 'Mr Democracy-Mr Science' slogan, intended by 'science'? The future, and the first, leader of the Chinese Communist Party saw science as the positivist cure to ancient obscurantism. For Chen, 'modern Europe's superiority over other races is due to the rise of science' (近代歐洲之所以優越他族者, 科學之興).<sup>3</sup> Ignorant of science, scholars were cast as charlatans using geomancy to hoodwink the people; farmers were ignorant of seed selection techniques and the use of pesticides; industrialists' ignorance of science was responsible for dependence on foreign countries; physicians were ignorant of anatomy, bacteria and contagion, and depended on ancient formulae such as *yin* and *yang*.

The solutions to such deficiencies lay in science: "as for such unknowledgeable thinking, such illogical beliefs, if we wish to cure them at the root, we apply science (凡此無常識之思惟, 無理由之信仰, 欲根治之, 厥為科學)". In this denunciation of superstitious practices and old knowledge that was constituent of, and that propped up, a conservative regime's ideology, he simultaneously opposes science to the spontaneity and creativity of the 'imagination' that he consigns to a past moment. Indeed the sixth section of his 'Call to Youth' is entitled 'Scientific and Not Imaginative' 科學的而非想像的. For Chen, imagination is the antithesis of reason:

在昔蒙昧之世, 當今淺化之民, 有想象而無科學。宗教美文, 皆想象時代之產物。

2 Note how the two words were commonly transliterated from English as *demokelaxi* and *saiensi*. Later 'democracy' would be translated with *minzhuzhuyi* 民主主義 from the Japanese *minshu* 民主, and 'science' with *kexue* 科學 from the Japanese *kagaku* 科學. However, in Chen Duxiu's 1915 'Call to Youth' (see the note below) the Japanese-derived translation *minshu* 民主 was preferred. It is possible that in post-Versailles China when Japan had just been handed German's colonies, it was deemed preferable to avoid Japanese translations. The sexism implicit in the figure of the two Misters is striking and unfortunate, for the reality was that numerous women students were at the forefront of the Fourth May Movement. In fact, in the fight against a patriarchal ideology that not only obliged the young to venerate the old but treated women as almost worthless, women were amongst the most ardent agitators. See Dooling 2005, 35.

3 Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, 'Jinggao qingnian' 敬告青年 (literally 'Warning to Youth', often translated as 'Call to Youth') (reproduced on *People's Daily* website, <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/BIG5/151935/151936/151965/9123165.html>) (2017-10-23).

In former benighted times there was, and today among uncultured peoples there is, imagination but no science. Religion, art and writing, were the product of the era of the imagination.

Imagination, here closely associated with myth and creativity, is assigned to the past. There can be no cohabitation between science and imagination. In his celebrated slogan what Chen would pair with 'science' was 'democracy'.

Chen would soon abandon 'democracy' in favour of historical materialism, but his belief in science that would bring 'modernisation' to China endured. And yet, it is evident from the catastrophic outcomes of the twentieth century that science, beholden to technology, was not the instrument by which democracy, in the sense of liberty and autonomy, would be brought about. Witness the state of the industrialised planet, of which China is an integral part, today. Science has not been objective, and has certainly not been neutral. And democratic control of science and technology has not been practised to date. So-called liberal democracies, just as totalitarian autocracies, are no longer the drivers of technology, they are the driven. The so-called neutrality of science has allowed a head-long and *limit-less* expansion of unnecessary, and certainly ill-considered, technologies which have not brought about 'progress' but rather an ecologically doomed environment and socio-economically unequal global society.

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Since the middle of the nineteenth century, China's élite had then felt itself obliged to re-invent the country as a modern nation-state. The 1919 post-World War One, Treaty of Versailles and the 4 May Movement to which it gave rise, convinced China's élite of the need to emulate the West as had Japan, in order to (re)create China. Or rather to create a modern nation-state China for the first time. This Western process of *nationalisation* was seen as the means to resist the colonialist system that had just humiliated it once again, and to attain sovereignty over what would become a national territory. This was an ideology shared with other colonised peoples. Sovereignty, it was held, could only be achieved via modernity, and the Versailles process had reaffirmed nationalism as the only means to achieve a modern organisation of peoples (see Duara 2008, 63).

A classical radical or Marxist reading of the outcome of Versailles would hold that it put the imperialist world in a dilemma and spelt its death-knell. For if the non-white, non-European world could not benefit, there and then, from the Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination, the principle of the essential link between nationalism and modernity had been affirmed and would sooner or later bring the decline and fall of colonialism (see Füredi 1994, 5).

But this model of nation-state modernity as a means of self-determination and attainment of sovereignty was a poisoned chalice. Once China had accepted the need for Westernisation/modernisation – let us recall that the term 西方 *xifanghua* was in the first half of the twentieth century not only synonymous with modernisation it was the ‘natural’ way of referring to the process – China’s incorporation into the world system, which has been variously called colonialism, Americanisation, globalisation, became inevitable.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, what this path rendered inevitable was the obligation to adopt Western epistemologies and to eliminate old pre-nation-state, ‘Chinese’ knowledge.

Whether or not the Versailles Wilsonian doctrine and the Western imperialist system that gave rise to it did indeed signify that there was never any alternative to mimicry of what was then still a Western system is disputable, but what will be demonstrated below is that this system had led China and the world into an impasse.

Far from announcing the end of colonialism and its procedures which were intimately imbricated in what we call modernity, these same procedures were seen as the panacea. The real success of colonialism at the start of the twentieth century, a success that continues to this day, was to have convinced colonised peoples, or rather their élites, that there was *no alternative* to the emulation, imitation and mimicry of the nation-state paradigm. For the élite what counted was access to the colonial powers’ knowledge and science.

In the pursuit of this logic an enormous contradiction was pushed aside. In order to regain sovereignty, a power of agency, China’s radical élite rejected all that was local and heterogeneous, as witnessed by Chen Duxiu’s ‘call to Youth’ quoted above. It had to homogenise its languages and cultures and customs, and sweep out diversity to install uniformity.<sup>5</sup> In short, it had to imitate, and thus even become this Western Other.

4 Duara sees globalisation as putting the former territorial model of China as nation-state under stress: “The effort to integrate the overseas Han Chinese into the nation has led to a spatial reimagination of the nation from the territorial China to the ethnic one” (Duara 2008, 63).

5 One of the first recorded appeals for the use of Guoyu 國語 was made by a group of returned students from Japan in 1906 “to train people to speak the national language in order to eliminate the dialects of the provinces”. See “Gesheng liu Hu xuesheng zonghui diyue jianzhang 各省留滬學生總會第一則簡章” (First Draft programme of the Alliance of Students in Shanghai from All Provinces) (1906) in 江寧學務 *Jiangning xuewu* (Educational Affairs of Jiangning prefecture) Nanking, 1906, cited in Chow 1960, 34. However, it was not until the early ‘20s that the national language started to be institutionalised. In January 1920, the Ministry of Education decreed that the vernacular be used in the first two years of primary education and the adoption of the vernacular quickly spread to higher echelons of the school system. In 1920-1, the vernacular was officially recognised as the ‘national language’ or *Guoyu* 國語. See Chow 1960, 279.

Science and scientism took hold of the élite's imaginary as it had taken hold of the Western popular imaginary in the second half of the nineteenth century when "in the name of science it was deemed necessary to destroy false ideas, religions, cultural traditions, myths; all that was a product of the imagination of the dark ages had absolutely to be replaced by the Light of Science".<sup>6</sup> While this logic is still dominant, with all its social, economic, and environmental consequences, it now clashes with the authorities attempts to institute a local identitarian cultural politics with which to combat the temptation of democracy.

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In recently launching a campaign against Western values in the academic sphere it is as if the authorities wished to cut off China's nose to spite its face. Where do 'Western' values stop and 'Western' science start? At stake is not only what is projected as Western culture, which we know is now a global culture, but what is perceived as Western methodology. Ironically, for the past fifty to sixty years humanistic values have been under attack in the Western academy itself where humanities scholars have been pushed and bullied into reinventing themselves as scientists and into adopting a 'scientific' methodology. So, are 'science' and 'culture' separable?

In attempting to discuss this question, the relationship between technology, which has increasingly colonised 'science' since World War 2, and economics also needs addressing. Before doing so, I need to make my position clear: it is evident that the economic strategy of growth is killing our planet, and that there is an urgent necessity not simply to opt for sustainable growth but to adopt the path of ungrowth. As the French political scientist Jacques Ellul has noted this will require a global cultural, or 'civilisational', revolution in order for humanity to achieve this ambition (cf. Ellul 2015).<sup>7</sup>

The question of the specificity of culture, or more specifically of cultural creation, is also an issue that needs to be addressed in this discussion around science and culture.

From the nineteenth century onwards the colonised world, was in part forced and in part 'chose' to adopt Western epistemology, a Western

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6 Ellul 2010, 323: "Il fallait au nom de la Science détruire les idées fausses, les religions, les traditions culturelles, les mythes, tout cela, produits de l'imagination dans les âges obscurs, devait absolument être remplacé par la Lumière de la Science".

7 This projection towards a radical departure from current beliefs and cognitive attitudes echoes the debate on transformational change, as framed in sustainability studies. A useful conceptualisation of transformative versus incremental approaches to sustainability is provided in: Hopwood, Bill; Mellor, Mary, O'Brien, Geoff (2005). "Sustainable Development. Mapping Different Approaches". *Sustainable Development*, 13, 38-52.

originated organisation of knowledge and of culture. Japan *chose* this course. To what extent this was indeed a pragmatic choice, and to what extent it was a function of a colonisation of minds is also a question to be discussed.

Over the past twenty years or so there have been attempts to broach the dilemma of modernity and identity in the context of the aftermath of colonialism. For instance, in the field of Postcolonial studies and tangential academic domains, there is a current debate on intellectual decolonisation; a sort of second-stage decolonisation beyond territorial, physical decolonisation. Departing colonialists not only leave behind problematic and improbable borders, Western forms of socio-political organisation, and a proliferation of flags and national armies. By the same token, they also leave behind cultural practices and ways of thinking.

If the colonial 'legacy' of modernity, in other words postcolonial modernity, cannot be de-reified, can it be made more homely, be somehow 'naturalised' while its apparent advantages are preserved?<sup>8</sup> Addressing this question has been the debate focused on so-called 'alternative modernities'; a debate that has taken place in the Euro-American academy, and in the Chinese academy where the idea of a specifically *Chinese* Modernity has been advanced, and posited as a good modernity.<sup>9</sup>

What is immediately pertinent to my current concern is that in the cases of both Japan and China, as in the fully territorially colonised world, Western cultural and institutional norms and forms were introduced alongside scientific and technological ones. Not only were the natural, or 'exact', sciences deployed to displace local scientific understanding of the world, but the products of cultural practices were also re-shaped and forced into foreign disciplinary categories; a simple example would be the modern Western forms of narrative: the novel, the short story. Chinese cultural practice has thus taken what was once a 'Western' path for the past century.

So when the Chinese authorities refuse Western 'values' what are we to understand, that while the form is Western the content must be Chinese? But after a century of 'modernisation', of 'Westernisation', of globalisation, what is now Chinese? Moreover, there is nothing new in this schizo-

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8 See the writings of the Qinghua-based academic Wang Hui who also presented a paper at the XV EAN Workshop (Venice, 14th May 2015). See Wang 2008, 114-40.

9 The alternative modernities position was first posited and discussed in a series of turn-of-the-century special issues of the journal *Public Culture* entitled The Millennial Quartet: 1) *Alternative Modernities* ed. by Dilip Parameswar Gaonkar, *Public Culture*, 11(1), 1999; 2) *Globalization*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai, *Public Culture*, 12(1), 2000; 3) *Millennial Capitalism and Neo-Liberal Culture*, ed. by Jean and John Comaroff, *Public Culture*, 12(2), 2000; 4) *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Carol A. Beckenbridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Public Culture*, 12(3), 2000. For a summary and critique of the latter see: Harootunian 1999, 21-9.

phrenic desire to adopt Western technology to make China strong while 'preserving' an essential Chineseness. It was at the heart of the movement that followed the mid-nineteenth-century Opium Wars, a movement which sought to strengthen China by adopting foreign methods in military and political organisation and in industry, and, as logically follows, in education. The strategy has been applied erratically, but surely, ever since. The result has been the China of the twenty-first century which is locked into a longer moment stretching back a century and a half which we may term the dilemma of Chinese modernity.

As to China's cultural identity, a century ago it was the identity of an élite expressed in a pre-modern language inaccessible to the majority who were largely illiterate. Culture was either local, oral and popular, or it was élite and shared across Chinese space by a class whose power depended upon it.<sup>10</sup> The creation of a 'nation-wide' or national culture depended on the bringing about of a Chinese nation, and the building of that nation demanded in turn the creation and instituting of a 'national' homogenised language and modern culture. It is that new national language that it is the business of China's Confucius Institute network to disseminate beyond China's borders.

There can be no return to 'Chinese values'. There can be no dereification of a century and half of change. A return to 'authentic' Chinese culture would mean a return to a minority culture practiced by an élite, and to local cultures practiced in local languages. National Chinese culture is irredeemably modern. However, there can be, and has been, a false 'return' to Chinese values, to a political logic, the overthrow of which Chen Duxiu demanded a century ago. Confucian 'values', not for the first-time in Chinese history, have been redeployed and reinvented to reinforce and support totalitarian forms of power both in China and in other Chinese-speaking states such as Singapore.

There is a central question here regarding cultural practice, and whether it could and should be subtracted from the set of globalised practices that are now common to the whole world. Should the former colonised world keep the technology and 'return' to an Ur local culture, or even to a reinvented one?

In the twentieth-first century, what is known as 'culture' is instrumentalised to identitarian ends, as has been the case in the past with tragic consequences. It is so in China, it is so in Europe. Such instrumentalisation pertains to a politics founded on invented cultural identities, nationalised and even supra-nationalised identities. For instance, the French government exploits the French language hoping to maintain and extend its influence in the francophone world, and more broadly in the latino-

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10 See Johnson, Nathan, Rawski 1985, *passim*; Rawski 1979, 8-20,

phone world. China propagates a myth of an 8,000-year-old homogeneous 'national' culture and attempts to exploit and extend a sinophone sphere of influence.

But for a language to be exploited, it needs first to exist, and the great revolution that was needed to bring China into line with other nation states was seen to be the invention of a standard modern Chinese language. Words were invented, equivalences found, literary categories remapped to conform with Western epistemology. A new poetry, a new idea of the novel were invented, and regional theatrical practices replaced with this strange Western drama form where the actors only talked, did not sing, and where the audience could not clap, drink tea or eat snacks during the performance.<sup>11</sup> Let us take the 'novel' form as an illustration. While Western sinologists have fallen into the habit of retrospectively referring to pre-20th-century *xiaoshuo* 小說 as 'Chinese novels', Cyril Birch himself advises us that "the category novel as such may be inappropriate... prior to the twentieth century".<sup>12</sup> The appearance of the novel in the Western sense was a product of the familiarity with foreign novels - including much middle-brow fiction such as the adventures Sherlock Holmes and Jules Verne's science fiction novels - translated into the literary language towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Although short fiction started to be written in the modern vernacular in the late '10s, notably by Lu Xun 魯迅, the first full-length novels in the national language only started to appear in the second half of the '20s and in the early '30s.<sup>13</sup>

**11** Before the twentieth-century there was no word for 'novel'. The expression *xiaoshuo* 小說, literally 'small talk', referred to the 'popular' narrative, what seemed to be an 'entertainment' genre that was held in contempt by the scholar class who, at least overtly, preferred the genres of refined prose and poetry; fiction "no doubt belonged to a minor tradition rather than the central élite culture of historiography, philosophical prose, and lyric verse" see Birch 1977, x.

**12** Birch 1977, xi. It was only with the advent of Western epistemology that the terms 'novel' or *changpian xiaoshuo* 長篇小說 literally 'long-length fiction' and 'short story' *duanpian xiaoshuo* 短篇小說 'short-length fiction' were coined; there was also the *zhongpian xiaoshuo* 中篇小說 'middle-length fiction', often translated into English as 'novella', and occasionally as 'nolette'. Types of modern, national-language fiction were thus classified according to length.

**13** Lu Xun's short story "Kuangren riji" 狂人日記 was written in April 1918. However, while Lu Xun was writing in the vernacular, this was not quite the National Language. Moreover, he did not adopt a modern narrative style. For example, Charles Alber sees the 1922 "A Q [阿Q]" as "a contemporary parody of the traditional story script". Not all the conventions are there, but some are, and this is the only story that Lu Xun [魯迅] wrote in serial form. Here again, however, A Q is the exception, and the *wenyan*[文言] (literary language) influence on Lu Xun's works seems to predominate. See Semanov 2017, xxii-iii. For the translated stories of Lu Xun see Yang, Gladys (1973). *Silent China. Selected Writings of Lu Xun*. London; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Soon China had two cultures, or at least two cultural imaginaries, a new modern Westernised culture heralded by the 4 May Movement's call for Science and Democracy and an older culture that was declared obsolete. The advent of the Communist regime did not halt this process, rather its trenchant dismissal of the old advanced it.

Thus, like so much else that has been learnt and borrowed in modern China, the linguistic and cultural practices of today's China are not simply leg's of a table, they are now part of the wood that the table is made from. When we start interrogating the integrity of cultural categories, they fall apart. As for the spoken language, as we have seen, the new national language drew on the former *lingua franca* of officialdom itself based on colloquial language spoken in the northern half of the dynastic territories. It was a language known as *guanhua* 官話, literally 'official talk', or what in English we call Mandarin.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese language promoted by Confucius institutes today is not 'authentic' or 'genuine' nor is it 'millenary' or 'eternal'. What is promoted is a recently invented nation-state normalised official language. Indeed, the modern standard Chinese language is a *lingua franca* that has failed to represent the linguistic and cultural and historical diversity of the space we now call China. Nevertheless, the language promoted abroad serves to present China as a homogeneous whole, it is as deceptive as the word 'Chinese' itself.

China today is as locked into the global technic-economic system as is Europe; and it has been so for some considerable time. The notion that China's identity can now be preserved or resuscitated by the promotion of an identitarian cultural politics, that even its own intellectuals largely regard as sterile, is illusory.

China in the post-Deng era, has integrated fully not only the world economy but the whole gamut of the world's spectacular circus: tennis championships, the Shanghai Formula 1 Grand Prix, the Miss World beauty competition, and let us not forget its hosting of the 2008 Olympic games.<sup>15</sup>

In my book *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers. Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and Its Others*, I analysed at length the integration and negotiation of Western cultural and artistic practices in twentieth-century China. Even if the epistemology remained Western, there

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14 There is no such things as written Mandarin, a common error of understanding amongst foreigners. Nevertheless, written Chinese, increasingly resembles written-down Mandarin or standard spoken Chinese. Nanjing Mandarin served "as the dialectal base of the *lingua franca*" from the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and "Beijing Mandarin from the second half of the nineteenth century onward... There was no attempt at codification or standardisation of the *lingua franca* as a standard form of spoken Chinese for the general public. It was not taught at school... The number of people who attained any degree of proficiency in it was minimal in areas of southern dialects" (Ping Chen 2008, 202-3).

15 In 2007 Zhang Zilin 张梓琳 became the first PRC Miss World, and in 2012 Yu Wenxia 于文霞 the second.

were always attempts at adaptation and nuances introduced in the process of intertextuality, resulting in a more or less creatively imaginative hybridity. But, despite the recent campaign against 'Western values', China's current participation in these 'ludo-economic' spectacular global events reveal no attempt at mitigating, modifying or negotiating Western practices and institutions, no attempt to sinify or even hybridise. Indeed, China is now fully integrated into economic, technological, spectacular global modernity.

If China is now charged with turning the handle of the barrel organ, who made it? If I use the metaphor of the barrel-organ it is because it seems to best sum up China's predicament today. China is now at the controls of a system that emits a music according to a pre-established programme. It is a closed system in which the 'musician' produces a programmed melody, where the only variable the organ-grinder can introduce is the speed at which the handle is turned.

The repetition, the stability, the inevitability of the barrel organ is akin to the system which subjugates and dominates us all in the modern world, the 'technological system'. More complex than a simple barrel-organ, the system nevertheless, reveals itself through the interdependence of its components, through its generalisation and through its acquired stability; the system seems so stable, widespread and entrenched that there is no way to reverse it.<sup>16</sup> The handle carries on being turned and the one now turning it is China.

The technological system having now become global and generalised, China finds itself responsible for turning the handle for all of us. This is the historical logic resulting from 19th- and 20th-century colonialism, from the colonisation of China by Western science and the ideology of Versailles, and from China's élite's embracing of this course as the only means of survival and regeneration.

For the past two decades we have been talking of China's rapid change. But what seems to be an acceleration, a speeding-up, in infrastructural development over the past twenty years, this 'rapid change', is merely a result of "normal foreseeable and an almost linear consequence of prior mutation". The concept of 'rapid change', as Ellul says, is just a distraction (Ellulm 2012, 100).

China's attachment to the 'Science' that has led to the present technological system dates from its humiliation during the mid-19th-century Opium Wars. The sudden consciousness of China's military technological, especially maritime, 'backwardness' jolted a part of China's ruling élite to initiate reform initiatives in favour of Westernisation and 'self-reinforcement' 洋務運動, 自強運動, efforts renewed by the Reform Move-

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16 Jacques Ellul, *Le Système technicien*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1977; le Cherche Midi, 2012, 93.

ment of 1898, and confirmed in the post-Versailles 4 May Movement of 1919.<sup>17</sup> Thus while Deng Xiaoping's post-1978 reforms reconnected China to, and reinforced the logic of, the imitation of the Western technic-economic model, they did not constitute its starting point. However, the national wealth created by the reforms, that were re-launched after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, have supplied the conditions of economic growth which have allowed the expansion of the technological system. Thus, China's élite's dream of being part of this system stretches back to the 19th century.

From the point, in the '80s, when China re-boarded the moving train of this technological system it was condemned to imitate, repeat and finally overtake the West, and to take over the handle of the barrel-organ. However, this 'over-taking' is illusory. The fact that sensational technological discoveries will be made in China and no longer in the West is without consequence. That Chinese taikonauts will be the first humans to set foot on Mars and not American astronauts is unimportant. Both will be a consequence of China turning the handle of a machine invented in, and supplied by, the West, a "reasonable and normal consequence" as Ellul would say, of 'what already exists (2012, 100).

More than thirty years ago, Jacques Ellul analysed China's modern political history and the then Chinese authorities' policies and foresaw the technic-economic *and* political course of the subsequent three decades thus:

The technical as both model and ideology has borne its first fruits in the notable quality of young Chinese scientists and technologists whom we host now in the West where they come to hone their skills and find their feet... The current [ideological] orientation is in line with reality. But it also expresses this reality, that the technical has finally vanquished the revolutionary model of Chinese communism. This interpretation allows us to avoid a frequent error that has gained momentum over the past three years [since 1979]. All the French newspapers talk of the 'liberalization of the regime'. Whereas, I believe that this is a fundamental misconception. The commentators who take this position are always surprised when we are witness to people who stick up *dazibao* are arrested, suppressions of student or workers' demonstrations... Each time they write of 'a brake on liberalization'. But it is a nonsense. There never was any liberalization and the new political tendency has nothing to do with liberty. There is a transition from a system where revolutionary ideology held sway over technical efficiency to a system

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17 This historical narrative is one to which pro-government theoreticians gladly adhere. See Yu Keping 2012 ([http://en.theorychina.org/xsqy\\_2477/201306/t20130611\\_270481.shtml](http://en.theorychina.org/xsqy_2477/201306/t20130611_270481.shtml)).

where the desire for technical growth effaces revolutionary ideology. The technical at any price and 'efficiency first' have nothing to do with liberalization.<sup>18</sup>

Had China-watchers, journalists and academics read Ellul, it might have dramatically reduced their need to consume of humble-pie over the subsequent period. Of course, a number of appointed, as well as self-appointed, China specialists have still not tasted the pie.

However, writing in 1982, Ellul did not, or would not, foresee the sea-change that was taking place in the global politics and its economic and geopolitical. He foresaw China transforming its people into an 'advanced industrial proletariat' through industrialisation and technology which, despite his clarity regarding the absence of political change, he thought might lead to a new revolution Ellul whose writings did so much to inspire the ecological movement, saw as inevitable China's being obliged to enthusiastically engage in the technological system. Ellul understood the dilemma of China, but could not predict its political outcome. Surprisingly, he seemed to almost welcome China's aggressive participation in the system, and he did so seeing the resultant proletariat as constituting a revolutionary potential which would oblige the system to change. But China's technological industrialisation has not led to revolution and thus to liberty, but rather to a human rights situation that is getting gradually worse, and to an increasingly ecologically catastrophic and hazardous environment.

Writing in 1996 over a decade later than Ellul, and concerned about pollution in China, Castoriadis predicted "ecological catastrophes without precedent". He continued:

And the catastrophe is much swifter than in Western countries. If we lift the Third World out of its misery it will lead to the destruction of the

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18 'La technique en tant que modèle et en tant qu'idéologie a produit ses premiers fruits dans la qualité remarquable des jeunes Chinois scientifiques et techniciens que nous recevons maintenant en Occident où ils viennent se perfectionner et se situer... L'orientation actuelle est cohérente à la réalité. Mais elle exprime aussi cette réalité, à savoir que la technique a finalement vaincu le modèle révolutionnaire du communisme chinois. Cette interprétation nous permet d'éviter une erreur très fréquente qui se développe depuis trois ans. Tous les journaux français parlent de la 'libéralisation du régime'. Or nous pensons qu'il s'agit d'une incompréhension de fond. Les observateurs partant avec cette idée sont alors tout surpris lorsque qu'on assiste à l'arrestation des gens qui affichent des dazibaos, à des répressions de manifestations étudiantes ou ouvrières... Chaque fois on écrit: 'coup de frein à la libéralisation'. Mais c'est un contresens. Il n'y a jamais eu de la libéralisation et la nouvelle tendance n'a rien à voir avec la liberté. Il y a passage d'un système où l'idéologie révolutionnaire primait le souci d'efficacité technique, à un système où la volonté de croissance technique efface l'idéologie révolutionnaire. La technique à tout prix et 'l'efficacité d'abord' n'ont rien à voir avec la libéralisation" (Ellul 2015, 227).

Earth. It is to these absurd dilemmas that the pursuit of the capitalist path condemns us.<sup>19</sup>

If, then, in hindsight Jacques Ellul's optimism over China was misplaced and Castoriadis's later foreboding a more realistic assessment of where China was heading, Ellul's global strategy, one that implies recognizing ceilings and fixing limits, nevertheless remains the only "road map of a possible future". The ceilings (pollution, depletion of resources) represent the "boundaries which human action (and technology) must set so that life remains possible". That, of course, is just a minimum. For if we are interested in creating or recreating a culture it would be necessary to go further and fix "limits that constitute the blueprint of a culture".<sup>20</sup>

During the EastAsiaNet workshop at which an initial form of this article was presented, we had the pleasure of an intervention by Professor Ignazio Musu of Ca' Foscari University entitled "Towards a Green Economy". Professor Musu, an economist, has consecrated much of his recent career to ecological questions and the issue of sustainability. He has also visited China a number of times and encountered at first hand the contradictions between state directives aimed at improving environmental conditions and the state-driven imperatives focussed on economic growth. Professor Musu talked about regulation and limits and the need to constrain growth. He talked about bottom-up civil society action being necessary to bring that about.<sup>21</sup> For that to be possible in China, a revolution in China's current culture, as well as in the rest of the world's, would need to happen. That revolution would depend on a radical reassessment of the role and the nature of science and technology in society and human activity. For, technology like science itself is not neutral, and China's espousing of the dominant world technic-economic system has brought about repercussions that are not simply social and economic, but which have resulted in devastating consequences for the environment and climate of our planet.

Science is not neutral. The very concept of 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' is part of what, writing in 1961, Castoriadis referred to as the "illusion of exact sciences as historical activity outside of history". He noted that while this illusion persists the temptation to transpose 'techniques', 'methods' and 'categories' from the natural sciences to the 'historical sciences' and *human* activity will exist (Castoriadis 2009, 263-7).

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19 Castoriadis 2013, 621: 'Et la catastrophe est beaucoup plus rapide que dans les pays occidentaux. Si l'on sort le Tiers Monde de sa misère, ce sera pour détruire la Terre. C'est à ces dilemmes absurdes que condamne la poursuite de la lancée capitaliste'.

20 Ellul, *Le Système*, 305 et 305 n. 25.

21 The emergence of civil society in China has been in fact closely tied to environmentalism. On the topic, see Zhang, Joy Y.,; Barr, Michael (eds.) (2013). *Green Politics in China. Environmental Governance and State-Society Relations*. London: Pluto Press.

Science, Castoriadis reminds us, comes with a history. There is a historicity to science, the 'natural sciences', the 'exact sciences' whose ideology and place in the imaginary of human society has changed radically over the past century and a half. From science as truth in the mid-nineteenth century to science as happiness, in the '20s and '30s, to science as omnipotence in the post-World War 2 years, to science giving way to technology which offers us eternal life (see Ellul 2012, 332-7).

"The current ideology of science is an ideology of salvation". Not only do we see it as the only way forward, we also refuse to see its negative aspects. Science is the solution to all humanity's problems; this is particularly clear in health and medicine.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, for Ellul, it is this ostrich-like attitude of modern humanity that explains the failure of the ecology movement.

The destruction of rain forests to create 'virtual water' (an example of this is China's growing food on cleared land in Latin America to export back to China), the massive pollution of oceans, the blue-less skies of China's cities, do not move us to act. The public feels an overpowering sentiment of powerlessness when faced with gigantic threats, to the extent that we refuse to absorb negative information: Leave it to science, it has all the answers.

Increasingly studies on China are no longer about just China, they are about the world. This reality poses a particular problem to 'sinologists' or China specialists, since not only that we have created our object of study and observation, but for over a hundred years we have watched, and watched over, China (re)creating itself as US. And yet as sinologists we often do not want to, or are ill-equipped to, question ourselves. But now, after 30 years of so-called reforms which have turned China into a productivist and consumerist society, thirty years that have seen China driven by a need, a thirst for technology and everything else that constitutes the technological, we are unable to deny that when we are looking at China we are in fact looking at ourselves.

The realities we address today demand an academic capacity urgently to dismantle disciplinary and area studies boundaries. Unfortunately, it is a capacity that has never been pronounced. What goes for the world, what goes for humanity, goes for China too. But China's authorities propagate an image of, and to, China that they also wish to market to the world. That image is a dream:

The universe we inhabit is becoming increasingly a dreamed universe, since the society of the spectacle is changing gradually into the society of the dream. This is brought about by the diffusion of spectacles of all

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22 Ellul 2012, 339: "L'idéologie actuelle de la science est une idéologie du Salut".

sorts which we ask the spectator to internalize, but also brought about by the maintained dream of a science which immerses us into a world as yet unknown and incomprehensible.<sup>23</sup>

But in the twenty-first century the dreamed universe has *not* displaced what Guy Debord critiqued as the society of the spectacle, the show society, a consumer society in which power and politics had been assimilated to the strategies of communication, showbiz and advertising hitherto largely confined to the market place. Rather what we have witnessed is a convergence. We are now living in that post-convergent moment. To the theory of the society of the spectacle must now be added the critique of omnipotent science and technology. And whereas Guy Debord described the late twentieth-century world, in which the manner of exercising power in totalitarian societies (the concentrated spectacle) and in so-called liberal democracies (the diffuse spectacle) were converging, as the integrated spectacle, we are now faced with a further element which is the dreamed universe.

Spectacular society has not been transcended, it has mutated. The convergence perceived by Debord continues. Ideologies seemed to melt away with the twilight of the twentieth century, but in fact re-disguised themselves as other dreams. The New World Order of a post-Communist era where universal happiness, made possible by technology and paid for by capitalism, had dawned.

The American ideology seemed to have won. But that dream was of short duration. It was broken by the awakening of petty, retrograde, xenophobic, nationalist and fundamentalist dreams made possible by yet another crisis of capitalism and constructed on the ruins and dregs of the logic of a (post)colonial world order.

We now inhabit a world of seemingly different imaginaries and projected dreams; dreams as individual and collective projects. But more than ever the dreams are articulated and sustained through an assemblage of spectacles which do not seek to hide widespread human misery and planet-wide environmental catastrophe, but rather to mediate them by their integration into the daily show. We are called on to live a dream not of our own imagining. It is a dream in which words are no longer needed to stimulate the imagination; the images are provided. It is a dream articulated by an array of technological gadgets, electronic entertainments, and mediated fears and hopes.

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23 Ellul 2012, 343: 'L'univers dans lequel nous vivons devient de plus en plus rêvé, car la société du spectacle se change peu à peu en société du rêve. Ceci par la diffusion des spectacles de tous ordres dans lesquels on demande au spectateur de s'intégrer, mais aussi par le rêve entretenu d'une science qui nous plonge dans un monde encore ignoré, incompréhensible'.

We have entered the moment of the spectacular-oneiric society.

For the Golden Age Spanish dramatist Calderón de la Barca, all of life was a dream, and dreams themselves merely dreams (*toda la vida es sueño, y los sueños, sueños son.*), while for his compatriot Goya over a century later the sleep of reason produced monsters (*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*) for, as the Spanish teaches us, to dream is to sleep. Out of a cultural metaphor of early modern society, the technic-economic system has produced the world as dream, a dream(ed) world. For the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China coined the slogan:

同一个世界  
同一个梦

The official translation of which was:

One world,  
One dream

China's President Xi Jinping has declared his presidency to be that of what he calls the Chinese dream, 中国梦. China is enmeshed in the logic of the technic-economic system. Its people are called on to live life as a dream, to invest in President Xi's promise of a 'China dream,' of a spectacular-oneiric society.

But the reality is that behind the blinding ideology of the technic-economic system, a sleep of reason, has produced the monstrous China nightmare of environmental disaster, and social misery.

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Was what is now happening to China avoidable? Perhaps, but only if other choices had been made sixty, one hundred, one hundred and fifty years ago. What we are witness to now, is the product of the postcolonial nationalist road to salvation to which the logic of Versailles gave rise. But the inevitability of China's and Japan's being enclosed in this logic was already embedded in the imaginary of their intellectual élites at the end of the nineteenth, and the beginning of the twentieth-century. Embedded in Chen Duxiu's 1919 slogan of Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy, was the roadmap to today's China. Mr Democracy never reared his head, except perhaps in a confused way in the '80s, and Democracy or no, the technic-economic outcome would have been the same.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Let us also recall that what happened in Japan and then in China and in the territorially colonised world, that is the reorganisation of knowledge, the epistemological revolutions, the denigration of local knowledges, of what E.P. Thompson called 'common sense', had also occurred earlier in the West resulting in the kind of human upheaval, alienation and misery we now see in China's recently urbanised new proletariat.

China's failure to realise that half of Chen's sloganised ambition that was 'Democracy', is in part explained by the success of the other half, 'Science'. Science never needed democracy to flourish. The one was not predicated upon the other; the failure of the post-Communist world to shed totalitarian ways has demonstrated as much. But while science and technology may not need freedom to advance, cultural creativity craves it. While China has been capable of imitating the Western technic-economic model, its officially sanctioned art and culture has clearly failed to impress beyond its borders. Since the beginning of the 20th century hegemonic cultural production has favoured and represented the reinvention of an industrialised technological power, of the march towards sovereignty through the emulation of Western modernity.

We may go so far as to say that the official literature and culture of the Communist era has functioned as an instrument of the post-colonial poisoned chalice insofar as it has shaped, negotiated and represented the post-Versailles ideology which has led to China's transformation into a major agent of the world technic-economic system. But alongside that dominant cultural production there has always existed a current that has engaged in the critique of that system. And when, as has often been the case during most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, cultural creativity has been suppressed and censored it has resulted in a critical, dissident cultural discourse, for where there is oppression and censorship, there will be resistance and dissent as surely as night follows day.

Rather than imitate and laud the technic-economic system, unofficial modern Chinese creativity has drawn on the West's, and China own, critical traditions to create alternative cultural modernities of contestation. This parallel creativity in poetry, fiction, film and artistic practice is at odds with the spectacular-oneiric vision that is the official China dream.

This disjuncture explains why China's recent cultural diplomatic policy initiatives have failed, and why Western and other Asian visions of the dreamed universe remain hegemonic. Official American, French, German, British, Spanish and other cultural diplomacies are supported by alternative spectacular cultural diplomacies of a modern global dream represented by Hollywood, Disney, the Cannes Festival, film-stars, singers and sports stars. These cultures offer an exotic to the consumer which often foregrounds the new, the innovative, the culturally vibrant and the cosmopolitan. Asian alternative cultural diplomacy has also been extremely powerful in this respect: Japanese manga and video games, Korean TV series and K-Pop, Indian cinema and Thai cinema are the most spectacular examples.

China has given the world a cultural diplomatic initiative named after Confucius, a name that evokes a millenary order, stability and obedience. This strategy of promoting an exotic that is backward-looking, out of step with today's technic-cultural realities, and that excludes its most influ-

ential living artists and creative talent, means not only that the policy is ineffectual, it is counter-productive.

The idea that Chinese Modernity can be different if it re-constructs itself within an identitarian cultural capsule, if it 'reserves' itself a 'Chinese' cultural space, if it models itself on the supposed Japanese example of a supposedly specific form of modernity, is really to misunderstand the nature of the historical processes that have unfolded and to misunderstand the reality of the dangers facing humanity. The 2011 disaster at Fukushima was not a problem of a specifically *Japanese* modernity, but of a global industrial modernity in which technology has been given the upper hand.

It is as if there were a psycho-social schizophrenia that had gripped China's authorities. On the one hand they invest in and promote a Western technic-economic model, while on the other they implement a culturally conservative policy aimed at producing a hermetic, cultural and academic system to constrain 'Westernness' to the technical sphere.

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Is there a way out of this limit-less system into which nineteenth-century and twentieth-century colonialism has led the world? Perhaps, because the system is faulty, and within this faultiness lies hope. We see in today's China the imperfections and the misfirings of the system: the high speed trains that derail for lack of respect for security provisions, buildings and bridges that collapse because built by non-qualified personnel or because the concrete has been watered down, cruise ships that capsize because warning signs are ignored. There are other obstacles and brakes on the system: the inability of institutions to move forward at the same speed, and then there is the widespread social contestation of labour. However, without China, humanity cannot retreat from the abyss. In large part, it falls to China, colonized by, and currently the agent of, the system to create a new culture, and to do so by setting 'willed-for limits'. The unlimited is incapable of founding and constituting a new culture, or a person. 'It is by establishing limits that humans institute themselves as human'.<sup>25</sup>

Without China's cooperation, even if the rest of the world co-opted for the path of ungrowth, the nightmare would continue. The 37 Chinese nuclear power reactors in operation, the 20 under construction, and those about to start construction, present not only a mortal danger for China's people but for China's neighbours also.<sup>26</sup>

25 "Ce n'est pas l'illimité qui peut en rien fonder et constituer une culture, ni une personne... C'est en établissant des limites volontaires que l'homme s'institue homme" (Ellul 2012, 305 n. 25).

26 See World Nuclear Association's website <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/country-profiles/countries-a-f/china-nuclear-power/>. I was reminded of our nationalist vision of

If China's people wish to re-route their future, if they wish to live and not just survive, then they will have to fix limits. Such a move would constitute a response, albeit belated, to the 'progress' proffered by the global system: imperialism, colonialism, Americanisation, and globalisation.

Such a course is not impossible. Once again, what has occurred in the West, will occur, is already occurring, in China: a shift in opinion consisting in "disappointment, fear, and questioning", a "widespread revolt"<sup>27</sup> of workers against efficiency and the subordination of labour to yield" (Ellul 2012, 304). In China on a daily basis there are demonstrations and minor rebellions against the system, and at the individual level, suicides in the face of inhumane working conditions are common. It is at this price that China's and the world's consumers have been furnished with the electronic trinkets and toys that fill their spectacular-oneiric lives.

However, the rise of consumerist, productivist China has not only revived and prolonged capitalism for a certain period of time, it has also permitted the expansion of the technological system it feeds. At the same time China's participation in this system brings nearer the inevitable social and environmental crisis that Ellul predicted a quarter-century ago. What Ellul three decades ago resonates even louder and truer since China's leadership fully integrated the country into a system on whose super-face the cracks are legion.

China's contribution to the world's future well-being does not lie in re-inventing itself an alternative cultural modernity, nor in marketing a cultural sand-castle that crumbles in the fingers, but rather in contributing to a global conversation focussed on limits. Only then will the real issues facing the world's present and future populations be frontally addressed. Only then will the mystique of growth be interrogated and that creativity, *poiesis*, will reassert its centrality in human society. I use the word creativity, in the sense used by Castoriadis. Poiesis is the work of the artisan and the artist that is not subordinated to the constraints of subsistence. It is creation. The artist and the artisan in the post-colonial, post-industrial, ungrowth society will inevitably need to resort to a cosmopolitan bricolage, creating out of the present and the past, out of what is to hand, and out of what may come from afar. This creativity may be imbricated with new forms of culture, but it will certainly imply a new poetry, or poiesis, of

nuclear power and of the illusion of a non-global approach to stepping back from dependence on nuclear technology during a 2014 workshop on the Fukushima disaster, when a Japanese speaker suggested that Japanese civil society was now willing and ready to push for the elimination of nuclear power plants. That is all well and good, but what about the problem of Chinese civil society on the other side of the East China Sea not being able to follow suit?

27 The *China Labour Bulletin* (CLB) provides regularly updated statistics about workers' protests in the country. An interactive strike map can be consulted on CLB website at: <http://maps.clb.org.hk/strikes/en>.

daily life, the abandonment of the dreamed universe, throwing away the barrel-organ handle, and creating a new music. Only then will the sense of *techne*, as the human capacity to make and perform, be restored.

But, if change in the sense of 'ungrowth', an abandonment of current economic dogma and a restoration of the ecological balance of our environment is to be effected, then the strategy Ellul proposed in the '80s would need prompt implementation. A new music, a new imaginary, a new ideology in the best sense of the term, together with propitious intellectual and moral conditions, would be indispensable to the creation of a new human spirit. Specifically, narrow self-interest would need to be overcome, and a commonly borne frugality and 'revolutionary austerity' instituted. All in all, a profound epistemological shake-up, and a shared and global awakening from our collective dream would be required. This could only be rendered possible by a 'cultural revolution' and the institution of 'an ethics of powerlessness'.<sup>28</sup> Alluding to the doctrines espoused by Gandhi and the civil rights movement, Ellul described the spirit of 'powerlessness' as going beyond non-violence, as constituting 'the choice... not to dominate, not to exploit, and even not to use the means of power that could be available to us'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Or 'éthique de la non-puissance' in French, where the word 'puissance' also implies capacity to do and not simply the political power to do. Ellul, *Changer de révolution*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> Ellul, *Changer de révolution*, 419: '[L]'esprit de Non-Puissance, qui dépasse la non-violence,...est le choix...de ne pas dominer, de ne pas exploiter, de ne pas user même des moyens de puissance que l'on pourrait avoir;"

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