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**Digital Asia:
Nations, Narratives and Development**



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Why Digital Asia?

For the Asia-Pacific region, the past year was a year defined by trans-Pacific geopolitical events and a buildup of nationalist sentiments. Meanwhile, rapid digitalization created complex legacies through its interaction with what was already there -- local norms, social order and national identities. These dynamics surfaced powerfully in the digital landscape, and have manifested themselves in conjunction with the region's rich history and the possibilities for its future.

The current issue is devoted to examining national development and narratives through a novel lens, that is digital transformation. Have digital tools amplified or dampened the voices of the traditionally marginalized, be it state actors or the peoples? Have digital trends exacerbated or positioned us to better respond to the situation in a humanitarian crisis and the COVID-19 public health crisis?

You will find answers to such questions in the words of our writers. Their ideas with creativity and rigor stood out from a pool of pitches we received from the global Columbia community. Their articles and interviews represented great geographical diversity, spanning across China, Japan, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and North Korea.

Lastly, I want to thank the three talented assistant editors: Rhe-Anne Tan, Lydia Grek and Roy Yang. Without your hard work, the journal would not come to life.

Qiheng Chen
Editor-in-Chief of APAC Journal
May, 2020

FEATURED

Facebook's Role in the Rohingya Genocide

Xintong Wong
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Described as 'the most persecuted minority in the world', the Rohingya are an ethnic, religious and linguistic minority in Myanmar, primarily located in the western state of Rakhine. Since the late 1970s, the Myanmar junta government has pursued discriminatory policies with the purposes of marginalizing the Rohingya and denying them human rights. Despite accounting for approximately a third of the Rakhine state's population, they are not recognized as one of the 135 official ethnic groups in Myanmar and are forced to identify as 'Bengali' to denote their separateness from the country and to emphasize the false perception that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. In 2012, their marriage and birth rights were further inhumanely restricted. Families were limited to two children only, birth registrations of newborn Muslim babies in Rakhine effectively ceased, and Rohingyas seeking to marry must seek government approval – a mandate unique to only the Rohingyas.

The situation escalated in August 2017 when the country's military initiated a brutal campaign of targeted violence and persecution against hundreds of Rohingya

villages in response to a wave of attacks on military and police posts by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Condemned by the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee that deals with human rights and humanitarian affairs, the Myanmar military stands accused of conducting genocide against the Rohingya. As of March 2019, over 909,000 stateless Rohingya refugees, including more than 400,000 children are in Bangladesh. The majority of them live in thirty-four extremely congested refugee camps, exposed to monsoon weathers and vulnerable to disease outbreaks.

This outcome is the product of a systematic strategy to disenfranchise, and institutionalize discrimination against, the Rohingya Muslims. It is also the product of a secretive military operation that exploited Facebook's social media platform to incite and legitimize violence against the Rohingya. First uncovered in a 2018 New York Times expose, this state-sponsored campaign took advantage of Facebook's reach and influence and its lax approach towards content regulation, to spread disinformation and hate speech.

Facebook's use and popularity in the country coincided with a time of major political and societal change in Myanmar. The country's oppressive military regime had begun a gradual transition that had seen opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, freed from house arrest and welcomed President Barack Obama as the first ever sitting U.S. president to visit Myanmar. In 2013, the incumbent president Thein Sein liberalized the previously state-controlled telecommunications sector. A country with an approximate population of 50 million people saw its mobile penetration rates skyrocket from having less than 1% internet penetration and just 1.3 million mobile subscribers in 2011 to almost 90% internet penetration in 2017. This late stage adoption of internet and smartphone devices helped fuel Facebook's meteoric market share growth in the country. In 2018, Facebook accounted for over 85% of all internet traffic leading the Frontier Myanmar, a Yangon-based news and business magazine, to conclude that 'in Myanmar, Facebook is the internet'.

Given the relative infancy of

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Rohingya refugees after crossing the border into Bangladesh. Reuters/Jorge Silva

internet use in the country and the fact that the only news information outlets available previously were state-sponsored newspapers, levels of media and internet literacy were severely limited (and still are) among the population. Against this backdrop, members of the military Myanmar's disinformation campaign were able to take advantage of Facebook's extraordinary reach and influence to spread anti-Rohingya propaganda. They worked to set-up imposter accounts and sham pages devoted to local celebrities and respected public personas, to distribute misinformation and stoke anti-Muslim, and anti-Rohingya sentiment. Hate speech and rumor articles against Muslims and Rohingyas started surfacing in increased volumes on Facebook's platform as early as 2012-2013.

As early as 2014, activists and several media outlets flagged the widespread presence of misinformation and hate

speech on Facebook, drawing attention to the risks of fueling ethnic tensions between Buddhists and Muslims, and inflaming anti-Rohingya sentiment. At the end of her fact-finding mission, Yanghang Lee, then UN-appointed Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, expressed her fears about "the spread of hate speech and incitement to violence and hostility in the media and on the internet". In July 2014, violent religious riots exploded in Mandalay, the second largest city, resulting in two dead and approximately 20 people injured after a prominent ultra-nationalist monk shared a Facebook post falsely accusing the Muslim owner of a local teashop of raping a female Buddhist employee. After failing to contact Facebook, the government decided to shut down the internet to contain the wave of disinformation and prevent the violence spreading.

Facebook lacked adequate recognition of the role its platform played in enabling local violence. The company's actions exhibit a disconnect and ignorance of the risks associated with the scale and influence it enjoyed in Myanmar. Facebook outsourced content moderation to Accenture's Kuala Lumpur office. But Accenture had no physical presence in Myanmar, and reportedly, was operating with just one Burmese-speaking content reviewer based in Dublin, Ireland.

Facebook commissioned a Human Rights Impacts Assessment on its Myanmar operations in 2018. Soon after, an open letter signed by Myanmar civil society groups denounced the company for relying heavily on third-party groups, for failing to address the need for emergency escalation processes, and for lacking transparency and engagement with local stakeholders.

On January 23 of this year, the International Court of Justice ordered the state of Myanmar to protect the Rohingya Muslim population within its borders from acts of genocide. It represents a first important step in bringing justice to the Rohingya people and holding those responsible for their plight accountable. Another significant step would be for Facebook to embrace its duty of care to prevent its business from being exploited as a tool against human rights.

Gendered Embodiment and Thai Digital Narratives

Thailand is often referenced as a site of queerness and its metonymies: foreign connotations of the country take the form of a ‘gay paradise’ wherein ‘anything goes’ along the lines of sex/sexuality. Those stereotypes remain relatively uncontested by foreigners within the local queer community, contributing to an outside racialized, gendered view of Thailand as the embodiment of fantasy and desire. Those views are partially extracted from historical context: gender variance exists with a longstanding history of societal incorporation, as the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ exist alongside Kathoey and Tom (Thai gender variant individuals, generally regarded as trans-feminine individuals and trans-masculine individuals respectively). In the twenty-first century those communities have become increasingly visible, largely through circulation on digital interface. Yet, as contemporary digital markets become saturated with queer Thai imagery and aesthetics, reified dynamics of commodification and orientalism similarly manifest through cyberspace.

Digital modes of communication first came into prominence in the later twentieth century, as an era of globalization brought the Internet into the public and private sphere. Technology became a medium through which gender variant individuals came to explore their own identities, facilitating processes of ‘becoming’. Lacking the constraints of physical space (which oftentimes comes with cisgender/heteronormative barriers), cyberspace allowed for alternative modes of being, which would otherwise be rendered illegitimate. For instance, the prominent site ‘Camfrog’ (of the early twenty-first century) provided options to identify with a gender/sexual identity of choice, which may or may not align with an identity practiced otherwise. Those on the site, able to partake in this somewhat ‘liberated’ form of communication, had the potential to forge entirely new personas, with tangible consequences. As gender was rendered malleable through self-selected usernames, voyeuristic performances, and uninhibited self-expression, many sought similar lived experiences. As gender is lived both through cyberspace and the corporeal self, many looked to affirm a (real) digital identity; as Shrock, Reid and Boyd (2005) note, “bodies be our friends or enemies, a source of pain

or pleasure, a place of liberation or domination, but they are also the material with which we experience and create gender”.

As individuals resided in and interacted with the surrounding world (including digital platforms), dissonance between digital identities and the physical body remained a critical component of lived experience, particularly for Kathoey, Tom, and others undergoing gender variance. Those individuals often reconsidered the ‘material’ experience mentioned by Shrock et al. (2005), with many seeking to affirm their own identity through embodiment, involving surgical self-transformation. Practices were ultimately successful in creating a market for gendered transformations: since sex reassignment surgery (SRS) was first performed in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1975, Thailand has become known as the “Mecca” of gendered body modification, with readily available physicians partaking in vaginoplasty and other reconstructive surgeries.

As surgical practices developed alongside twentieth century Internet culture, physicians were able to advertise more broadly to an English-language speaking clientele, leading to an increasing number of non-Thais seeking SRS in Thailand. Indeed, clinic websites have become a mechanism through which non-Thai prospective patients are provided with comprehensive information on surgical procedures, leading to burgeoning medico-touristic practices. Medical tourism, wherein citizens of affluent nations travel to other countries seeking affordable medical services, has expanded due (in part) to such advertising methods; the country hosted nearly 400,000 medical tourists every year in the mid 2000s. Yet, for non-Thai individuals seeking physical transformation, the choice of location often extends beyond cost: digital interface allows for the envisionment of a more feminine feeling futurity. Just as sites such as Camfrog facilitated self-transformative processes, SRS advertisements facilitate the transformation of Western subjects from masculinity to the ‘mystical’ femininity encoded within Thailand. One particular site, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, promoted the “traditional” Thai experience as follows:

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“Cyberspace allowed for alternative modes of being, which would otherwise be rendered illegitimate”

- DANTE SILVA

The Kingdom’s legendary tradition of superior service and gracious hospitality is working its magic in a new sector. Timeless Thai values and traditions are very much alive in place where it is least expected—in hospitals and clinics around the country. Patients are welcomed as ‘guests’ and made to feel at home in unfamiliar surroundings. The reception is gracious and courteous.

Stereotypically feminine notions of the ‘gracious’ and ‘courteous’ reception lead to a racialized and sexualized digital exchange: the potential tourist (not necessarily female) receives a form of feminine affect which relies on the subjugation of the Thai gender variant individual. The ‘unfamiliar surroundings’ further encode medico-tourism as a metaphorical journey which relies on the orientalizing and exoticization of Thailand to facilitate the patients’ own processes of becoming.

In this way, digital interactions translate directly to lived experiences. This narrative is similarly seen within the advertisement phrase “first world medical treatment at third world prices”, often circulated and promoted through digital mediums. Third World commodities, which often exist in the form of services and human labor, become exploited for ‘first world medical treatment’. Thus, while certain individuals possess the agency to comfortably embody gender variance, others exist to aid those transformations and to provide a supplemental femininity. Aren Z Aizura, prominent queer theorist, notes such dissonances as manifested within the Thai clinician, expending affective labors in Thai gender reassignment clinics; for instance, within “the care, nurturing, and the transmission of affect to non-Thai trans women patients” which “facilitates the self-transformation of those patients into more feminine feeling subjects”. The marketing

reinforces those systems, as once again digital interface mediates relations amongst users in a hierarchical sense: the non-Thai intended recipient is provided with the opportunity to envision femininity in a way that inherently necessitates the self-orientalization of the Thai clinician. Unfortunately, digital advertisements suggesting such ‘mystical’ and ‘feminine’ self-transformative processes are increasing as the global market for SRS expands, and thus medico-touristic hegemonies become manifested through the cyber realm.

The cyber realm itself becomes a component of the reproduction of existing power dynamics: rather than comprising some abstract spatiality, cyberspace exists within its own confines, subject to broader modes of surveillance and control. Imagery circulated amidst cyberspace—dominated by affluent, predominantly white queer communities in the West—suggests a spectacle of the ‘Third World’ as available for queer consumption.

Colonialism exists as an ongoing set of contentions, present in the form of the advertisement, chat room, voyeuristic experience, etc., structurally embedded within digital exchanges. Medico-touristic processes of ‘becoming’ similarly exist as privileged sites of sexuality, a form of “imperial nostalgia” as termed by Renato Rosaldo. In this way, the digital exchange clearly differentiates which bodies are rendered more or less desirable, which possess the critical mobility to comfortably embody gender variance, and which bodies exist solely through racialized and Orientalist narratives. These paradigms remain particularly troubling for queers of color, forced to navigate both sexualized and postcolonial spaces, unable to partake in the ‘liberated’ queer medico-touristic practices of their white counterparts. In moving forward, queer communities in the West must redress harmful implications of the fetishized queer ‘Other’, omnipresent in modern queer consumption of digital media.



Pixabay.com/Sasint

RSF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

CÉDRIC ALVIANI

Cédric Alviani, a French national and graduate from Strasbourg University's journalism center, currently serves as East Asia Bureau Director for press freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Cédric has worked in Asia since 1999, mainly based in Taiwan, and has directed projects at the intersection of diplomacy, culture and media.

Q: How has digitization of media affected the growth of fake news and how do governments play a role in this new world of digital media? Is there any way to control or mitigate fake news?

Cédric: Ok. Ok. I'll tell you the big picture. Before the development of the media on the internet, there was an era where the space of information was scarce, for example, a newspaper 30 or 40 years ago was covering all functions of a social media, they even had classifieds, they had some type of place where people could meet, you know what I mean? And at least in democracies, governments passed regulations concerning the media. We're not against regulations in the media--regulations are supposed to protect the weak against the strong. And if regulations are democratically adopted it is an imitation of freedom that is being decided on in order to enforce the general freedom, so at that time there were regulations on the national level that were protecting the public from abuse in the media. And with the development of the internet, that space has become globalized, and every regulation, every protection that has been enacted domestically is not effective anymore. And this is the reason why disinformation has developed to such an extreme level, because it can circulate

without borders and it's very hard to enforce. And so far democracies have not been able to follow the trend of who directly benefits from that extension of that space.

So there are a few groups that benefit from this digitization of the media. One group is social media, they have become the rulers of this space. But very often, for economic reasons, they prefer not to regulate. Which is a problem. And also they do not have legitimacy to regulate like governments did in the past. And another group is authoritarian governments. First off being the Chinese government, but not only--Russia is also an important player. And they benefit because they have the power to submerge that space with disinformation or information that suits them. There are two ways to censor information. One way is to try to delete it, the other way is to throw so much competing information that no one's going to pay attention to it. The public doesn't believe anything they read anymore because there's so many things online saying the opposite and people don't have time to fact-check.

In the past, well, you could choose one paper you trust a day. But now the problem is that you have access to millions of sources, and it's very hard to know which ones are trustworthy. RSF is currently leading a few projects to combat

this issue. One is the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), which is a media self-regulatory initiative designed to promote trustworthy journalism. The idea is to assist the public in knowing which media they can trust. Like creating a certification and basic set of assessments of their production processes. And the second project we're working on is the Information & Democracy Commission. We've managed to gather 31 democracies, and the number is growing, in a forum that promotes online access to news and information that is freely and independently reported, diverse and reliable. It establishes democratic principles, including political, ideological and religious neutrality for algorithms and transparency in the way they function. And it focuses on the responsibility of online service providers to promote trustworthy content and pluralism in order to escape the current "information chaos."

Q: How has the Chinese government reached beyond its borders with media influences?

Cédric: It's always hard to distinguish, because the way China supports governments goes through a lot of indirect development or political support that cannot easily be attributed to supporting an authoritarian

approach of the media environment. Some Southeast Asian countries have passed regulations that look like Chinese ones but using their own language. But only if you are studying them in different languages, look for common wording, can you see where the texts originate from. It is quite tricky and very difficult to attribute a successful election to direct support from China. And there is money. If you get the support from China, the way that money circulates is usually not transferred so it's almost impossible to prove. So personally I would just say that there is a troubling convergence between the policies of the Southeast Asian countries and the policies of the Chinese government regarding media control and regulations they adopt. It's not very surprising because Western democracies are not the only suppliers of development aid, and they ask for the countries to democratize, which is somehow like asking a dictator or dictatorial group to give up their power. While China is actually doing the opposite. So of course this is welcome and is extremely efficient. When you're a dictator and you're being asked to remain a dictator in exchange for economic aid, then it's perfect. So I would say the Belt and Road Initiative which has a strong media component is a perfect platform for China to try and promote its way to control the media.

Q: I noticed that RSF has reported that recently Chinese journalists are getting more pressure from the government.

Cédric: Yes, COVID-19 has led to a surge of freedom of expression. All of a sudden the emotion and fear about the doctor who was one of the first whistleblowers, has led people to do some reporting. There was a group of people calling for the end of censorship, and then the central government cracked down on this. They enforced tighter regulations and made a few arrests, including a few citizen journalists.

Q: Why do you think Beijing is still arresting these journalists even though many worldwide have applauded China's mitigation of the virus?

Cédric: There is that obsession with social order. So a journalist going to the hospital releasing information that the public might now know, I mean people know about coronavirus. For example, reporters were revealing that structures were not ready, that things were not so much under control that

there were some without beds, that the figures were questionable, so I believe it's not so much a question of revealing that there is a virus problem, it's a question of showing that China might not be so well prepared as they say and might not be so much in control as they say.

Q: So do you think that this is making a significant impact on Chinese nationalism or how people think of the government in China?

Cédric: I believe it is, however, we have to wait until the end of the crisis to make an analysis because things could change. But for years in China, the government had things strongly under control and they realize that it's not necessarily because the government is strong, but that the censorship is very good, that things are under control. And the example of a virus is really relevant because it shows that there are things that censorship cannot stop.

Q: How about the rest of the world? Do you think their perspective of China has changed?

Cédric: It's also hard to know, but there might be some impact on their relationships with the Chinese authorities because through the virus, the world might realize how dependent it has put itself regarding China. The less dependent that foreign business or countries are on China, the easier it will be to be critical of the system. This virus crisis is also revealing that Chinese censorship is not only the problem of the Chinese people, that censorship in Wuhan can have consequences all around the world, can have other countries lose billions of billions of dollars, lose to tourism, shares, get into a lot of trouble, and of course lead to the death of many people. So this shows that you cannot consider censorship as an internal Chinese problem. This might be the first time the world realizes that censorship is not only a problem of China, it's a global problem. Which might actually be beneficial in the long run, because of course, we are realizing that we might need to put added pressure on China, put added pressure on the countries that try to copy China, and to try and get more transparency.

Interview by Lydia Grek



Cédric Alviani

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“Censorship is not only a problem of China, it’s a global problem.”

Going Digital

Hiroaki Ishihara, SIPA MIA '21

Why is Japan failing to implement an identification number system?

Long Hours, Low Productivity

In 2019, Japan was the third-largest economy country in terms of GDP. However, it was 24th in the ranking of productivity (GDP per hour worked). Japanese workers only make US\$46 per hour, compared to US\$71 in the US. This data indicates that while Japanese people work longer overtime hours, they are doing so less efficiently than their American counterparts. Moreover, Japan faces an aging population, which will bring a huge decline in the future labour force. Thus, increasing labor productivity is imperative to compensate for the shrinking workforce, especially given stagnant Japanese growth.

One of the solutions to improve productivity is the digitalization of society. Faced with these challenges, it is necessary for Japan to make full use of information technology to optimise human capital and performance. The My-Number program is one of the policies the Japanese government has introduced as part of an overall initiative to achieve digital transformation of society. This program is intended to make government administrative procedures significantly more efficient and accessible. Additionally, the self-identification system allows the private sector to access and utilize information to offer new services to the public.

What Is The My-Number Program?

My-Number program, launched in 2016, consists of two features of self-identification. The first is a social security and tax number system. The 12-digit “My-Number” acts as an identification code that identifies individuals among local and central governments. Local governments can access each other’s servers and information databases by using My-Number as an access key. Therefore, using the system, individuals do not have to submit the same documents to multiple local government offices, enhancing the efficiency of administrative processes. The other feature is an Electronic Signature that is certified by the government. The signature can be used for electric contracts or identification of an individual in the private sector. This is similar to one’s Google or Facebook account, which can serve as a universal short-cut for user identification when signing into a new app or service. Moreover, the Electronic Signature is certified by the government, making it ideal for services that require a reliable security guarantee. Thus, by utilizing the My-Number program, both the government and private sectors will reduce administrative costs and achieve faster processing for customer service.

Unfortunately, the program is regrettably failing. Only 15% of the total population has a My-Number

card, which means that an 85% majority of the country has yet to opt-in to the system. This has enabled continued inefficiencies in Japan’s bureaucracy: it is estimated that the My-Number system could streamline the submission of over a thousand paper documents as part of Japan’s complex legal procedures. It is said that there are 60,000 types of administrative process and 2.1 billion individual cases processed per year in Japan. Although the My-Number system might not be applicable in all of these cases, it is clear that there is plenty of opportunity for the program to be implemented. This leads to a Catch-22 situation: if there are not many users, there is no incentive for local governments to integrate their administrative procedures to the My-Number system, due to the costs incurred. On the other hand, if the system is not sufficiently useful for users, as it is not connected to commonly-used systems at a local level, they too will never have an incentive to opt into the program. Moreover, the other signature feature of the program—the Electronic Signature—would also not be maximized to its full potential without widespread card users. Thus, this creates a chicken-and-egg problem.

Precedent: India Stack

Let’s contextualize the preceding example in the global context, in order to identify a solution to this problem. India Stack is an

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“The benefits of the program accrue in the long run, but citizens prefer immediate and demonstrable convenience.”

Indian online service platform, which is comparable to the My-Number program. Currently, India Stack consists of various essential services such as a national identification system and electronic payment. India Stack originated with Aadhaar, an individual identification program. Aadhaar was aimed at providing ID cards to those who did not have a bank account, and faced financial constraints as a result. The government intended to use Aadhaar as a platform to distribute subsidies directly to those in need, applying information technology to overcome the practical difficulties and delay of locating and issuing physical ID cards, in order to provide timely intervention for vulnerable communities. By March 2020, 1.25 billion IDs had been issued out of a population of 1.33 billion. Building on the success of Aadhaar, India Stack has continued to expand its services, responding to the needs of citizens and industries.

This successful case shows that introducing a tangible incentive for users, in this case, subsidy distribution, can stimulate citizens to opt into the program. On the other hand, the Japanese government frames the benefits of the My-Number program as i) a fairer and more just society, ii) improved administrative efficiency, and iii) enhanced public convenience, which do not have the same

powerful, galvanizing effect. For the average rational citizen, these are not sufficiently persuasive. Fairness and government efficiency are abstract concepts that might not translate well into daily life. The benefits of the program accrue in the long run, but citizens prefer immediate and demonstrable convenience. In theory, citizens benefit from using My-Number, as they enjoy reduced processing time at the municipal government and greater ease and convenience in conducting administrative tasks. However, new procedures can appear complicated, and there is usually an acclimatisation period before society becomes accustomed to the transition from a physical to digital system. Citizens may hesitate to switch from their old procedures, due to force of habit or privacy concerns, unless they see a critical mass of their peers adopting the new system.

Of course, the Japanese government is working hard to expand its user base. They plan to launch a campaign that encourages people to register for a My-Number card by distributing a \$50 reward—the ordinary amount one earns when creating a new credit card. However, registering for the My-Number system requires significantly more effort than the corresponding credit card application, negating the financial incentive. Thus, the complexity of digital adoption makes this campaign unattractive. For now, there is no “killer” incentive that encourages the majority of people to opt into the My-Number program.

Turning Crisis into Opportunity

So, what could provide a breakthrough? Currently, the Japanese government has decided to distribute money to citizens, as part of an emergency economic package. This stimulus package is meant to mitigate the economic

damage caused by COVID-19. As of April 20th, the government plans to distribute 100,000 yen (about US\$1000) to every single resident. However, residents must submit an application to receive the subsidy. This application can be completed in two ways: one through mailing a hard copy to the municipal government, and the other is an online application through the My-Number card.

Although only 15% of the total population currently possess the cards, the government can make use of this opportunity to both expand the My-Number program and showcase its benefits. People will be drawn to the program as they are able to recognize its tangible benefits: for instance, those registered could receive their subsidies earlier than others without My-Number cards. This provides the motivation that was previously lacking to overcome ingrained habits and entice users to embrace a digital system. Unfortunately, it was observed that some municipalities faced logistical issues and confusion due to weak server capacity of the system. In addition, it has been reported that some municipal governments continued to verify the application against the Basic Resident Register (the information stored at municipalities' servers) by manual operation. These obstacles may lead citizens to dismiss the My-Number program due to their negative experiences, although these wrinkles are common in the early adoption phases. On the other hand, for the government, this was a good chance to identify and close loopholes in the system and its operation. Given that the timeline for COVID-19 remains uncertain, the emergency economic package may have to be distributed several times over the year, and other relief programs may extend into the near future. Thus, this poses the ideal opportunity to expand the participants of the My-Number program if the Japanese government is able to resolve the problems in a timely fashion.

A Constructed Reality

Safia Southey
Columbia/Sciences-Po Dual BA '21

Safia is a passionate human rights activist, learner, and world explorer. Raised by international travelers and development practitioners, Safia has been lucky to grow up in Cairo, Paris, Amman, Menton, and NYC. These experiences, characterized by cultural, linguistic, and political diversity, spawned her early interest in policy and humanitarian issues, leading her to work in institutions such as UNRWA, the US State Department, the World Bank, and various NGOs. Her love for photography grows from a deep appreciation of the power of photos to communicate the universal humanity and challenges she has been honored to capture through her extensive travels.



In writing this photo essay on North Korea, I started in a strange place: rewatching *The Interview*. As I recalled from my first viewing, the movie draws on what seems to be actual footage of the airport, major monuments, and landscapes. I was struck by how real the visual images seemed, mirroring my exact experience visiting North Korea in January 2018 on a guided tour; however, I knew the sets were created on a soundstage in Vancouver. But when my entire trip was carefully curated, only seeing what the government wanted us to see, I began to question what “real” actually means. Does it matter that this movie was not filmed in North

Korea when it isn’t clear that anything I witnessed was any more accurate? In our contemporary society, digital reality and reality itself have become blurred, and even government-controlled visual representations have become powerful in their ability to transmit angles of the truth.

When I announced that I would be entering North Korea, my terrified family imposed a single rule: do not take any photos. However, when I got there, I was surprised to be constantly encouraged to take photos. From the outside, Pyongyang was perfect, with clean streets populated by cheerful individuals and colorful

buildings, creating bright, symmetrical compositions straight out of a Wes Anderson movie. This was the image the government wanted us to leave with and transmit to our respective communities.

While citizens on the ground were not being visibly controlled or directed, it was clear that they were aware of what “proper” behavior was, of what they were supposed to do. When a wedding party gathered in front of an enormous statue of the Supreme Leaders to pay their respects, they moved in conscious and deliberate formations, as if adhering to an invisible, yet understood, societal expectation of “perfection.”

Looking back at my photos, I had trouble finding one that expressed any sense of poverty, deprivation, or lack of rights. Rather, the truth reveals itself through subtle gaps in the meticulously calculated experience, as exemplified through a poignant image of women folding boxes in what claimed to be a ginseng manufacturing facility under signs calling for unity and hard work. As we pulled up to the building, the lights flicked on, and I could see the women only beginning to “work” as we entered the room, grabbing items off a completely unnecessary conveyer belt and randomly moving paper around to create the illusion of productivity. Our guides urgently forced us out the door as the machines slowed down and the employees scrambled to find more objects to place on the belt, with any illusion of a functioning factory leaving with us.

There were many tiny moments such as this that brought light to the imperfections of the country. Walking past a school, I saw a wall of government posters, with one of them having fallen down. It was a minuscule detail, but when I was editing my photos on the bus, my tour guide, with a passionate plea in his voice, said, “Please delete that photo.” It was clear that he believed that by visualizing and sharing an image of North Korea that was anything less than perfect, I was putting them all at risk.

Another shot that speaks to the underlying reality is from the country’s largest library, with a woman watching flickering VCRs through an outdated, oversized television. While this moment is representative of how the materials from the outside world can only be found in the state sanctioned library, the fact the government chose this place as one of the few we were allowed to see is demonstrative of their values. They were proud of the library, a place where the public could access resources; however, the content was still





managed, there was no Internet access, and only few could actually visit. Like much of what I felt in North Korea, these VCR tapes, 20 years out of place, spoke to the jarring disconnect witnessed as an outsider.

When I reflect back on North Korea, it's best captured in the following photo: a sense of facelessness upon a background of straight constructed lines, the illusion of movement, and a heavy use of strong powerful color to mask a paleness that one could feel below the surface of everything.

Photography is powerful; it allows us to humanize geopolitical issues. This trip was particularly difficult in determining what photos should be taken and shared, as I was aware of the danger of communicating a false visual narrative of a safe, beautiful, prosperous country. While the images from my trip seem to capture a harmonious and vibrant society, they can only be understood in light of the heavily curated nature of the visitor experience; under such a lens, this perfection becomes highly representative of the state's systemic repression, even more so than if the reality of the situation was freely visible.

In writing this photo essay on North Korea, I started in a strange place: rewatching *The Interview*. As I recalled from my first viewing, the movie draws on

what seems to be actual footage of the airport, major monuments, and landscapes. I was struck by how real the visual images seemed, mirroring my exact experience visiting North Korea in January 2018 on a guided tour; however, I knew the sets were created on a soundstage in Vancouver. But when my entire trip was carefully curated, only seeing what the government wanted us to see, I began to question what "real" actually means. Does it matter that this movie was not filmed in North Korea when it isn't clear that anything I witnessed was any more accurate? In our contemporary society, digital reality and reality itself have become blurred, and even government-controlled visual representations have become powerful in their ability to transmit angles of the truth.

When I announced that I would be entering North Korea, my terrified family imposed a single rule: do not take any photos. However, when I got there, I was surprised to be constantly encouraged to take photos. From the outside, Pyongyang was perfect, with clean streets populated by cheerful individuals and colorful buildings, creating bright, symmetrical compositions straight out of a Wes Anderson movie. This was the image the government wanted us to leave with and transmit to our respective communities.

Twiplomacy: An Extension of Power in the Digital Age

Yi Chen
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While the advent of Twitter has been described as a diplomatic revolution, it may simply reflect rather than rebalance existing power dynamics.

Today, a vast array of social networks, such as Twitter, have brought governments a degree of connectivity that has never been experienced or imagined before. Twiplomacy, or Twitter diplomacy, stands for the usage of Twitter in advancing diplomatic dialogues and agendas online. As a digital form of public diplomacy, it has been widely adopted by heads of the state, governors of international organizations, and diplomats around the world. According to the Burson Cohn & Wolfe's Twiplomacy study in 2018, 131 foreign ministries maintain active accounts on Twitter, making Twitter the single most popular tool of digital diplomacy.

Countries and leaders in Asia have indicated a wide range of deployment of Twiplomacy. The Government of Japan (@Japan) registered its official account as early as in March 2007. The Chinese State Council Information Office (@ChinaSCIO) has been on Twitter since 2015. For leaders, the most notable achievement in Asia has probably been made by India so far, whose Prime Minister Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) enjoys the second largest number of followers globally, highlighting Indian government's persistent effort in realizing digitalization in both its political and economic planning that consists of innovative initiatives such as Aadhaar and eKYC.

What makes Twiplomacy unique and different from traditional means of diplomacy in Asia? Some people believe that the old-style diplomacy no longer works in the age of social media. Conversely, I argue that the emergence of Twiplomacy represents a change in the format and channel of traditional person-to-person diplomacy, yet it still inherits the strategic logic that governments have employed, which is consistent with other forms of political communica-

tions. On the one hand, Twiplomacy has highlighted its function of amplifying the existing messages and even helps to facilitate actual services in life, which revolutionizes the conventional "top-down" diplomatic approach and makes diplomacy more engaging and accessible to ordinary citizens. On the other hand, however, Twiplomacy does not give birth to a new set of diplomatic rules by "democratizing" the diplomatic playing field. In fact, we continue to see key leaders and players in world politics and economy, such as the U.S, Europe, China, and India, dominate the headlines, while very few developing countries manage to get their voices heard. Thus, Twiplomacy may simply replicate existing power distributions and political realities, as followers and listeners online may not translate to diplomatic clout.

A Diplomatic Revolution?

The essential characteristic that makes Twitter the social media tool of diplomatic choice is the ability to amplify a message in terms of reach and speed. By tagging, retweeting, and commenting, officials can foster engagement and discussion on important issues and challenges, leading to instant interactions with audiences both inside and outside the country. For example, Alan Peter Cayetano, the Foreign Minister of the Philippines, renamed his account to "God bless the Philippines" during Typhoon Mangkhut, which caused widespread damage in Philippine in 2018. This constituted an astute Twiplomacy strategy that allowed the government to amplify an urgent message and to attract international attention in light of a crisis situation.

Similarly, online engagement can translate to real life actions and services. For instance, social media can bring a new dimension to consular services,

connecting virtual requests with offline assistance, which marks a new level of governance efficiency and accountability. Under Sushma Swaraj, the Minister of External Affairs in the first Modi government, her Twitter account received countless inquiries and distress calls from Indian citizens. This enabled her staff to respond in a timely fashion by directly connecting the consular officials responsible to resolve specific issues. According to a study undertaken by CPC-Analytics, Swaraj's followers were over six times that of India's official Ministry of External Affairs account (@MEAIndia), despite the longer presence and the higher frequency of tweets by the latter. Swaraj's spectacular growth of popularity demonstrates the effectiveness of her participatory approach in engaging citizens and filling the void left by the official channel. As a study by an independent analytics firm showed, "tweets asking for assistance with MEA services such as repatriation of family remains, lost passport support and expatriate community aid are asked of the Minister herself, requiring new internal communication strategies and prompt policy action." This suggests that Twiplomacy has changed the way that internal diplomatic services between citizens and state are conducted.

A Double-Edged Sword?

Nevertheless, the immediacy and accessibility of Twiplomacy can also accelerate the spread of ill-timed and counterproductive messages, which might result in unwanted tensions. On April 1, Amit Malviya, the head of Indian's ruling party BJP's IT sector, posted a provocative Tweet saying "Delhi's dark underbelly is exploding! Last 3 months have seen an Islamic insurrection of sorts, first in the name of anti-CAA protests from Shaheen Bagh to Jamia, Jaffrabad to Seelampur. And now the illegal gathering of the radical Tablighi Jamaat at the markaz. It needs a fix!" This post, along with other ongoing media bias and distorted reporting on Islamophobia amid the COVID-19, quickly induced a new wave of Anti-Muslim sentiment in the Gulf. India's diplomats in the region are now being put on the spot trying to mitigate the anger in the Muslim community, while avoiding concessions that might undermine the reputation and prestige of Indian diplomacy. While this dilemma is equally present in face-to-face diplomacy, rooted in the complex geopolitical and socio-cultural nuances of the issue, the advent of Twiplomacy creates a particular challenge for Indian diplomats. Since Twitter now enables everyone to see India's response seamlessly and in real time, any mishandling will be further amplified and could lead to catastrophic diplomatic fallout. Hence, the outcomes of Twiplomacy largely depend on the behaviour of the governments using it, making Twiplomacy an extension of traditional diplomatic practices and a reflection of real-world dynamics.

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"Thus, Twiplomacy may simply replicate existing power distributions and political realities, as followers and listeners online may not translate to diplomatic clout."

Some studies, which have underscored how Twiplomacy might have reshaped a country's foreign affairs policies, have said that countries such as China have become more assertive on Twitter since last year. However, very few have touched upon the hidden causation in the dynamics here: as a relatively newcomer in the world of digital diplomacy, the tremendous attention Chinese Twiplomacy has gained is primarily because of its strategic and economic significance as a major power, rather than how tactical or sensational its Twiplomacy strategies are. Even before China embraced a more assertive and aggressive social media narrative, countries such as Russia have already deployed similar tactics in its online interactions with major powers such as the UK for years. Hence, solely focusing on the peculiarity or exceptional nature of Chinese Twiplomacy approach is a flawed way of assessing how digital diplomacy's impact in international relations as a whole. The voices of major powers are often loud enough to reverberate across continents, regardless of the platform.

Ultimately, Twiplomacy is an extension of power. Today, over 4,600 embassies and 1,400 ambassadors remain active on Twitter. Given its unique capability to amplify messages, and its potential to evolve into a parallel diplomatic network, Twiplomacy will not cease to reshape, rewrite, and revolutionize the development of international relations and diplomacy. As a virtual and flat platform, Twitter allows countries to express their views and standpoints in a more visible manner. However, it does not create a brand new world free of hierarchy, inequality, or constraints. On the contrary, it mirrors the reality and magnifies both the edges and obstacles each country faces when calculating the geopolitical considerations and dealing with the multilateral relationships with its neighbors, competitors, and partners.

Social Media and Nationalism in the Sinosphere

How Chinese “Wolf Warrior”- Netizens have shaped nationalist discourse through the internet

Joey Zhou, SIPA MPA’20

The understanding of national identity has changed rapidly in the past decades. Social media and other digital platforms have accelerated and changed the nature of discourse on nationalism.

In the past, the central government monopolized control over narratives on nationalism through crafted political campaigns. However, with social media in the digital age, nationalism and its narrative are increasingly initiated bottom-up by online netizens unorganized. As a result, the government has been losing control and has become more reactive.

This leads to a potentially dangerous trend and cycle of nationalistic conflicts, wherein the Mainland netizen’s aggressive advocacy for unification provokes Taiwanese and Hong Kong citizens’ desires for independence, and vice versa. Such back and forth in turn fuels the furthering of nationalistic fervor from both sides.

Since the introduction of the Internet, China has carefully crafted its online ecosystem by controlling the flow of information and limiting the presence of foreign internet companies. Today, China’s online community—though relatively isolated from the world—is vibrant and robust. The online discourse on social

media reflects the sentiment and thought of the general Chinese populace: confident, patriotic and nationalistic. China’s digital craftsmanship has consolidated netizen’s belief of what China is as a country. The Global Times, a nationalistic state-owned outlet, epitomized this belief with this summary, “the days when China can be put in a submissive position are long gone.”

In 2016, when the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Hague published its verdict on the South China Sea dispute, the People’s Daily posted a picture on Weibo with the hashtag of “not a single dash will be given in” — referring to China’s Nine-Dash Line claim. Riding the wave of patriotism and nationalistic pride, the post was retweeted across social media platforms by celebrities and ordinary netizens. Even in 2016, nationalism was led and controlled by the state and then followed by the people.

By 2019 however, netizens were taking more initiatives in dictating nationalistic discourse. For example, during the peak of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, Houston Rockets’ General Manager Daryl Morey drew widespread criticism and sparked anger among Chinese netizens with his tweet supporting the Hong Kong protests. In response, netizens coerced Tencent Sports to issue a public statement calling for the boycott and eventual suspension of much of its NBA broadcasting operations. A

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once hopeful five-year, \$1.5 billion deal with the NBA for exclusive digital broadcasting rights in China began to take financial toll on the company. To this day, Tencent Sports has yet to resume its NBA broadcasts, leaving Chinese basketball fans without channels to catch their favorite teams and the company with great financial loss. Through this fallout, the government was left to deal with the diplomatic consequences.

This increasingly jingoistic behavior has been termed, “wolf warrior”—named after a Chinese action movie series. Netizens who mobilize through social media to actively boycott and attack any individual or organization that are deemed “anti-China” are dubbed “wolf warriors”. Beyond just Chinese platforms, wolf warriors have targeted Facebook and Twitter and have affected businesses and consumers as in the NBA incident. Further, they have negatively affected civil diplomacy between the mainland China and Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In face of this rise in Chinese nationalism however, a completely different sense of nationalism is fostering in these two regions due to rapid mobilization of movements and ideas through social media.

From the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan in 2014 to the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, we saw a rapid rise of the “non-China identity” and anti-Chinese sentiment. In response to Beijing’s tough stance, Hong Kong and Taiwan reacted by furthering support for their own separate national identities. In recent years, protestors advocating for independence with signs such as “Hong Kong/Taiwan is not China” and “Hong Kong/Taiwan Independence” have become more visible and active. In 2019, Hong Kong saw its biggest protests with estimates of 1.03 million people. In all these movements, social media played an indispensable role in advancing these ideas and mobilizing large populations to participate in the protest. Further, as these protestors and the wolf warriors clashed, civil

diplomacy between Mainland netizens and non-mainland protestors quickly deteriorated.

Admittedly, wolf warriors and their advocacy of extreme measures such as military actions exacerbated the growing anti-Chinese sentiment. We saw a wave of anti-China politicians, mostly young and fervent and proficient at social media, elected to office in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Often citing the words of wolf warriors, these officials ran media campaigns to garnish support for their pro-independence platforms. In short, actions on both sides are contributing to a cycle of competing jingoism and nationalism.

Landslide victory for anti-Beijing and pro-independence candidates in Taiwan and Hong Kong’s election displays Beijing’s inability to define a shared Chinese identity in today’s political and social context. Beijing’s tough stance has not only fueled the nationalistic and independent sentiment in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but has also empowered wolf warriors to continue their online nationalist campaign.

As Tsai Ying-wen proceeds to a second term in office and pro-independence legislators take control of Hong Kong’s legislature, anti-Beijing sentiment will not easily fade in the near future. Thus, questions for both scholars and policymakers emerge: can Beijing effectively control and direct domestic online discourse away from nationalism? Does the government still have the capacity to control the narrative in today’s highly digitized world?

Social media and advances in technology have not necessarily led to improvements in relations but on the contrary, decreased mutual understanding and amiability within the Sinosphere.

Beijing is at risk of being thrown onto the sideline if it does not take control of the nationalism and wolf warriors in its internet ecosystem.

On Transparency and Corruption

“Please get out of here, otherwise I will lose my job!”

The demand, issued by a security guard at the Red Cross Society of China warehouse in Wuhan, was caught on camera during a China Central Television live broadcast, and viewed by over ten million Chinese people on February 1st, 2020. Soon after, the incident was widely discussed on several famous Chinese websites, such as Weibo, the largest microblogging website in the country, and Bilibili, a popular video sharing site.

With easy access to digital technology, Chinese people get timely updates on the news happening both at home and abroad through their smartphones. Rapid transmission of information makes Chinese netizens aware of the incidents happening in an instantaneous and convenient manner. The censorship and propaganda by the Chinese government, widely criticized by international media, is increasingly less effective than it used to be. Once a scandal has left a negative impression on the public, it will be extremely hard for netizens to change their thinking. This effect has been magnified during the current COVID-19 outbreak, as netizens are forced to remain home during the lockdown, and are therefore spending more time on their phones. Thus, Chinese

officials have been pushed to improve the transparency and efficiency of their work to avoid the spread of negative news.

Scandals involving Chinese officials posted on the internet can undermine the public's confidence in the government. In addition to discussing the evasive expression of the security guard covering up the warehouse mismanagement, Chinese netizens also linked the video to a picture posted on Weibo earlier in the same day of an official car taking a large box of 3M masks from the warehouse of the Red Cross to government officials. “That's why the security guard was sent to stop the live broadcast reporter from watching the distribution of supplies in the warehouse,” noted Chinese netizens, questioning the Wuhan Red Cross over how donations are being used. As a result, the Red Cross Society of China, a state charity, repeatedly lost credibility amongst Chinese netizens in national crises. A Chinese student in Columbia University noted in her WeChat Moments, “I have donated all my red envelopes to Wuhan University Alumni Association (WUAA) because I don't believe in the Red Cross Society of China.” Red envelopes are envelopes with money given to children by older family members for Chinese New Year. Many Chinese at home and

abroad, similar to this Columbia student, made donations to civil society groups, such as WUAA, celebrity foundations, or by directly contacting local hospitals to send supplies, because they do not want their donations benefiting corrupt officials and their friends. Because of their distrust of the Red Cross, some civil society organizations have given up the official express delivery channels directly and tried to find ways to send supplies to the hospital themselves.

The criticism and questioning by Chinese netizens on social media draws attention to government officials and urges them to clarify their “corruptive actions”. An official clarification is usually the first-step response from the government to address public concerns, which relieves the anger of netizens, to some extent. Soon after the “official car taking masks” incident was widely criticized on social media, a few netizens' accounts posted that the Wuhan municipal committee was investigating the incident. A day later, Wuhan municipal government posted a notification on its official website regarding the incident, stating that the official car was transporting masks and other protective equipment for a municipal meeting about COVID-19 resources storage and management, which had been documented by the

municipal emergency resource manager. In addition, the Hubei Red Cross, which operates at the larger provincial level, released information on donations to the public through their official website, noting that they would continue disclosing all donation distributions.

However, due to the increasing skepticism over the integrity of state charities, especially the Red Cross, the clarifications are insufficient to calm netizen anger. The distrust in the Red Cross can be traced back to an incident far before the outbreak of COVID-19. In 2011, Chinese netizens questioned the authority of the Red Cross Society after capturing a “coincidence” that revealed a connection between a luxurious Internet celebrity, Guo Meimei, and the Red Cross through social media. Chinese netizens expressed their suspicion on whether the donations to the Red Cross were being exploited by officials. Apart from Ms. Guo and the Red Cross denying the connection, there was no follow-up investigation or punishment published by the government. The scandal left the Red Cross Society of China with a severely damaged reputation, which had a subsequent negative influence on people’s confidence in state charities.

Compared to the scandal in 2011, the government took greater action to respond to public concerns during the COVID-19 outbreak. The government investigated the officials that have been widely criticized by netizens and subsequently punished them by removing the officials from their positions once solid evidence

came to light. Only three days after netizens expressed their anger on the mismanagement of donations, three officials from the Hubei Red Cross have been punished, one of whom was dismissed. In addition, the Wuhan government fired one government official, and warned another two over misappropriating masks from the Red Cross warehouse. The punishments largely relieved the anger of the netizens and rebuilt their trust in the government.

Some may argue that the government is using censorship on the internet to suppress critics, especially in the incident of Dr. Li Wenliang. Dr. Li was a medical professional in Wuhan who tried to alert his family and friends about the virus through WeChat. However, rather than responding to his concerns, Dr. Li was asked to sign a confession for spreading rumors by local police. However, the censorship is not targeting the expression that finds fault with elements of the government, its policies, or the officials. Instead, the censorship targets people who “join together to express themselves collectively, stimulated by someone other than the government, and seem to have the potential to generate collective action”. Dr. Li’s messages noted “seven people from a local seafood market were diagnosed with SARS,” which raised great panic in WeChat. SARS was a severe virus with efficient transmission and high lethality that had a global fatality rate of 11%. WeChat users who saw this message made screenshots and spread the message through social media. To avoid

the spread of the message further raising mass panic, Wuhan municipality asked the police to deal with the message spreading issue according to the law.

The digital age has brought convenience for people to access news and to express their opinion, but it also makes it difficult to stop the spread of fake news, unhealthy content, or to prevent and punish cyber violence and online crime. Fortunately, Chinese netizens are also aware of their rights in supervising officials and participating in public affairs through social media. Officials’ corruption can hardly be concealed in the digital age as information is transferred quickly and freely throughout the internet. Even though the Chinese government uses censorship to prevent collective action, the government does not suppress online critique of officials, and actively responds to the critics by disciplining officials and improving transparency. As such, the Chinese government should keep improving its governance capacity and increasing transparency under the supervision of Chinese netizens to foster social development in the digital age.

Interview with Dr. Eve Zucker

Imagining the future first requires envisioning and interpreting the past – how to recall it, preserve it, discuss it, and ultimately reckon with it – as well as the implications that it has for society in the present. As such, the project of historical memorialization carries great significance, especially as we are now being called upon to define the ‘new normal’ in our individual and collective lives. Our interview with Dr. Eve Zucker, an Associate Research Scholar at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute and a lecturer in Anthropology at Columbia, discusses the role of digital tools and platforms in facilitating the memorialization of mass atrocities, the dynamics and challenges around their use, and what this means for the individuals and communities affected by genocide, war, and other forms of mass violence.

Dr. Zucker’s research focuses on the aftermath of mass violence in Cambodia through the lenses of social memory, morality, the imagination, trust, digital media, and everyday practices. She received her Ph.D. in anthropology from the London School of Economics and her M.A. in cultural anthropology from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She has conducted extensive research in Cambodia on the topics of memory, morality, and recovery from war and genocide.

Q: Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us. Could you describe your work on digital memorialisation and how you came to be involved with this field?

Zucker: There are two interconnected strands to my work on digital memorialization. The first would be a broader project about digital memorialisation of mass atrocities – war, genocide – in general, which started with a conference organised by myself and David Simon, Director of the Yale Genocide Studies Program, a couple of years ago. We (David and I) were simultaneously looking at digital and material memorialisation in the aftermath of mass atrocity, and it became increasingly evident that there were many changes taking place very rapidly in both the physical and digital realms. In this way, digital memorialisation emerged as a theme and concept for the conference and later the book.

Connected to that project, I conducted research in Cambodia last summer, where I focused on a number of digital memorial

projects taking place. First, there are the immense efforts to digitise the very large archives of documentation at Tuol Sleng, the ECCC, and also by Documentation Centre Cambodia (DC-Cam). I focused mainly on the former two. The second part of it was looking at two (smartphone) apps that have been developed, one by an organisation known as Bophana, which is an organisation started by Rithy Panh (Well-known Cambodian filmmaker, whose works include *Duch* and *The Missing Picture*); and the other, “Mapping Memories Cambodia” by students at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). Both projects addressed the challenge of “how do we get young people to want to learn more about their history?” and they both thought that an app would be a good approach. Bophana then created the Khmer Rouge History app, which contains original footage, digital testimony, and photographs from the Khmer Rouge period.

The other project, “Mapping Memories Cambodia,” was developed at RUPP with support

from the German government. Students at the university went out to (the provinces) and interviewed and videotaped former Khmer Rouge and survivors. It’s called Mapping Memories because it is linked to GPS. When you visit a site, the app can give you information, photographs, and videos on it (the site) as it relates to the KR past. It’s more interactive, and people can submit comments to it. Again, it revolves around the same idea, “how do we reach out to young people?” With atrocities that happened quite a while ago, there is the concern that people are getting older. How do we ensure that the younger generation has access to these stories, and how do we help them learn about their past? Finally, I conducted some general ethnographic research on the use of smartphones, apps, and social media as it relates to memorialization.

Q: What were some of these “rapid changes” you were seeing, and how did that shape the direction of the field?

Zucker: Disparate projects were taking place, but they were interconnected as well. You have all these seemingly different things going on: social media, artificial intelligence, digitisation of photographs, documents, and databases. At the same time, they are all feeding into each other. For example, a digitised film or photo may then be put online on an archive, which could then be downloaded into somebody's personal archive and placed on a Facebook site. So there are different relationships that occur between these forms of digital media and digital tools.

We are looking at the increasing use of digital tools and digital media to memorialise the past, as it's being done by different individuals, different communities, and states as well, who all have access to many of the same tools. It should be noted that digital memorialization is not an entirely new phenomenon: since the advent of the internet in the mid-1990s, there have been a number of large projects to digitise archival documents and make them accessible online. Then came the period (that we are in now) associated with "Web 2.0" or the "participatory web", which allowed for new connections between people. In the past, people could create websites about mass atrocities of the past, but these platforms were limited. People could not interact with them, and there was not a community being formed in the same way that there is now. The advent of social media has really changed things. Anybody can create a Facebook page to recall an event or contest a particular narrative, and communities near and far can participate through discussions, sharing of photos, videos, and so forth in real time. Therefore memorialization and the narratives that accompany it is not only under the auspices of the state but is available to the ordinary individual who may choose to contest the state narrative. The

key is that ordinary people can now reach a broad audience in a manner that was not possible in the past.

Q: With these changes in mind, how would you say that this digital medium enhances or perhaps destabilise the act of memorialization?

Zucker: Memorialization is not just a monument or pictures, but is accompanied by some kind of explanation – similar to what you see in museums – and this could occur at a physical or digital site. This goes back to the idea of narratives that are being articulated, sometimes by the state, in which case they may become dominant. These narratives not only establish a history, but also a vocabulary to talk about what happened. Not everyone may agree with that vocabulary, and there are different voices that may contest official forms of commemoration or feel that certain members have been left out. Digital memorialization means that people in a state that, perhaps, does not recognise a genocide or did not include certain groups in their commemoration can communicate with each other, and come together and contest it: saying "this did occur, our families were victims, here is some evidence."

We're also seeing this now with this COVID-19 pandemic – people don't have a choice for gathering together in person, so memorialization is taking place online – for instance, the annual Holocaust memorial is being hosted online. With digital media, it codes information into a binary language of zeros and ones, which allows for transfer between mediums. There's a lot of plasticity there compared to the analog world – the ease of use and creativity allows for the construction of many different kinds of memorials.

But there are also drawbacks: the availability of what's online is constrained depending on what nation you're in. Someone in China may not have access to the same kinds of information as someone in Australia, say, or it may be dangerous to contest the state narrative in somewhere in Thailand or Cambodia, where you could end up in jail. So it's not that there is total freedom and the state has no power, the state also takes advantage of all these resources to assert their power.

Q: Returning to your fieldwork in Cambodia, you discussed both the digitisation of archives in Tuol Sleng, as well as the creation of interactive apps, such as the Mapping Memories project. Would you say that these varied forms of digital memorialisation operate in different ways, and were they engaged with or situated in society differently?

Zucker: It seems that the engagement with the apps at least initially mainly came from students studying for school or working on a project. It was hard at that point to build wider engagement, and that seems to be a central challenge: getting a larger audience involved. But it may also be a problem of time constraints: In Cambodia, college students are tremendously busy, but sometimes these interests develop later on in life, and they may well want to use these apps when they have the bandwidth to do so. Often, when people are older, they may want to make sure that their children understand the events of the past as well.

The archives are not fully uploaded yet, although DC-Cam has started to make material available. A very active site for interaction would be the Facebook pages that are created to memorialise these

historical events. For instance, one was created for the Khao I Dang refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodia border, where people share memories and post pictures, but also use the site to locate past relatives or contacts from that period. So it's a multi-purpose site that also functions as a memorial, and it's clear that people are participating from a variety of places in the world. There is actually a lot of cross-feed between the Facebook sites, archival images, and YouTube content, with media being shared across separate platforms. They are not disparate; it's a very interconnected landscape, and that makes it interesting to study.

Q: Building on that idea of inter-connectivity, how would you say that these digital memorialisation projects complement the existing programmes for commemoration and reconciliation offline and on the ground?

Zucker: They are definitely linked. You have the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC, an independent hybrid tribunal in partnership with the United Nations, established to try senior Khmer Rouge leaders for war crimes), with its official websites and YouTube page, but also the unofficial discussions of the ECCC taking place over social media including on the ECCC YouTube pages. So there will always be discussions of what's taking place "on the ground" so to speak. Another example is Hun Sen's version of events, of how the Khmer Rouge came to an end through his Win-Win policy. Not only has he constructed Win-Win statues, but he's also created films, posted about it on his Facebook page, and shared photographs of the horrific conditions under the Khmer Rouge – and in doing so, this is his

way of projecting his narrative. Physical memorialisation is not about to go away, but there is now an added digital dimension. And at the community level, projects like the Mapping Memories app brings students into the villages where incidents have taken place. This place then ends up being digitised, so it may just be one small site and not a whole national monument, but it is now preserved through videos of the words and memories of the community themselves.

Q: Lastly, to wrap up our conversation, what do you think the main value or purpose of memorialising mass violence is?

Zucker: The first reason has to do with collective memory, and also history. If an incident of mass violence has occurred, it is first of all important to acknowledge that it has happened, and also to understand how it happened. That memorialization process makes a statement that (1) the atrocities occurred, and (2) that these people are victims who either perished or suffered. Another aspect of memorialization is also providing closure for the victims and their families: it recognises and responds to the violence. This recognition could come from the state, but also through communal forms of memorialisation. And a third reason is education: the hope that this information may prevent such atrocities from occurring again. These categories are all interrelated; they flow into each other, and as we move on from the events of the past and look to the future, education becomes more and more important in ensuring that the younger generation understands what has happened.

Dr. Zucker's upcoming book, co-edited with David J. Simon, is entitled "Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age:

Memorialization Unmoored." Forthcoming July 2020 with Palgrave MacMillan, it further explores the themes of virtual mediums of memory and impacts of digital mediums on mass violence and its aftermaths.

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Gendered Embodiment in Thai Digital Narrative

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