

THE REED

Spring 2014



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WEAI Director to Step Down After 7 Years **Q&A with Myron L. Cohen**



AFTER serving seven years as director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Professor Myron L. Cohen will step down from the post this summer. Since assuming the directorship in 2006, he spearheaded the Institute's undergraduate initiatives, oversaw numerous events and international symposia, and helped strengthen the WEAI's programs in Southeast Asian and Taiwan studies. A professor of anthropology, Cohen has been a longtime member of the WEAI community, receiving both his undergraduate and graduate education at Columbia and serving on the University's faculty since 1966. The author of such studies as House United, House Divided: The Chinese Family in Taiwan, he has conducted fieldwork in Taiwan and China for over fifty years. The Reed sat down with Professor Cohen to discuss his career and his accomplishments at the WEAI.

How did you first become interested in East Asia?

I was an undergraduate anthropology major at Columbia. The questions that occurred

to me then were "how could a society as large as China continue for so many years?" and "What kept that country together?" Those were the years of Maoist China. The irony, or paradox, was that, in America, anthropological interest about China was growing at the very same time that China was cut off from anthropological research. So people went to Taiwan or Hong Kong to do their field research, especially Hong Kong's new territories or rural Taiwan, since basically there was nowhere else to go.

What was it like first setting foot in Taiwan in 1963?

Taiwan now is avant-garde and hyper modern. This was not the case relative to the rest of the world when I went there in 1963. At major construction sites, oxen hauled carts of mud. In Taipei city, huge areas were filled with still-attractive, onestory Japanese homes. When I first arrived in Taipei, I was able to rent a Japanese house with brand new Tatami mats on the floor. In fact, each of the American graduate students there had his or her own house.

All this has disappeared, as Taipei has turned into a city of apartment buildings and commercial establishments. Back then, it was not as economically developed as where I had come from, but on the other hand it certainly had its own charm and character.

How was the experience of first traveling to East Asia?

It was interesting. I had never even been to the West Coast before, and in those days, planes didn't travel as far as they can now. So I visited people in San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver. I then flew to Hawaii; the plane I was on made refueling stops on Wake Island, then in Guam. I finally reached Japan, where I was welcomed by graduate student colleagues who showed me around Tokyo. I stayed there a few days, went to Taiwan and enrolled in the Cornell University language program which later that year merged with the inter-university program. I stayed in Taipei a year before leaving for fieldwork in southern Taiwan.

While in Taipei, I had already decided to do research in a Hakka village. The two possibilities were the Hakka regions of either Taiwan or Hong Kong's New Territories. So I flew to Hong Kong's New Territories to check things out. At that time there was a very eminent professor at Chung Chi College named Lo Hsiang-lin, who was an expert on Hakka culture and history. Professor Lo arranged for a guide to walk me through some of the more mountainous regions of the new territories, where there were still-intact Hakka villages. So it was a Saturday morning when I arrived at Professor Lo's house; he had told me to be there at six in the morning. I arrived at about that time, and Professor Lo asked me to sit in his living room while he made some preparations and phone calls. He handed me a newspaper to read. I unwrapped it and saw the headline, "President Kennedy shot." So the day that I heard about Kennedy's

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assassination was the day that I had my first walking tour of the New Territories — quite a cascade of events.

After visiting several small villages dating from the Ming and Qing dynasties, and little changed since then, I went to a party given by a fellow graduate student, but it had turned into a wake. People from the U.S. consulate had been invited so it was rather interesting to see how they were handling the situation at that point.

How did people in Taiwan and China respond to having an American academic study them?

I did my first field work in South Taiwan in a place called Meinong. People there were surprisingly well informed about the world. They weren't rich; they only had bicycles, and it was during my stay there that the first motorcycle was introduced to this particular village. Then, the only cars there were taxis; now, almost every family owns one or more automobiles.

Shortly before I entered Meinong, an area known for its tobacco production, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a report identifying tobacco as a cause of lung cancer. I wondered how people in Meinong would react to this news. It seemed that everybody in Meinong knew about the report. They read about it in the newspaper, and were rather concerned that this news would impact their livelihoods. When asked, I would say little more than that there would be an impact.

How has Taiwan changed during your years of research?

I've been going back and forth to Taiwan for about 50 years. One research focus is on what might be called historical anthropology of the Meinong area, the way it was before the Japanese occupation began in 1895. But I'm also interested in the contemporary scene, which is a very fast moving target. Social change in Taiwan has been rapid and enormous — also in China, but Taiwan's revolutionary social transformations were earlier.

Of what accomplishments as director are you most proud?

Our series of undergraduate initiatives are very good, and I'm happy about them, such as the summer Global Scholars Program. In recent years we have been working to expand Southeast Asian studies. We've gotten young faculty to move up and get tenure, which has strengthened our teaching and research. So, in general, the Institute is an energetic and healthy place, and, overall, it's been a good show.

Have there been significant changes in the WEAI since you took the post in 2006?

The Southeast Asia initative is one. The whole Tibet program was there when I took over, but it's really blossomed. It's much stronger than it was. Senior staff and the Institute's very capable faculty leadership have been consistently of great support.

What were your expectations of the undergraduate Initiatives?

Well, the expectations when we started the Global Scholars Program were that it would be attractive for undergraduates and that it would be something that would take hold and continue. It would make good use of the various Global Centers that have been set up. There are eight of them, and, as the East Asian Institute, we will always focus on East Asia as one of the anchors. But our program is flexible and the curriculum changes every year, it's a program in which students who have participated have said that for them it has been tranformational. We hope it will also serve as a model for other Columbia University units, and that in the future there will be several Global Scholars Programs running concurrently during a single summer. Students would have a choice, and more could participate.

What do you think is the importance of having institutes like the WEAI at Columbia?

Well, you're really talking about the whole idea of regional studies. By having

a regional studies institute, especially like the Weatherhead, people from different departments and disciplines sharing an interest in a common region or era, are able to come together. There's a certain kind of synergy that helps foster pedagogical and research energy in ways that a traditional departmental context might not.

On the other hand, a departmental environment will have its own advantages, so the two approaches complement each other. There's so much focus these days on inter-departmental activity that we sometimes forget that the regional studies approach has promoted this for many, many years.

Do you have any plans after your term as director? I know that you're working on a book.

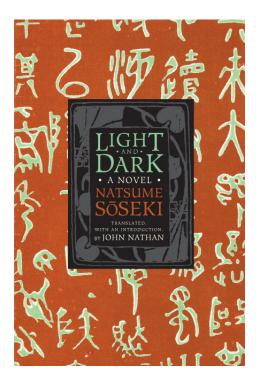
Yes, I have lots of plans. My main plan is to do more research of my own. I have three projects and if I ever finish those three, then I have even more projects based upon fieldwork that I've done. One of the things about doing anthropology in Taiwan and in China, where I did fieldwork in three widely separated villages, is that you wind up with lots of local documentary material. I want to work up all this material I've accumulated in the course of my field research and write it up. That's the main goal now. I'm not about to engage in new long-term field work in yet other locales. I just want to use what I have.

Do you have any advice for Eugenia Lean, the WEAI's incoming director?

Well, most of the advice I would give her is not really advice in the moral sense of the term. Perhaps I'll give her practical tips regarding this, that, or the other. Eugenia is hardly a stranger here. She knows the workings of the Institute very well, so I don't have to give her any advice in terms of any general orientation. I have assured her that if there's anything she wants to know, she need only ask. With Eugenia in charge, WEAI is in very good hands indeed.

WEAI Publications Series

WEAI Authors Discuss New Books



SINCE 1962, the Weatherhead East Asian Institute has been collaborating with leading university and trade presses to publish important studies of East Asia as well as new translations of contemporary and historic East Asian texts. This year, the Institute invited three authors—John Nathan, Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, and Emily T. Yeh—to discuss their new WEAI books with the Columbia community.

The first author event, held on December 9, featured John Nathan, whose translation of Natsume Sōseki's final novel, *Light and Dark*, is the most recent Weatherhead Book on Asia. The Weatherhead Books on Asia series, published by Columbia University Press, comprises high quality translations of significant works in Asian languages that are geared toward scholars, students, and general readers. During his talk, Nathan, the Takashima Professor of Japanese Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, discussed the influence of the American novelist Henry James on Sōseki (1867-1916), who is considered

one of Japan's foremost authors. Nathan further expounded on the art of translation, which requires that the translator find a way to convey in another language not only the words but also the style of the original author. Because the prose in *Light and Dark* proves dense and elusive to Japanese readers, Nathan explained that a faithful translation will make the book an equally challenging read in English. "It requires that you fly in the face of the reader's expectation and editor's expectation that translation should proceed smoothly," he said.

On February 25, the Institute welcomed Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, author of Neither Donkey Nor Horse: Medicine in the Struggle Over China's Modernity, a forthcoming Study of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute published by the University of Chicago Press. The Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute are books that bring public attention to the results of new research on modern and contemporary East Asia and are published by a variety of academic and trade presses.

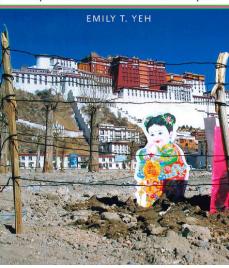
Lei, currently an associate research fellow at Academia Sinica, Taiwan, wrote his book about the process in which traditional Chinese medicine, rather than becoming an antiquated remnant of the pre-modern era, coevolved with Western medicine in the twentieth century. Although critics deemed modern Chinese medicine "neither donkey nor horse" because it was neither wholly modern nor wholly traditional, its



Sean Hsiang-lin Lei discusses his new book

TAMING TIBET

Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development



endurance, Lei explained, illustrates how hybrids of the traditional and the modern can successfully exist in contemporary society.

The final event, held on March 25, featured Emily T. Yeh, author of the Study of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development. Published by Cornell University Press, the book is based on sixteen months of fieldwork in Tibet between 2000 and 2009 by Yeh, an associate professor of geography at the University of Colorado at Boulder. During her ethnographic work in the Lhasa Valley, Yeh found that, while the Chinese government views its landscape and housing development programs as gifts to the Tibetan people, in reality they serve as a form of "indebtedness engineering" in which the Chinese state demonstrates its control over the region and expects gratefulness from the Tibetans.

Find out more about WEAl's publication programs by visiting our webage: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/publicationsseries.html

2013–2014 Undergraduate Initiative

INTERACT Program



WEAI Research Schola Yumi Shimabukuro leading a panel on welfare policies throughout Asia

THE International Network to Expand Regional and Collaborative Teaching (INTERACT) Program, founded in 2010, focuses on developing global studies in the undergraduate curriculum through a network of postdoctoral scholars focused on cross-regional, trans-regional and interdisciplinary study. In addition to WEAI, current participants in the INTERACT initiative include the Harriman Institute, the Committee on Global Thought and the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society.

In the 2013–2014 school year, INTERACT scholars have organized events for Columbia undergraduates ranging from full-day conferences to film screenings and panel discussions. Events have covered such topics as colonial legacies, social welfare, and queer documentary film, all of which were discussed in a trans-regional context. At WEAI, an INTERACT event recently organized by WEAI Research Scholar Yumi Shimabukuro involved a panel of five local scholars and drew a full crowd, facilitating a lively discussion on the issue of welfare policies throughout Asia.

This year, WEAI is hosting two postdoctoral fellows via the INTERACT Program: Shi-Yan Chao, who focuses on documentary film and queer media, and Saskia Schäfer, who studies religious and political issues in Southeast Asia. In addition to organizing events and teaching courses on their respective areas of expertise, the WEAI postdocs have also developed a presence on social media and contributed posts to the WEAI blog as part of the INTERACT initiative this year.

Another feature of the program is the annual INTERACT seminar, "Unequal Geographies," which is being taught this spring by Chao and Michael Griffiths of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. Schäfer and the other INTERACT postdocs have delivered several guest lectures to seminar students, further contributing to the course the type of collaborative and interdisciplinary atmosphere emphasized by the mission of the INTERACT Program.

Q&A with

Shi-Yan Chao

INTERACT Fellow

How did the INTERACT Fellowship impact your research and studies in terms of your areas of expertise?

INTERACT fellowship strengthened my research and studies on two levels. In terms of the method, I find the interdisciplinary approach very productive. It brings research from other fields into a meaningful dialogue with my studies on Chinese cinema and queer theory/media. For example, take the class I am co-teaching with another INTERACT fellow, Michael Griffiths. My colleague's expertise in postcolonial literature provides me with a comparative view on the representation of minorities in different media, while a recent session on human rights (along with the readings from Human Rights, Inc. by Professor Joseph R. Slaughter) also helped me rethink gay rights historically and in a global context.

What were some of the qualities of the INTERACT Fellowship that drew you to it?

I really appreciate the agenda promoted by the INTERACT fellowship that underlines an interdisciplinary approach to academic research in a transnational and transregional framework. I believe this is crucial to both scholars and students in an era of globalizing processes that are far from homogenous, but involve forms of negotiations between various players in and across different political economies. In addition, Columbia University provides such an amazing intellectual environment,

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2013–2014 INTERACT Post-Doctoral Fellow

Q&A with Shi-Yan Chao

along with its rich academic resources, and that has also become a significant draw of the INTERACT fellowship. Of course, all the scholars and staff members affiliated with my host institute, the WEAI, have been really generous and helpful; without their generous support, the transition in my post-doctoral stage would not have been so smooth.

Do you ever experience any backlash from others in response to your work, given its generally polarizing or controversial nature?

To be honest, I am not aware of any backlash in response to my research on Chinese queer cinema. Instead, all my friends, colleagues and mentors have been profoundly supportive of my work. Maybe I am just too lucky.

Is there a strong movement within China and Taiwan of people bringing to the forefront issues that surround the LGBT community?

It is very hard to have a gay movement in Mainland China, given that various "more general" rights issues can also not find proper expression, and that no sizable public rallies would be allowed under the banner of any kind of gay activism. The gay scene in China has largely taken the form of cultural events (such as film and cultural festivals) and private consumption (such as gay bars and gay friendly restaurants), while the Internet and social media have played a pivotal part in the queer social networking. In Taiwan, the scenario is rather different. Taiwan's queer culture, though only emerging in the 1990s, has become part and parcel of the local popular culture. Take the mainstream feature films (documentaries,

shorts, TV movies, and TV series not included) for example, there have been around twenty gay-themed productions since 2002, and several of them-such as "Blue Gate Crossing," "Formula 17," "Eternal Summer," "Spider Lilies," and "Girlfriend, Boyfriend"—even became box-office hits. Moreover, there has been an annual gay pride parade in Taipei since 2003, which, with over sixty thousand participants in the past two years, has boasted the largest gay pride parade in Asia. Currently, with over half of Taiwanese in support of marriage equality, there is also a chance that Taiwan will become the first state in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage.

What types of advantages do you think film brings to movements and causes like the ones that you examine?

In Taiwan's case, the proliferation of sympathetic queer characters and narratives in film, television, and popular culture in general, I believe, is integral to the change of public attitude towards the LGBT community. Indexical of this change is the percentage of Taiwanese people supporting gay marriage that has doubled since early 2000s, which virtually happened in parallel to the mainstreaming of the queer culture in Taiwan.

Would you quantify film and media representations of the LGBT community in East Asian countries as mainly positive, negative, or apathetic?

In China, homosexuality is mostly absent from the official discourse. If it does appear in the state-sanctioned mainstream media, it is largely portrayed in a negative or voyeuristic manner. In respect to the queer characters and narratives portrayed in the independent films and documentaries that exist outside the official system, they are usually sympathetic, if not clearly positive, mainly because of the filmmakers' identifications or connections with the community. In Taiwan, the queer characters and narratives are largely characterized by a sense of sympathy, and in many cases, they are not so much marked by an overtly positive outlook as a sense of sentimentalism (which also permeates Taiwan's popular culture). In Hong Kong, queer representation in mainstream media had been largely stereotypical and pejorative until the mid 1990s, namely the eve of the 1997 Handover. As for Japan and South Korea, I feel I have not done research that is extensive enough for me to discuss and qualify their respective queer cultures, although I would love to proceed with this project in the near future.



Shi-Yan Chao received his PhD in Cinema Studies from New York University. Granted distinction by the Cinema Studies Department, his dissertation, "Processing Tongzhi Imaginaries: Chinese Queer Representation in the Global Mediascape," examines the production and consumption of tongzhi/queer images from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China.

WEAI Panel Discussion

China & the Environment



Eugenia Lean, Micah Muscolino, Isabel Hilton & Peter Perdue

IN an in-depth conversation held on March 31, three leading experts discussed the importance of looking to China's past in order to address the country's present environmental situation. The discussion, moderated by Columbia professor Eugenia Lean, featured Yale professor Peter Perdue, Georgetown professor Micah Muscolino, and Chinadialogue editor Isabel Hilton. The event was co-sponsored by the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, the Center on Japanese Economy and Business, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Study Center.

Peter Perdue first spoke about China's long environmental history. He began by placing the history in its global context, where nature and humans across time have been united in a "global contribution for better or worse" to the climate. In his remarks, he focused on the need to present a "longer term view" of China and the world's environmental challenges. To illustrate this point, he spoke of the rise of CO2 emissions three or four thousand years ago as a result of deforestation in China and East Asia. Deforestation also occurred as a result of war and even of Buddhism, in which monastic centers of production were also forces of deforestation. Efforts on behalf of the state to industrialize during the

Self-Strengthening Movement of the late nineteenth century led China on a search for The state focused its efforts on the coast, neglecting the central and Northern provinces, which contributed to the Great North China Famine of the 1870s. Perdue argued that the Great Leap Forward famine was also the result of both ecological phenomena and state policies. He concluded that the environmental crises

are deep seeded and very hard to reverse. The good news, he said, is that there is information in the past that may help us learn how to address present and future challenges.

Micah Muscolino encouraged people to incorporate many disciplines and all regions of the world into the discussion of environmental history. In his own research, he has looked at the legacies of how people in China have perceived and responded to environmental change. He asserted these perceptions and responses will "shape the options available to China as well as the rest of the world, as we grapple with environmental change on a global scale." Muscolino's most recent book on the ecology of war in China centers on Hunan during World War II and the subsequent civil war, in which the Nationalist Army breached the dikes of the Yellow River in a the attempt to block a Japanese military advance. He characterized this event as "possibly the most environmentally damaging act of war in world history."The diversion led to mass flooding and precipitated a famine. These events tied together war, flood, and famine. They were strategic decisions made by the state and its military leaders, which had a

massive impact on environmental change. Muscolino said that "literally everything in China's history has environmental components," emphasizing the need to make the environment a central focus of the discipline and of the discussion of China's present challenges. "China's past may be the world's future," he concluded.

Isabel Hilton spoke about the journalism profession, which she characterized as having a "short-term memory." She questioned the narratives of modern environmental challenges, which view stories in terms of a start, middle, and end point. She argued that "the difference with climate change is that it is not going to end" and warned that the opportunity to build effective policies to address climate change will diminish as societies are put under increasing stress. According to Hilton, the short-term roots of China's environmental crisis are the past thirty years of development where the government pursued a policy of "develop first, clean up later." Now the repercussions of this sort of policy are beginning to appear, yet the state faces the difficult situation of these problems being embedded in the economic model.

While there is political will to confront the environmental issues, Hilton explained that the enforcement of top down policies is likely to fail "without the proper horizontal checks and balances." There must be freedom of the press and social media, she said. There is a spread of civil society, Hilton said, but it is weak because citizens are denied avenues of activism. She explained that the Chinese government now regards environment problems as a "security issue." With that mindset, Hilton explained, government efforts to fight pollution cannot be effective because they are tied to the larger ambition of maintaining party power.

PhD Candidate: Masahiko Haraguchi

Measuring Flood Impacts in SE Asia



Masahiko (second from right) with organizers of a regional workshop held at Thammasat University

"OUR priority during the floods was to protect the life of the people." These words from one Thai government official motivated my research on the economic impacts of floods. Prolonged flooding in 2011 caused 813 causalities and devastated the economy in Thailand. The Thai Central Bank estimated that the disruption of the supply chain there resulted in a 76 percent reduction of the GDP growth rate. As a Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF) fellow, I investigated the components of economic systems in Southeast Asia that are resilient after such disasters. Working to understand how companies respond to natural hazards, I examined the roles that the private sector and that environmental policies play in bolstering economic security.

My study focused specficailly on the resilience of supply chains to flood risks in Thailand. The most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in March 2014 found that

Asia, particularly in its urban areas, will face the worst consequences of climate change. This research is vital to Southeast Asia due to the region's important role in global manufacturing networks and its increasing vulnerability to natural disasters.

The supply chain research I conducted will grow in importance as the economy of Southeast Asia becomes increasingly interconnected. The Association Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is making efforts to integrate their economies by 2015 under the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC aims at transforming ASEAN into one economic region "with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital." In particular, the AEC will cooperate in such areas as enhancing infrastructure and communications connectivity and integrating industries across the region to promote regional sourcing. But, the more connected the economies, the more interconnected the risks. This means the economy with more interconnections is susceptible to increased systemic risk, a financial term used to describe the risk originating from one node of a financial network which then harms the entire financial market. Systemic risks will propagate through interconnected supply chains. Therefore, governments and private sector groups in Southeast Asian countries must make their supply chains resilient to interconnected risks, including those posed by natural hazards.

Both in academia and in the industry, the vulnerability of supply chains has received recent attention. For example, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published a special report titled "Building Resilience in Supply Chains" in January 2013. Few researchers, however, have modeled the impacts of adverse weather on supply chains. I am working to create such climate based models.

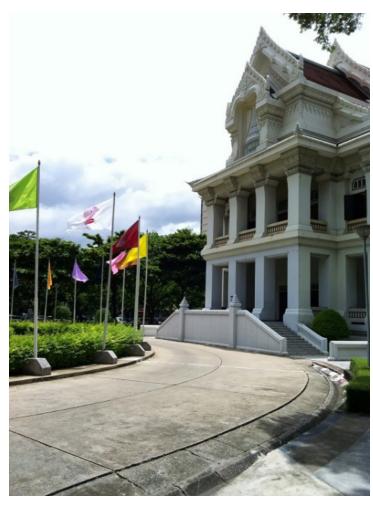
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Wat Arun, a well-known temple in Bangkok

PhD Candidate: Masahiko Haraguchi

Measuring Flood Impacts in SE Asia





Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok

Factory that was damaged by the floods in 2011 and abandoned

With grant funding from the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, I investigated how companies in Thailand were affected by the enormous floods in 2011. In addition, I examined how the Thai floods impacted neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. I also evaluated how the Thai government is preparing for coming floods by investing a huge amount of money into hard infrastructures and by creating a new insurance mechanism. I would argue that these policies have still not been tested in the face of long-term changes in climate.

By examining the case study of the 2011 floods in Thailand through network theories.

My goal is to provide effective and practical means to collect the data, documents, and tools for policymakers and industrial leaders to prepare for natural catastrophes in the future. This multidisciplinary research related sustainable development, as it addresses the larger question of how economic stability can be achieved by decreasing the vulnerability of economic systems to natural hazards in Asia.

Thanks to the generous funding of the SYLFF grant, I was able to advance my research on the vulnerability of supply chains to disasters. Without the support from SYLFF, I would not have had the connections for my research. I am now working to build a model based on this research to find ways to help Southeast Asia prepare for future floods and other natural disasters.

Masa Haraguchi is a doctoral student in Earth and Environmental Engineering at Columbia University and a summer 2013 recipient of WEAI's Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund grant. He also received an MA in Climate and Society from Columbia, an MS in International Peace Studies from Hiroshima University, and is a World Bank Graduate Scholarship recipient.

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