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Introduction

Thanachate Wisaijorn

The notion of local governance in Asia is the focus of this issue of *Asian Review* by The Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. With the increasing influence and impact of international connectivity nowadays, it is difficult to deny that political actors at a local level are not completely separated from those at the regional and international level.

The analyses of interesting case studies in Asia will be illustrated in this issue, ranging from the article by Kasidech Somboonkitichai who has explored the post-war situation in Lebanon, arguing that consociational democracy is the most favourable way to maintain peace and stability in the area. Given the fact that Lebanon is an Islamic state with its own unique historical context, the author argues that transformative liberal approaches are incompatible to the nature of the local politics among the Lebanese elites. Next, Dinara Umarova has brought the case on the local governance of Kazakhstan, which is rarely discussed in the circle of the Thai academic journal. In the article 'Development of the Cities: Kazakh Case', the author argues that the capital city of Kazakhstan 'Astana' is competitive both at the national and regional level. The poverty and unemployment rate has been constantly low. Meanwhile, the life expectancy average, monthly wages and gross regional product per capita have been increasing. The rural area around Astana is also important as it is expected to be the key area that provides food and construction materials in the future.

Athikho Kaissi's article 'Democratization, Conflict and

“Act East” Policy: Challenges to Mediate Non-State Armed Actors of Northeast India in Southeast Asia’ is interesting in the fact that it does not only focus on the politics in South Asia per se, but also the impact upon Southeast Asia as well. With the focus on the State of Assam, with a long historical interaction with not only the Tai-Kadai ethnic groups but also others, the author argues that the approach of Act East by the government of India requires a democratic mechanism to deal with the conflicts in the region. The fourth article ‘Documenting Factors Contributing to the Emergence, Proliferation and Development of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand’ by Amanda Mowry shed light on the fact that Burmese migrants have been constantly fleeing domestic political unrest and crossing the border to take refuge in Thailand for over the past three decades. Accordingly, the education issue of their children born in Thai territory has become an issue, and Migrant Learning Centres have been established with the financial support of the Thai state and international donors.

Next, Sutida Tonlerd and Vethang Mason explain the historical development of Lao local government from the colonial heyday to the present. Albeit being descriptive, this article has contributed to the academic circle in local governance in that primary sources in politics are difficult to be acquired but they are historically framed and narrated in the form of academic text. This shall be the first step that benefits the discussion on Lao local government in the future. The final article ‘From Government-Centric to People-Centered Government: A Reform of the Administrative Service in Zhejiang Province, China’ by Orachon Saechang discusses the key aspect of the connection between local and global interactions. Implying by the topic, the voices of the people have been more heard even in China. The complicated and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures are no longer expected with the implementation of the policy “Visit Once at Most”. The Chinese government has planned for an administrative reform to provide a better service to the Chinese citizens.

These interesting articles are woven together to be this issue of *Asian Review*. As a guest editor, I must thank all the contributors and Assistant Professor Jirayudh Sinthuphan for giving me this priceless opportunity. I must also thank the Institute of Asian Studies for bringing the topic of the local-international relations to the table of academic discussion.

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Documenting Factors Contributing to the Emergence, Proliferation, and Development of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand¹

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ABSTRACT— This research aims to examine social and economic factors that led to the establishment, proliferation, and development of Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) in Thailand. With the migration of millions of Myanmar people to Thailand over the past 30 years, Thailand's economy has positively benefited from their contribution to the labor sector but has also experienced unexpected challenges in realizing migrant children and youth's right to education. With approximately 200,000 non-Thai children out-of-school, an education chasm threatens the safety and opportunity of migrant children and has necessitated alternative forms of learning via MLCs.

The establishment of Migrant Learning Centers was a result of

1 This paper is from the author's PhD dissertation entitled "Promoting Social Inclusion and Life Opportunities of Migrant Youth via Education: A Case Study of Migrant Learning Centers in Ranong Province" at the Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. The author expresses sincere gratitude to the BEAM Education Foundation for their unwavering efforts in advocating for comprehensive and ongoing educational opportunities for underprivileged youth. Additionally, the author acknowledges the invaluable contributions of Mr. Roland Sanga, Mr. Myo Myat Thu, and the MLC teachers and former students who participated in this research.

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three key factors including: 1) large numbers of Myanmar migrants residing in Thailand; 2) high numbers of out-of-school Myanmar migrant children; and 3) collective efforts by members within the Myanmar migrant community to provide education for their children. The vital factors that influenced the proliferation of MLCs in Thailand include investment by the Thai State in migrant education via ministerial regulations and international human rights commitments, as well as economic investment by the international donor community, which was a major impetus for MLCs to grow. Over the past 30 years, MLCs have gone through major developments in the ways they operate, coordinate, and advocate. What began as mostly siloed education has now largely become a network of schools that cooperate for increased standardization, recognition, accreditation, and parallel learning pathways.

Keywords : Migrant Learning Center, migrant education, emergence, proliferation, development

Introduction

Tides of migration between Myanmar and Thailand are centuries old and were an integral part to the lives and economies of people within the region. As formal State boundaries became designated by colonial forces, cross-border relationships became guarded by new standards and requirements creating challenging dynamics in the flow of human traffic within the region. Moving forward to modern times, the 1980s heralded new demands in the labor work force with local supply dwindling (Truong et al. 2014). Labor shortages, along with the 1988 uprising in Myanmar, created strong push and pull factors, rapidly increasing the Myanmar migrant presence in Thailand. Following this, 1992 brought about a new policy for select provinces allowing for unskilled Myanmar

migrants to work legally within the country through a registration process (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal 2012). It was this time, around the early '90s, that Migrant Learning Centers began to emerge within Thailand.

With the migration of millions of Myanmar people to Thailand over the years, whether because of tradition, economy, warfare, educational opportunities, or a mix of factors, children also arrived. Many came, and still come with their parents, while others have been born in Thailand with some never having been to Myanmar (Nawarat 2019). Unfortunately, most of these children remain outside government safety nets and struggle to access basic social services, such as education. With more than 200,000 children still out-of-school (Tyrosvoutis 2019), cycles of poverty, exploitation, and limited opportunity pervade, while the States of Myanmar and Thailand lose out on populations who could contribute in more meaningful and diverse ways to the development of both countries.

The emergence of Migrant Learning Centers began with migrant community collectives to support children born or brought into an educational system that was not prepared to absorb them. From grassroots beginnings, the first Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand responded to the immediate need of education for Myanmar children, but lacked formal structures, networks, or legal status (Nawarat 2014).

Progressing from the 1990s until the mid-2000s, international human rights campaigning, coupled with Thailand's commitment to national and international policy, saw a rapid growth in the number of Migrant Learning Centers along the Thai-Myanmar border, as well as in industrial hubs of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Prior to the opening of Myanmar, concerted investment, primarily by international non-government organizations (INGOs), gave financial footing for Migrant Learning Centers to open and grow; but this was subsequently set-back, as these same funders shifted their investment in-country with the Myanmar's move toward "democracy."

Despite national funding cutbacks, MLCs across Thailand have continued to develop and strengthen till today. Spurred by local commitment to recognition and accreditation, many remaining Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand participate in networking among other MLCs, with the Thai government, and previously with the Myanmar government before the 2021 coup d'état. This has resulted in increased security of schools, teachers, and students through quasi-legal standing and has also widened the breadth of continued learning paths for students who are now able to access a variety of educational opportunities via MLC education and services.

Emergence of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand

The following subsections breakdown the contributing factors of MLC emergence into more detail, toward elucidating a general history of the phenomenon. It should be noted, though, that this is a generalization of events and may not capture the nuances of each Center; yet there exist similarities that can be studied and extrapolated for creating a general history of the inception of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand.

Myanmar Migration and Population Proliferation Across the Thai State

Migration of peoples throughout Southeast Asia is centuries old, but it wasn't until the late 1800s and early 1900s that Thailand, along with other countries throughout Southeast Asia, began to develop a strong concept of the nation-state; during this time, under pressure from Western colonial forces, the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand) began to trace its boundaries with neighboring nations (Suphanchaimat et al. 2017). Since this time, the complexity of government policies to control migration, as well as the economic and political factors affecting movement of people, particularly from Myanmar to Thailand, has become increasingly complicated.

One critical draw for inward migration has been economic opportunity. Structural shifts in the Thai economy began in the 1960s (Vivatsurakit & Vechbanyongratana 2020), but throughout

this time and the 1970s Thailand's industrialization was fueled mostly by workers from rural provinces particularly from the north and northeast (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal 2012). In the 1980s, economic prosperity in the Gulf region began to boom and subsequently drew this same rural labor population from Thailand to abroad (Ibid.). Concurrently, compulsory education was increased to nine years (Ibid.) reducing the number of young laborers entering the workforce and creating increased demand for foreigner workers in the Thai labor market.

In neighboring Myanmar, the 1962 military coup brought hardship, particularly in peripheral states, in various forms, including economic instability (Devi 2014). Under the leadership of General Ne Win, the Union of the Republic of Myanmar (at the time called Burma) isolated itself from the globe from 1962-1988 leading to economic deterioration, food insecurity, and displacement (Maizland 2022, 2). Wide-scale departures of people from Myanmar happened over the years (Devi 2014) seeking security not guaranteed to them in their homeland. Even though work prospects were limited, and compensation was usually below Thailand's minimum wage, many Myanmar people began to migrate for better payment than available in their home country (Chalamwong & Prugsamat 2009). These work opportunities often fell into the 3D job sector (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) and with most laborers working illegally.

In addition to economic migration, systemic violence has pervaded the rule of Myanmar's military regime since 1962 with significant impact on ethnic border states; this consequently saw large-scale movement to Thailand after an unsuccessful uprising Myanmar in 1988 against the military regime (Allden et al. 1996). Many of the opposition groups during this time took refuge in the border areas of Thailand, particularly Mae Hong Son, Tak, and Ranong Provinces (Htut 2018), of which Tak and Ranong Province would eventually birth large numbers of Migrant Learning Centers.

Post-1988 uprising in Myanmar, the 1990s saw the Thai government begin to formally acknowledge irregular migrant

workers. From 1990 – 2000, “low-skilled migrant workers from neighboring countries were first acknowledged in Thai society” and the “government implemented the quasi-regularization of migration which concerned national security, economic necessity and employer demand. The most important policy at this stage was the ‘registration policy,’ which was first amended in 1992” (Chalamwong 2012, 17). In this year, employers in nine provinces along the Thai-Myanmar border were allowed to register migrants under their employment (Martin 2007). This was followed with almost bi-yearly policy changes, some more attractive than others, but none responding to the true extent of migration into the country.

Myanmar Migrant Children and Their Educational Obstacles Across Thailand

Across Thailand, researchers and development experts have noted many Myanmar workers are young, or have dependents, (BEAM 2012) and they live in families within Thailand. Their children are either born in Myanmar or Thailand (Rattanapan et al. 2017) and often fall through the cracks of the social service system. Such patterns contribute to domestic demographic transformation, as workers arrive not as single travelers, but move more often with families and children (Stange & Sasiwongsaroj 2020). Despite many development entities identifying a vast number of migrant children within Thailand, the true scope and scale of non-Thai children has remained unknown as many are undocumented (Ibid.). As Stange and Sasiwongsaroj cite in their research, 2018 estimates from The International Organization for Migration report there were between 300,000 and 400,000 migrant workers’ children residing in-country (Ibid., 186). Stange also goes on to cite The World Vision Foundation of Thailand’s figures which estimates that approximately 60,000 babies are born to migrant workers in Thailand each year (Chanwanpen 2018, n.p.; Stange & Sasiwongsaroj 2020, 186). While many children are born in Thai hospitals, the birth registration process can be confusing, and many migrant parents do not procure the proper documents within the allotted amount of time to formally document their

child. In other more remote locations of Thailand, children may be born outside of the formal healthcare system.

The implication of being undocumented can have dire consequences on the learning opportunities of migrant children. In a study conducted throughout select ASEAN countries including Thailand, researchers found that “many stateless children within the region are still denied access to education. They suffer negative impacts due to denial of the right to education, with no opportunity for further studies and employment, which eventually leads them to poverty” (Selvakumaran et al. 2020, 361). Fear of detention and deportation due to illegal status is one critical factor for low enrollment rate in Thai Public Schools (UNICEF 2019). Other reasons can include the cost of education, lack of information about the right to education, lack of interest or concern for education, discrimination by service providers, uncertainty of duration of stay in Thailand, and moving frequently from place to place within the country (Ibid., 16). Additionally, while migrant education policy remains strong on paper, practical implementation remains weak. Many teachers and principals are unfamiliar with the process of enrolling migrant children, especially migrant children who are stateless or whose parents have limited documents, leading to some children being denied enrollment; there is an ongoing misconception that children living illegally in the country are not allowed to enroll in Thai schools, which is expressly in contrast to Thailand’s 2005 Cabinet Resolution on Education for Unregistered Persons (Ibid.). Many teachers feel unconfident and ill-equipped to teach multilingual children with diverse learning needs (Ibid.) causing friction and miscommunication between teachers and non-Thai students and their parents.

While many scholars and advocates place pressure on the Thai State for high rates of out-of-school children, it should also be noted that in some cases migrant families themselves are reluctant to integrate their children into Thai Public Education, which does not always meet their unique needs. For example, in a statement published by BEAM Education Foundation, one of

the leading foundations working towards holistic education needs of marginalized, migrant, and refugee populations, they found, "...numerous migrant parents, upwards of 80%, choose not to send their children to Thai state schools due to a feeling that the curricula of these schools do not adequately prepare their children for a return to Myanmar..." (BEAM 2012, 3).

Thus, the converging factors of high numbers of Myanmar migrant children along with State education that is not accessible, suitable, or desirable to migrant populations has given rise to a need for an alternative schooling option in the form of Migrant Learning Centers.

Community Interventions in Migrant Education

The coalescence of migration movements of Myanmar people into Thailand, large numbers of migrant children within country, and subsequent numbers of out-of-school children has necessitated the emergence of an alternative education option: Migrant Learning Centers. During their inception, MLCs were primarily community-led by Myanmar nationals (Tyrosvoutis 2019). In the north, particularly in areas such as Chiang Mai and Tak, MLCs were often founded by members of the children's ethnic group and were aligned with their ethnic ideology (Nawarat 2012).

In these early days, MLCs often operated out of private residences or sometimes community spaces and were usually taught by comparatively educated people within the area. The education attainment levels of MLCs teachers varied and could include having passed the Myanmar matriculation exam, partial or incomplete study at university, or university graduation.

In Mae Hong Son Province, the founder of an MLC providing high school education with linkages to Thai Non-formal Education (NFE) recalls the following reasons for opening his Center,

"Before I founded my school, I used to work in villages located along Thai-Myanmar border for my daily survival. At that time, I personally saw the different lives of the people who fled from Myan-

mar's civil wars that are still going on. These people had to find and do different work to survive, and they were not able to afford to send their children to high school. Some of their children left from their villages to the city to find work to support their families.

A lot of children from villages in the Mae Hong Son municipality area ended up marrying at an early age or working as maids, construction workers, waiters, and waitresses. Some girls sadly turned to sex work while some of them ended up as minor wives for wealthy men...Some of the girls died from HIV because of sex work and some from husbands who had risky behavior.

I saw these things happening nearby and that the children from the parents who came from Myanmar were having bad things in their future. I could see that these children had very little education and were unable think of better things for their future. I hoped and believed that if at least the children could get more education and a high school education, they could be able to think of things that could benefit their future."

Male, Karen Ethnicity, Learning Center Founder

(Personal Interview, 19 January 2023)

In analyzing published literature on the emergence of Migrant Learning Centers a few generalizations can be made. The first is that there existed an unmet need in education for vast numbers of migrant children in Thailand, and that MLCs were initially an ad hoc response to fill this void. The second is that the first founders were from Myanmar communities. While not overtly described in MLC formation literature, it can be inferred that all MLC founders were affected by political instability, as mentioned in the MLC founder testimonials from Mae Hong Son, which led them to migrate; whether they were directly affected by conflict or pushed to leave because of an economy crippled by warfare. These factors eventually played a critical role in prompting the formation of the first MLCs.

Factors Contributing to the Proliferation of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand

From 1990 – 2005, Thailand's participation in human rights campaigns and subsequent domestic policy ran in tandem with Migrant Learning Centers' proliferation. Some of the most notable achievements during this time include the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 (OHCHR 1990), the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2534 (Kingdom of Thailand 1991), Convention on the Rights of the Child (Assembly, UN General 1989),³ Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand of 1997 (Kingdom of Thailand 1997), Darkar Framework for Action in 2000 (Pepler Barry 2000), and the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 as Amended by National Education Act, B.E. 2545 (Kingdom of Thailand 2002). In reviewing Thailand's education commitments and policies over this time, there emerges acknowledgement of migrant children's presence within Thailand as well as a child's inherent right to receive education, which coincides with a global investment trend in education and children's rights. Yet, throughout this decade of policy making, policy did little in supporting or legitimizing Migrant Learning Center education, but international participation and domestic policy engagement would eventually set the stage for one of the most critical policies to affect MLC proliferation.

In 2005, Thailand made its biggest actionable shift in support of migrant education via the Rule of the Ministry of Education's Evidentiary Document for Pupil/Student Admission into Educational Institutions B.E. 2548. This formally opened Thai Public Schools to migrant children regardless of their ID status and provided opportunity for migrant students enrolled in Thai schools to receive an identity card through the State (Tu-angratananon et al. 2019).

International Investment in Migrant Education in Thailand

From scattered Centers across the border in the 1990s,

3 The Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force in 1990 but wasn't ratified by Thailand until 1992.

MLCs continued to rise in number as international investment supported their operations. By the 2018 – 2019 school year, most of the 110 documented Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand (Tyrosvoutis 2019, 12) were to some extent supported by external funders for their activities.

International funding has become important to maintain many MLCs' operations but has also heightened financial vulnerability (Tyrosvoutis 2019, 7). In recent years, the funding for MLCs has seen dramatic cuts (Purkey & Irving 2019), affecting operations of MLCs across Thailand. As of 2021, the number of MLCs in Thailand dropped to 91 centers (Chulalongkorn University and UNICEF Thailand 2022, 24). Reduced funding of MLCs corresponds to the previous opening of Myanmar and prioritization of efforts within country, as well as forced closure of schools (including Thai government schools) for more than a year during COVID-19. With the turn of political events in Myanmar and increasing conflict, it has yet to be seen if the international funding will shift back to migrant education in Thailand.

Thailand's global and domestic policy engagement, along with increased funding, brought the number of MLCs from smatterings along the border to more than 100 in 2019 (Tyrosvoutis 2019, 12). Throughout this time, Migrant Learning Centers did more than just grow in numbers; they also formed concerted networks and initiatives for the development and realization of multi-national accreditation.

Factors Contributing to National Developments of Migrant Learning Centers

Over the past 30 years, Migrant Learning Centers have gone through major transformations in the ways they operate, coordinate, and advocate. What began as mostly siloed education efforts have now largely become a network of schools that coordinate on specific thematic areas for increased standardization, recognition, and accreditation. The significance of this development has led to several outcomes, some of the most important being that many MLC students now have pathways to accredited education,

Migrant Learning Center have representation during domestic and international discourses on migrant education, and MLCs are transitioning into more secure legal standing and strengthened relationships with Thai authorities.

Migrant Learning Center Standardization and Accreditation Initiatives

The development of Migrant Learning Centers began to take tangible steps forward in 2013 through groundbreaking cross-border agreements and the formation of advocacy initiatives that would go on to build formal relationships with MoE's in Myanmar and Thailand.⁴ This stood in stark contrast to MLCs' formative years. Prior to such movements, Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand began largely as individual educational endeavors, without concerted coordination or standardization among MLCs within country. This process of operation meant that children were receiving education often had no formal secondary and tertiary educational linkages. Upon graduation, students might receive a certificate from their MLC, but it usually held no credit among other educational pathways. Thus, if students wanted to transfer to another learning institution, they often had to start from the beginning, as opposed to continuing their equivalent level of completed study.

In response, Migrant Learning Centers, NGOs, and INGOs identified that for MLCs to gain recognition among Thai and Myanmar Ministries of Education, it was necessary to begin formal collaboration among MLCs and with representatives of the Thai and Myanmar government. MLCs had made huge steps from their largely home-based operations, had grown in physical structural size, catchment, and had semi-regular support from international donors. With MLC proliferation, stakeholders

4 Within the scope of this research, standardization and accreditation in MLC movements is presented through the work of the Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) under BEAM Education Foundation; these initiatives represent the most comprehensive movements for MLC development and recognition regarding their broader geographical inclusion of MLCs within Thailand and the breadth of stakeholders engaged.

involved in migrant education saw that children attending these schools also needed accredited studies that would provide them transcripts and the ability to transfer to different educational pathways, including higher education (Purkey & Irving 2019).

Establishing a Migrant Education Network

To begin a formal, strategized process of standardization and accreditation, it was first necessary to establish a comprehensive migrant education network. Thus, in 2013, the Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) was founded to develop an accredited migrant education system that would provide migrant children and youth the ability to continue their studies wherever they resided (BEAM 2023b). The initial MEII Committee was comprised 17 community-based educational organizations throughout six provinces of Thailand included Chiang Mai, Tak, Bangkok, Samut Sakorn, Ranong, and Phang Nga Provinces that took a leading role in developing strategy and implementing activities towards standardization and multi-national accreditation (Ibid., n.p.).

In addition to the core MEII Committee, the initiative also built a broader partner network with government actors, including but not limited to the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) and the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) under Thailand's MoE, and international organizations, including but not limited to UNESCO, UNICEF, and Save the Children (MEII 2019). Growing and strengthening this network has been an essential foundation to build bridges among MLCs and community-based organizations with governing bodies and international human rights organizations; this has led towards MEII's strategy being acknowledged, implemented, and realized under Thailand's commitment to Education for All and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strategies in Migrant Education

Prior to COVID and the Myanmar coup, MEII coordinated extensively with the Myanmar MoE, Thai MoE, and international agencies to solidify agreements and actions for recognizing migrant

education. The following activities highlight these activities with the caveat that needs and alignment have shifted significantly after the global pandemic and political upheaval in Myanmar.

Curriculum Standardization and Quality Assurance:

Prior to MLC coordination efforts, most MLCs worked in isolation determining their own curriculum which could vary as per school (Nawarat 2014). Under MEII, the network developed a curriculum standards framework, allowing for adaptation and addition depending on contextual needs (BEAM 2023b). MLCs within the MEII network adopted this framework with an additional component of quality assurance overseen by the Education Quality Assurance Board (EQAB). Through EQAB activities, standards of assessment have been developed and implemented so that participating MLCs are uniformly measuring learning outcomes of their students.

Cross-Border Education Coordination and Development of Regional Accreditation: Over the years, MEII and its networks have also been able to establish cross-border education committees together with Thai and Myanmar educational authorities, MLC representatives, and INGO and NGOs. Prior to 2021, these activities resulted in agreements with at least 5 state and region level education authorities in Myanmar, that enabled MLC students to transfer to Myanmar government schools upon their return; these coordination efforts included the development of a manual to detail the process of cross-country transfer from MLCs to Myanmar government schools (MEII 2016, n.p.).

Capacity Building for Migrant Teachers: Capacity building for MLC teachers has been an on-going process with topics including, but not limited to, critical thinking, child protection, early childhood development, and monitoring and evaluation. Another important activity building on efforts of the EQAB was a series of student database trainings to help track student records enabling MLCs to issue reports and recommendations required for the education equivalency transfer process (MEII 2018).

Advocacy Initiatives: From MEII's start, advocacy has

been an ongoing component among the migrant community, Thai and Myanmar educational authorities, Myanmar educational reform bodies, and related UN agencies and organizations (MEII 2013). Since 2021, strategies have evolved to include community rebuilding to support MLCs to become more resilient, such as through fundraising campaigns for teachers support, building new coordination bodies towards inclusive education with emerging and evolving education entities in Myanmar, Thailand's MoE, and UN agencies, as well as continuing to promote recognition of MLCs through registering MLCs (MEII 2023).

Developments in Accreditation

Despite major setbacks within Myanmar that threaten the future of the nation's education, MLC's relationships with the Thai Ministry of Education continue to progress, as well as expand into more intentional and strategic alternative education pathways. Listed below are several study options being provided at many MLCs with note that some MLCs are not linked to the full range of options as described.

Vocational Training: This education option is sometimes provided on-site at MLCs; the theme of the courses varies depending on the school. For example, at one newly restructured MLC in Ranong Province, a teacher has been recruited to teach a tailoring course on the weekends which is advertised on Facebook and is open to students as well as the broader Myanmar community. This recurring course runs approximately one month in length and provides students with skills that can be put to immediate use, particularly for those pursuing independent entrepreneurship. The importance of having this option was highlighted by one former MLC student who commented,

"I would suggest that they [Migrant Learning Centers] should have more activities, such as vocational training courses, so that students can have basic job skills because some students only study from...let's say...Grade 1 to Grade 5, and then they leave to start working. These kids don't have foundational education. But, if they had vocational training, like tailoring, they could use this in their

lives so that they could their own businesses.”

Female, Burmese/Karen Ethnicity, Former MLC Student & Current MLC Volunteer Teacher

(Personal Interview, 11 November 2022)

Thai Non-formal Education: Many MLCs have linkages to local NFE centers. Sometimes the NFE curriculum is integrated into the schools themselves, others have the option of studying at an NFE on the weekends in addition to their Monday – Friday courses at their respective MLC. NFE accreditation is of significance because it is recognized by Thai educational authorities and provides students the chance to continue their studies at the Thai tertiary level (BEAM 2012). As one former MLC student reflected,

“If I hadn’t studied and graduated from the NFE, I wouldn’t be able to continue my studies at Ranong Community College.”

Female, Mon Ethnicity, Former MLC Student & Current MLC Teacher

(Personal Interview, 26 July 2022)

Internationally Accredited Education: Some Migrant Learning Centers offer the chance to study in international programs, which are largely taught online, and are accepted by select international institutes. For example, BEAM Education Foundation offers on-site higher education preparation for the General Education Development (GED) Exam (BEAM 2023a) which is now also available online to MLCs throughout Thailand. The GED certificate allows students the opportunity to apply for scholarships and attend international programs at Thai universities or abroad (Ibid.). The importance of international education pathways was expressed by one former MLC student who shared,

“I studied there [at a Migrant Learning Center] for around four years, and I took more English classes...After, I joined the online diploma program which took about two years for me to complete, and I got a diploma in Liberal Arts...After that, I tried applying for

a scholarship to a Thai university, and I got one...I just finished my bachelor's degree this year in April."

Male, Karen Ethnicity, Former MLC Student & Current Freight Forwarder Company Employee (Personal Interview, 24 December 2022)

Myanmar Ministry of Education Accredited Education:

Since COVID-19 and the subsequent coup, formal relationships with Myanmar's MoE have largely been suspended until the country regains stability. Prior to these crises, some MLCs would affiliate their students under Myanmar public or monastery school umbrellas. If the students passed their exams, they would be issued a certificate of grade level completion which was recognized by the Myanmar MoE or state level education departments. Currently, coordination efforts are underway to reimagine and rebuild accreditation pathways with emerging and evolving education entities in Myanmar.

Conclusion

The birth of MLCs came from expressed need; people leaving conflict and economic hardship came to Thailand for greater safety and security. With them came their children, who needed an option for education that wasn't accessible for most migrants. Thus, concerned Myanmar community members began to teach from their homes and in ad hoc fashions. With demand ever growing and international attention and funding now finding its way to Migrant Learning Centers, MLCs began to grow in number, size, and sophistication. Realizing the need to accredit their studies, stakeholders from MLCs joined with international organizations to launch bi-lateral advocacy efforts towards recognition. These efforts gained momentum and achieved relative success with the MoE's from Thailand and Myanmar, as well as some international institutes, but took subsequent backsteps with school closures following COVID-19 and the subsequent military coup in Myanmar; from the latter event, most transfer programs to schools in Myanmar have been put on hold until the political situation improves. Even within Thailand, the legality of MLC

operations remains tenuous, but increased communication and collaboration have meant some MLC students and teachers have been afforded greater security.

Millions of Myanmar people within Thailand are critical to the economic wellbeing of the country but also hold complex challenges for the Thai government. MLCs are one avenue to support Thailand's MoE to address the massive number of out-of-school children. MLC proliferation has helped to ease the Thai State's weight of providing education to Myanmar migrant children that is culturally and contextually appropriate. Additionally, MLCs have demonstrated through their development a willingness to find middle ground in curriculum development, providing an opportunity for the melding of education systems which will ultimately lead to more knowledgeable and adept migrant youth who are able positively to contribute to both Myanmar and Thai society.

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Lao Local Government¹

Sutida Tonlerd and Vethang Masong²

ABSTRACT—: Before the promulgation of the first constitution of the Lao state in 1991 Laos was perceived by a number of Thai scholars as barbaric and lawless. The information about Lao politics during the Cold War was very limited to the outside world. The objective of this article is to reflect on the political system from Lao perspectives by using the analysis of local government in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR). From 2 December 1975 onwards, historiography and document analysis suggest that Lao local government has been one mechanism in the structure of the state that moves towards socialism. It argues that this local government is controlled under the system of the people's democratic republic with a single party. The People's Revolutionary Party thus dictates the political system of the country in all aspects.

Keywords : government, local government, Laos

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2 The Faculty of Liberal Arts at Ubon Ratchathani University.

Introduction

On 2 December 1975, the People's Revolutionary Party, known as the Lao Marxist-Leninist Party, established the Lao People's Democratic Republic and its government. This Lao state was established during the Cold War and was therefore a socialist orientated country. The objective of this article is to reflect on the Lao government and political system from the Lao perspective. This article will define the People's Revolutionary Party and the government of Lao PDR as "the Lao state," with the government of people's democratic republic. It means this former colony is successful in revolutionary war, giving its people democracy. However, the process of establishing a socialist regime has not been successful. Laos lacks proletariats in the industrial sector. Therefore, it is stuck in the stage of recovery, to prepare for a socialist revolution. Before the 1991 Constitution which is the first constitution of the Lao state, Laos was perceived by some Thai scholars as barbaric and lawless. The information about the Lao state, especially its local government during the Cold War was very limited to the outside world.

The notion of local government was formulated between the 15th and 17th centuries as the concept of nation-states emerged in Europe as the birthplace of democracy. When central government could not control all the areas thoroughly, decentralisation was necessary so local communities could take care of themselves in some areas. They could be sub-districts, districts, city and villages. This includes tax collection for local development such as public health services, environment and education (Chayyabhud, 2019).

According to Lenin (1977: 41-44), political and government system from the Soviet Union model was interestingly explained. He described problems in establishing the state of proletariats under the leadership of the communist party as follows:

*The proletariat class successfully overthrew the Russian Empire.
The steps in establishing a new country attracted the class of*

proletariats and peasants from the former regimes to cooperate with the communist party. "It was the authority of the working class, the authority that struggles to eradicate the influence of capitalists completely. The proletariat class in the city and industrial zones rose up to join the struggles. The victory was achieved at first and government authority was seized. A significant number of proletariats, peasants and working class were necessary to establish socialism. It is the products of the power of Soviet Union and ours is considered the best.

Lenin elaborated the roles of the communist party that dictated the proletariat class to establish a new regime by attracting the working class and peasants who were non-members of the party to take part in establishing the country. However, he did not explain the local government. Kaysone Phomvihane talked about the events that followed the establishment of people's democratic republic and the authority of the government. "... in the regime of people's democracy...the defence of the state centralisation and the unity of legislative and executive branches and leading roles were the responsibilities of the communist party or the proletariat party..." (Sisane, December 13, 1997: 2 quoted in Tonlerd, 1998: 116).

Since the end of the Cold War, the Lao PDR has been the last five nation-states under the rule of a party with Marxist-Leninist orientation. However, one cannot understand the local government in Lao PDR because its contemporary local government has the origin in the colonial days.³ Moreover, the first and second generation of revolutionists could be categorised as the royal elites, local government elites and the people's elites. They all had the

3 The root of Lao local government originated in the colonial days. The French colonialists laid the foundation of modern nation state of Laos by establishing its local government, that can be explained in 5 stages. The first one was the traditional government that lasted between 1893 and 1895. The second stage was the administrative district between 1895-1899. The third one is defined as the First French Government between 1899 and 1941. The fourth stage is the Second French Government from 1941 to 1945. The last one was the time under the rule of Japanese Empire in 1956 (Phommachan et al, 2000: 516-521).

experience being under the colonial rule and the royal regime. It must be noted, in the struggle for independence, the people's elites took part in laying the foundation of the local government that looked forward to establishing socialism.

The authors have conducted historical research on Lao local government in 4 steps. As the first step, the documents have been collected and categorised into 3 groups. Firstly, Lao documents such as the standardised Lao history by Phommachan et al (2000) have been collected. Also, the article by Sasane ((December 13,1997:2 quoted in Tonlerd, 1998: 116) that proposes the ideas of politics and government of Kaysone Phomvihane and Leninism in the government in the Soviet Union (Lenin & Stalin 1977) is examined. Secondly, the research reports by Phounsavath (2017) Supitcha (2019), Tonlerd (1998), Tonlerd and Masong (2022) and the Completed State Navy Review (1959) that explain the issues of local government are examined. Thirdly, the authors have analysed other documents such as Xinhua Thai newspaper. The second step is the examination and analysis of the documents above. In the third step, the authors have written an analytical draft of this manuscript. In the final step, this manuscript will be presented to the public. It discusses the foundation of Lao local government during the Cold War, the local government of the Lao PDR and draws a conclusion.

2. Foundation of Lao local government during the Cold War

The communist movements in Laos directly employed the experience from local government in the country from 6 March 1946 to 2 December 1975. That was the foundation of Lao PDR and the colonial legacy of the last phase of the French rule in Indochina from 6 March 1946 to 22 November 1953 in tandem with the time of the Royal Lao Government from 23 November 1953 to 2 December 1975 will be examined. The Lao people organised the governance themselves in the two phases aforementioned. Likewise, the communist movements developed their local governance. The salient details will be discussed as follows.

2.1 The last phase of the colonial government: French administration in Laos

The last stage of the French colonial government lasted from 6 March 1946 to 22 November 1953. The French encouraged the Lao elites to take part in the central government as can be seen in Chart 1 and the details of local government in Chart 2.

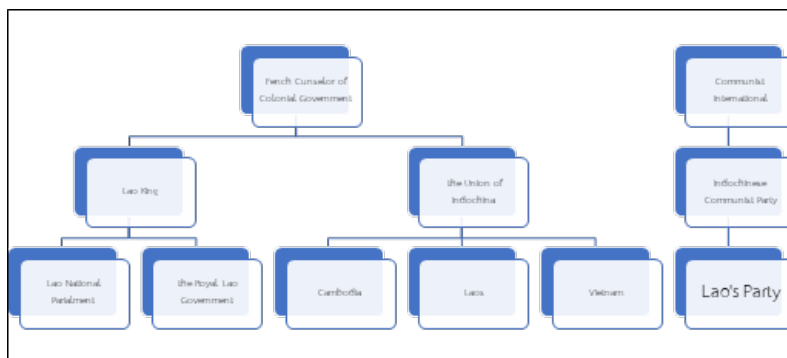
Chart 1 indicates that on 6 March 1946, the French had to fix their mistakes in Laos in two respects. The French limited the rights of the Lao people to work in the colonies at the level of the city by bringing the Vietnamese to work in Laos instead. The French colonial government in the last phase ran a campaign that encouraged Lao nationalists to take part in modern state building according to the Indochinese Communist Party⁴, *Khwaen Lao* Party, the Pan-Thaiism of Siam⁵. Amnesty had to be granted to

4 In the 1920s, Comintern sent *Nguyen Ai Quock* (another Ho Chi Minh's name) to establish people's support and revolutionary movement in Asia. In the late 1920s, Ho Chi Minh was successful in persuading *Khamseang Siwilai* from Sakhon Nakhon and *Khamphong Chamaroek* from Ubon Ratchathani to join the communist movement. Later, they became the key figures in establishing a political party with the Marxist-Leninist ideology. In 1930, Ho Chi Minh took part in forming the Indochinese Communist Party. However, between 1930 and 1945, the Party played a significant role in Lao by focusing on building mass support in Vietnamese working class. In 1934, the Indochinese Communist Party was separated into three big parties such as Worker's Party of Vietnam, Khwaen Lao Party and Kwean Kamphucha Party. During WWII, the Khwaen Lao Party under the leadership of Indochinese Communist Party was successful in producing a leader of the revolutionary movement *Kaysone Phomvihane*.

5 During the second period of French administration between 1941 and 1945 What date? the foundation of local government in Laos was exactly like that which the French colonial administration had formulated as the ethic policy in government in Laos. The highlight was to support nationalism by establishing the youth association. Some worked for the Lao government. Later, they formed the *Pathet Lao* movement or *Naeo Lao Hak Xat* (Paseuth, 2012: 96-97). However, most thinkers argued that the ethic policy was employed by the French to counter pan-Thaiism of the Thai government.

the group of displaced Laos by Prince *Phetsarath Ratanavongsa*⁶. A general election had to be organised with the people's parliament on 11 May 1947. Laos then was part of the Federation of Indochina from 3 March 1949. The colonial government of France granted independence to Laos on 23 November 1953.

Chart 1: Central government of France in Laos on the third stage that lasted from 6 March 1946 to 22 November 1953



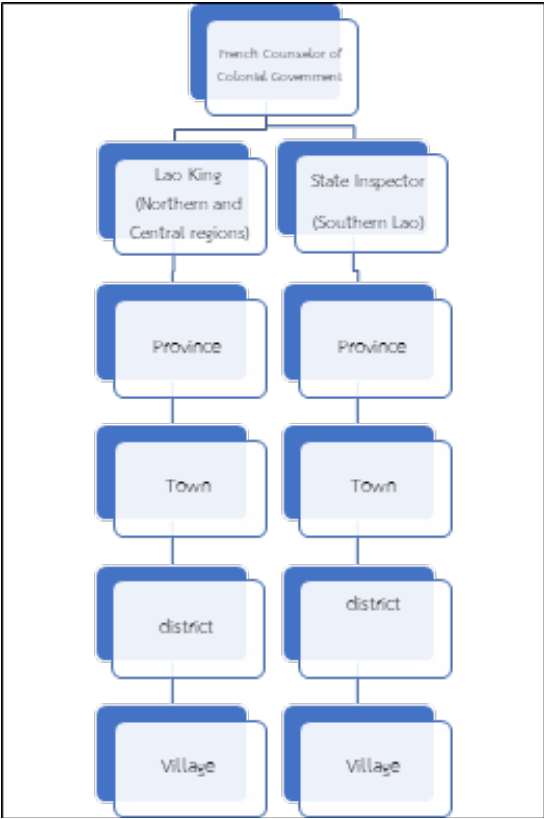
Source: Sutida Tonlerd

Chart 2 shows the local government of France in Laos on the third stage. It is the reflection of the Lao political structure with the overlap of the *Lan Xang* era and the foundation of modern local government. The Governor-General of Laos Paul Doumer separated Laos into two areas. The north comprised six provinces starting from *Khammoune* northwards with *Luang Prabang* as the central government. From the south, the administrative authority starting from *Khammouane* southwards comprised seven prov-

⁶ The 5th phase when Imperial Japan ruled over Laos was only a short period of time, that lasted from 9 March to 26 August 1945. However, that contributed to Laos as the Japanese helped ensure that Lao people learned to form their own government. The Army of Imperial Japan supported the replacement of the Lao with the French in administration. That was the foundation of nationalism and the nationalistic movement afterwards, as the King of Laos proclaimed its independence on 8 April 1945 (Phaseuth, 2012: 96-100).

inces. *Don Khong* was the centre of the government. The French abolished the traditional laws and slavery, and began to employ the Christian principles. According to the narratives of the Lao people who lived during the Royal Lao Government regime, they said that their country was divided into two areas, “from *Khammoune* northward, the land belonged to the King, while from *Khammoune* southward, the land belonged to Prince *Boun Oum*; the country was shared by the two governments”.

Chart 2: Local Lao government of the third stage under the French Regime that lasted from 6 March 1946 to November 1953



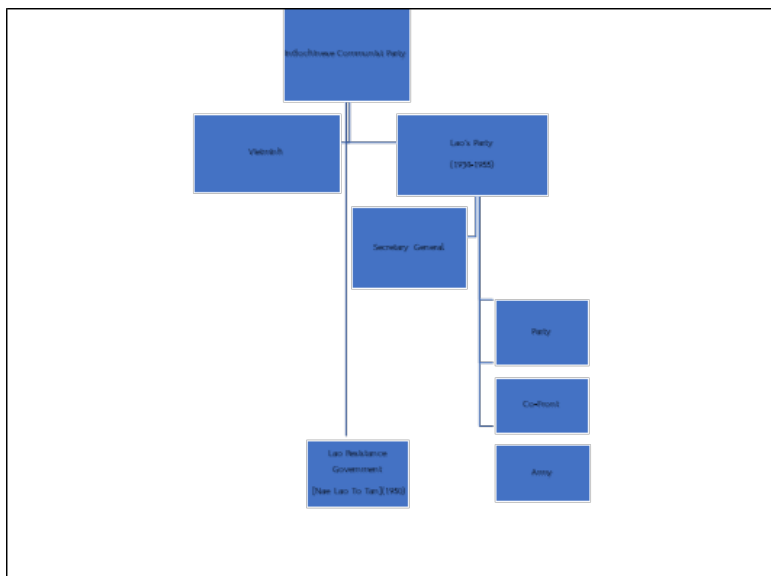
Source: Sutida TONLERD

Chart 3 indicates the Lao system of government after the government of Japan was defeated in World War II. Prince *Phetsarath Ratanavongsa* proclaimed independence and established

the Lao government in *Savannakhet* on 12 October 1946. This government was known as Lao Issara. On 6 March 1946, Ho Chi Minh yielded that France returned to Laos with the exchange of the independence of North Vietnam. In May 1949, Prince *Phetsarath* fled for the Kingdom of Thailand and established a Lao government in exile in Bangkok. The end of the operation was 24 October 1949 as it was the transitional time when the weapons of the Imperial Japan were handed over to the Allies. Viet Minh sent *Kaysone Phomvihane* to take part in the operation of Japanese disarmament. Some weapons were handed over to the movement of *Neo Lao Hak Xat*.

Between 13 and 15 August 1950, the Indochinese communist movement known as Viet Minh established another movement known as *Neo Lao To Tan*, which was illegal. Later, this group was merged into the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, in 1955. The *Neo Lao To Tan* began to strengthen the group that fought for independence by setting up "The discourse of three ethnicities that fought to revive the nation" that covered the ethnic groups of *Lao Loum*, *Lao Theung* and *Lao Soung*. Prince *Souphanouvong* was the leader of the Lao Loum, Sithon Kommadam led Lao Theung and Phaydang Lobliayao led the Lao Soung (Tonlerd & Masong, 2022:50-53).

Chart 3: The Structure of the Indochinese Communist Party, the Government of Lao To Tan and Kwaen Lao Group (Lao's Party)



Source: Sutida Tonlerd

Chart 3 reflects the formulation of administration and government by the group of the Khwaen Lao Party, which was at the stage of building the mass support and network to wage a revolutionary war. After the end of the Cold War, the Lao revolutionists narrated their stories as the young revolutionists. They started with the reasons why they took part in the revolution, the steps to become a professional revolutionist and the fight for independence. This set of evidence reflected the root of a socialist revolution or the formulation of a country with the system of people's democracy in the future. It also helped explain the network power of the Khwaen Lao Party at the local level that was metaphorically compared with the small roots that help support the main one so that the tree grows successfully in the future. On the other hand, some thinkers did not pay attention to the

political roles and movement of the Lao revolutionists but said that this was testimony that the *Khwaen Lao* Party was a puppet of Vietnam (Langer & Zasloff, 1969).

Unofficial groups of alliances comprised monks, priests and the Hmong, who were still the new key factor that bound the Lao people under the government of Pathet Lao. The Lao people as the stronghold were described as '*paxaxon bandaphao*' had the sense of belonging with the People's Revolutionary Party and other alliances (*Neo Lao Hak Xat* and *Pathet Lao* Movement) and the Lao People's Army who had been fortified since the time World War II ended. The principles that strengthen the revolutionary movement are socialism, equality and the charisma of the representatives of the three ethnic groups. For example, in 1962 in *Nong Het, Xieng Khouang* which is the base of the Hmong and the birthplace of *Phaydang Lobliayao*, the conference for the unity of the ethnic groups was organised by the *Leo Nao Hak Xat* movement. This activity reflected the mechanism of the local government by the government of Pathet Lao in the area of the Lao-Vietnamese border. As organised by the Hmong, it was the symbol of pluralistic culture in the future (Tonlerd & Masong, 2022:68-69).

2.2 Local government in the era of Royal Lao Government from 23 November to 2 December 1975.

The colonial government supported the Lao colony or *Khwaen Lao* of France for her independence on 23 November 1953, even before France was defeated in *Dien Bien Phu* in May 1954. During the 21 years of Royal Lao Government, the country had to face civil war as part of the Cold War. During this time, two group of Lao elites must be mentioned. The first group is the pro-monarchy elites (the government in Vientiane) and the second group is the pro-communist movement (Pathet Lao). They continuously developed the system of their government since the end of World War II. Between 1964 and 1975, the Royal Lao Government was officially divided into two zones of government. They comprised the government of Vientiane as indicated in Chart 4 and Pathet Lao as indicated in Chart 5. The

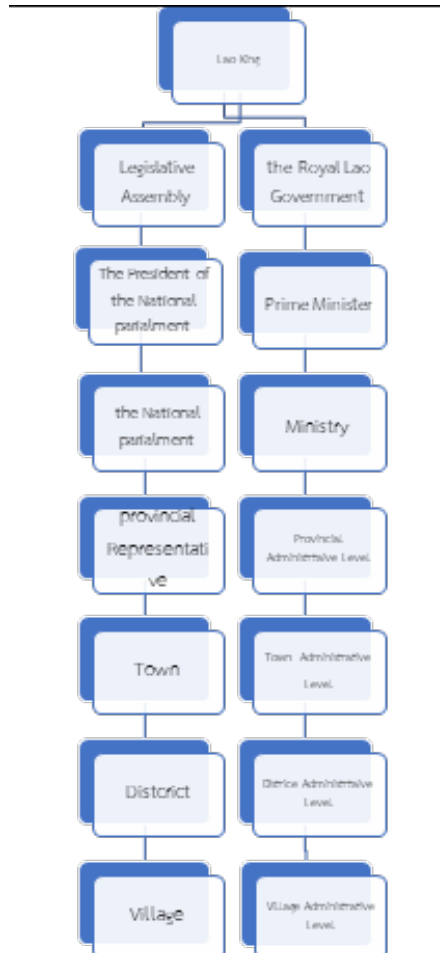
elites in the two zones were successful in establishing the sense of belonging with parts of the people in their own zones. Lao people in Vientiane had faith in the monarchy. Meanwhile, those in the area of Pathet Lao were confident with the socialist revolutionary. It could have been said that Lao people in both zones were different and antagonistic to one another with the ways of establishing the nation or the government.

Chart 4 indicates the details of the central and local government of the Royal Lao Government. What is missing in Chart 8 is the counselling team of the United States and her networks as they provided the assistance in establishing the army, the police and the ethnic militants (Conby, 2022).

This scenario reflected that this land-locked country was always the battlefield of the Cold War. However, the Royal Lao Government established the feeling of belongingness with the monarch and the people by supporting the trip of the Lao King, Queen, Crown Prince and royal family. They visited the people and hospitals in the southern cities such as Pak Xan in Bolikhamxai and Thakhek in Savannekhet. They had dinner and there was the music and a short film that lasted 9.53 minutes. The leaders of the Royal Lao Government, the US Embassy in Vientiane and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) attended this activity. The dinner was finished with the presentation of the Vientiane-Saigon highway construction project. The construction was planned to last 30 years (Skyline Chamnnel,2023).⁷

⁷ It is noted that in the early 1950s, the colonial government of French Indochina suggested that Sisavang Vong visit the people and move the capital city to Vientiane so that a good relationship with Lao people was established. The King would be the spiritual anchor and symbol of the nation. This method was implemented during the reign of King Sisavang Vatthana, the last King of Laos from 1957 to 1975. It was different from the case of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat who re-established the authority of the Thai royal institution which was very successful during the reign of King Rama IX of Rattanakosin Era, with the assistance of the US government.

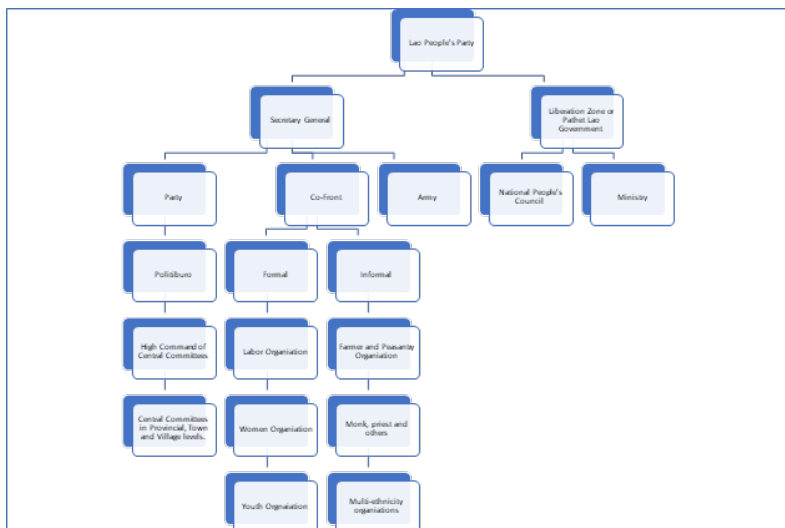
Chart 4: The Lao central and local government: The Royal Lao Government that lasted from 1953 to November 1975



Source: Sutida Tonlerd

Chart 5 explains the structure of the Lao People's Party before the establishment of Lao People's Democratic Republic from 1964 to 2 December 1975. What is missing is the counsellors from Vietnam and other socialist nation-states such as the Soviet Union; the People's Republic of China and the German Democratic Republic. These counsellors assisted the Lao People's Party in every mission, similar to the ways in which the US and her allies helped the Royal Lao Government. From the point of view of the Lao revolutionists, this was the fight for independence which was led by professional socialists. Moreover, Chart 5 shows that the Lao People's Party planned for the establishment of a state space for the lives of Lao people after the revolutionary war was over (Phommachan et al., 2000: 913-918).

Chart 5: Structure of the Lao People's Party before the establishment of Lao People's Democratic Republic between 1964 and 2 December 1975



Source: Sutida Tonlerd

3. Local Government under the regime of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

It is noted that foreigner who stayed in Laos for some time, all had direct experience that would be remembered for the rest of their lives. They felt as if they fell “in a vacuum, were suspicious, and worried as they were spied by the Lao government and its network.” They often asked why a country which is one in the group of the poorest (Xinhua Thai, March 26, 2022) could cause them trouble? We could analyse this direct experience which is “the power of the local Lao government”. This local government in the era of Lao People's Democratic Republic could be categorised as the Cold War and post-Cold War ones.

3.1 Lao local government during the Cold War

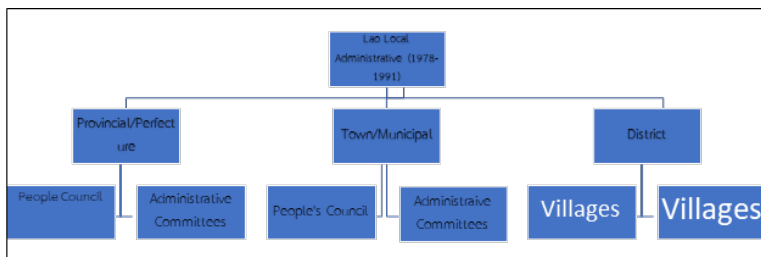
Lao local government during the Cold War took place from 2 December 1975 to 1991. This can be called the era of Lao People's Democratic Republic, after the ratification of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with Vietnam. Tonlerd (1998: 117-118) stated that “the administrative authority of the Lao people's Democratic Republic is separated into three branches; the legislative (National Assembly), executive (Council of Ministers, and judicial (Supreme People's Court). On the issue of local government, it is linked with the executive branch.” The Lao state has the slogan of nation building and tying the people together so that they are obedient and loyal to the state. It says “The Party dictates, the State protects, and the People are the masters”. This slogan can be employed to decode the network of Marxism-Leninism in Lao territory. According to the Governor of Huaphanh Xayavong (February 2-4, 1998: Interview quoted in Tonlerd 1998: 118), the slogan can be explained as follows;

The phrase ‘The Party dictates’ means the Party controls the direction of policy by attaching to the demand and benefits of the majority of people.

The phrase ‘The State protects’ means the State is the practitioner of the direction so that it materialises as demanded for the benefits of the people. The phrase ‘the People are the masters’ means the people are the most important bases for society, economy and politics. This is the key itself whether the implementation of the development by the State will be possible or not.

The point of view of Xayavong (February 2-4, 1998: Interview quoted in Tonlerd, 1998: 118) can be employed for analysis of the crucial role of the slogan. The first component of “the Party dictates” means the People’s Revolutionary Party directs the policy of the country from its base which is “a centrally planned democracy.” The second component “the State protects” means the government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic run the administration of the country and implement the policy of the Party. The third component “the People are the masters” means they are the “organisational coalitions”. They promote the policy of the Lao government to the people. The very objective of the policy focuses upon the benefit of the people. The organisational coalitions are directly and indirectly set up by the party so they are the middleman that bind the people with the Lao government. Its strong root resulted from the regional and local government as the Lao state revealed in its motion on local government in 1978 (Phounsavath, 2017: 50).

Chart 5: The structure of local Lao government from 2 December 1975 to 1991



Source: Mone Phounsavath.(2017).The Reform of Local Administration in Lao PDR by Law on Local Administration 2015. P50.A Thesis for Master's of Law. Thammasat University, Thailand. Retrieved on April 17,2023, from http://ethesisarchive.library.tu.ac.th/thesis/2017/TU_2017_5701090028_9098_9347.pdf

The Lao lawyer Phounsavath (2017: 41-42) did not explain the local government of Laos during the Cold War that lasted from 2 December 1975 to 1991, but he focuses on the post-Cold War one under the amended 1991 Constitution from 2003 to 2015.

3.2. Lao local government after the Cold War

After the Cold War, the Lao state was open to investment in three aspects: economy, tourism and culture. In terms of politics, it is still secretive although the Cold War is over. Security problems included the movement led by General Vang Pao, Lao To Tan and other resistant militants along the border with Thailand and China. The local government thus were the fundamental fortress that helped defend the country and look after the security problems for the Lao state. From 1991 to 2023, the Lao state fixed and developed at least three bodies of the law on local government. They are the 1991, 2003 and 2015 amendments.

3.2.1. Post Cold War local government of Lao PDR: Stage 1

The first stage of local government of the Lao PDR after the Cold War was between 1991 and 2003. Tonlerd (1998: 117-118) explained the government authority of Lao PDR on the matter of local government that it is linked with the executive body as follows;

The administrative authority of Lao people's Democratic Republic is separated into three branches; the legislative (National Assembly), executive (Council of Ministers, and judicial (Supreme People's Court). In 1991, the Council of Ministers was renamed into the government cabinet. It is the central government that extended its authority to

the regional and local section. The regional section includes the provinces, district, sub-district known as Taseng and village. The local government is in the form of prefecture. If it is a big city, it is called “kampheng nakhone.”

Chart 7 is about the structure of the administration of the Lao state from 1991 to 2003. It reflects the hierarchy of local government, which is the province, district and village. Phounsavath (2017: 51) analysed the 1991 Constitution by cutting the level of sub-district known as *Taseng* off (International Labor Organization, 1996-2014)

Boulaphanh, Khwatota, Luangkaew & Wantha (2022: 259) discussed the mechanism of local government and made a very interesting conclusion as follows;

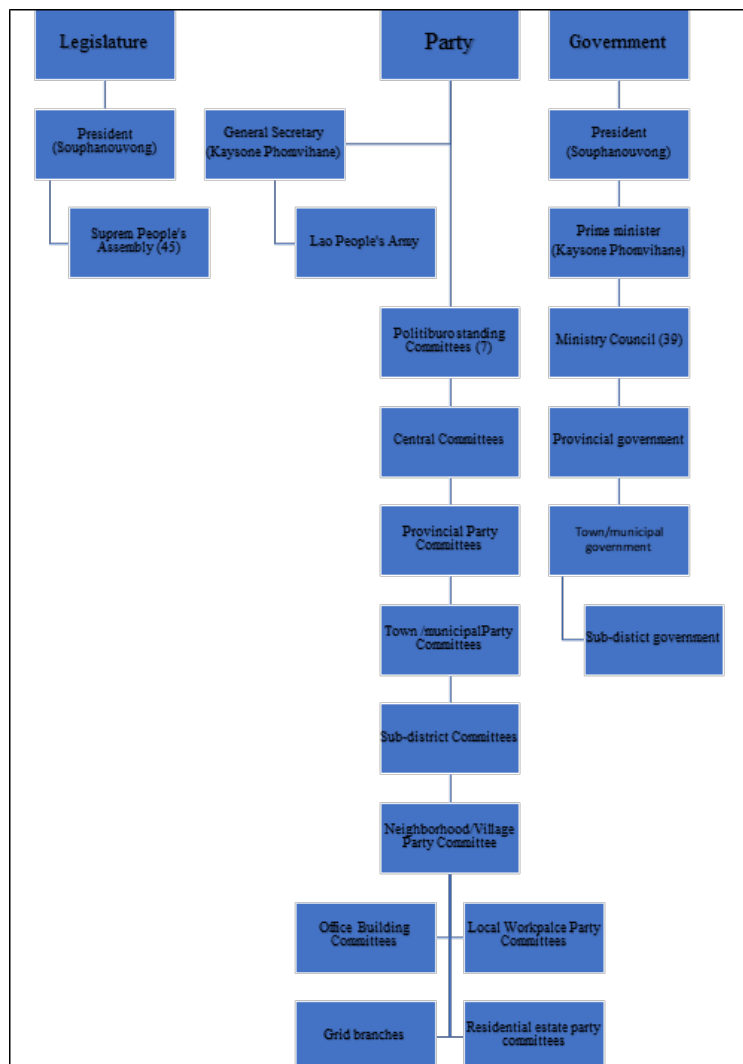
In each level of the hierarchy, there are the administrative commission, people's councils and the people's organisation led by the People's Revolutionary Party. The formats of the administration are collaborative. However, there is no concrete law. In the procedures of administrative organisation at the provincial level, there could be a type of government that is decentralised to the local government. The people's council in the province will be their representative the wield their power and rights. The authority of the government at the provincial level has two different roles. Firstly, the authority at the provincial level is the responsible representative of the government according to the law. Secondly, the authority at the provincial level set up the practices according to the resolution and the province is responsible to the people's council at the provincial level.

Boulaphanh, Khwatota, Luangkaew & Wantha (2022: 259) explained the formulation of the local government as follows;

The government is not the party that directly set up

organisations at the level of local government. However, it is the Prime Minister who approved the election results of the administrative presidents at the provincial and municipal level. The people's council at the provincial level approved the project and the appointment of the head of each department in the province and prefecture according to the administrative standard set up by the central government.

Chart 7: The structure of administration of the Lao state from 1991 to 2003; modified from “The Economist: Anatomy of Dragon China Communist Party and Government Structure 2021.”



Source: The Economist: Anatomy of Dragon China communist party and government structure 2021. In Bruce Dickson.(2021). "The Party and the People: The Chinese Politics in the 21st century." Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Retrieved on January 7, 2023, from <https://www.economist.com/specialreport/2021/06/23/the-cpush-to-revamp-the-chinese-communist-party-for-the-next-100-years>

The root of local government in the Lao PDR was adapted according to the structure of the area as indicated in the Leninist fundamental principles in order to establish socialism in each area. For example, *Nong Het*, *Xieng Khouang* Province, is the area of the Hmong. When there are conflicts among themselves, the members of District Commission who were Hmong would be the arbitrators. When tourists, or non-residents went to the community, everyone would be informed of their arrival and objectives of their visit.

After the Cold War, in the late 1990s, the Lao government had the policy of urban development which took place in the expanding city centre. The residents of *Nong Het* felt uncomfortable. They were not feeling at home even though they were home. Cows were walking around. As a result, they complained to the city governor of *Nong Het* and he negotiated with the owner of the cows. He was the relative of *Phaydang Lobliayao*. The result of the negotiation as issued by the committee of the governor, the relative of *Phaydang Lobliayao* had to relocate his cows out of town. The Lao government allowed the owner of the cows to choose the location himself and also granted him the land rights (*Yongly Lobreeyao*, April 5, 2019: pers,comm.)

3.2.2. Post Cold War local government of Lao PDR: Stage 2

In 2003, the Lao government promulgated the first law on local administration. Article 5 stated the organisation of local administration is established according to the principle of centralisation of democracy. At the village level, it is under the authority of the district. The district is under the authority of the province.

The province and the capital city are under the authority of the government (Phounsavath 2017: 51). In the meantime, to bring about the unity among the ASEAN members under the principles of the civil-society, culture and economy, the Kingdom of Thailand spent 16 years to produce a book on local Lao government (Mejan, 2013) after Lao PDR became a member of ASEAN in 1997.

The Lao (Lao Government, March, 2014) state defined local government “ສີ່: ການປົກຄອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນ ສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນລາວ ໄດ້ແບ່ງການປົກຄອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນອອກເປັນ 3 ຂັ້ນ ຄື: ຂັ້ນແຂວງ, ຂັ້ນເມືອງ ແລະ ຂັ້ນບ້ານ. ແຕ່ລະຂັ້ນປະກອບມີ: ແຂວງ ແລະ ນະຄອນ; ເມືອງ ແລະ ເທດສະບານ; ບ້ານ...”⁸

8 “Fourth, local government: The Lao People’s Democratic Republic separated the local government into three levels: the province, the district, and the village. Each level has the province and prefecture, district and municipality, and village.”

Chart 8: The structure of administration of the Lao state from 2003 to 2015; modified from “The Economist: Anatomy of Dragon China Communist Party and Government Structure 2021.”

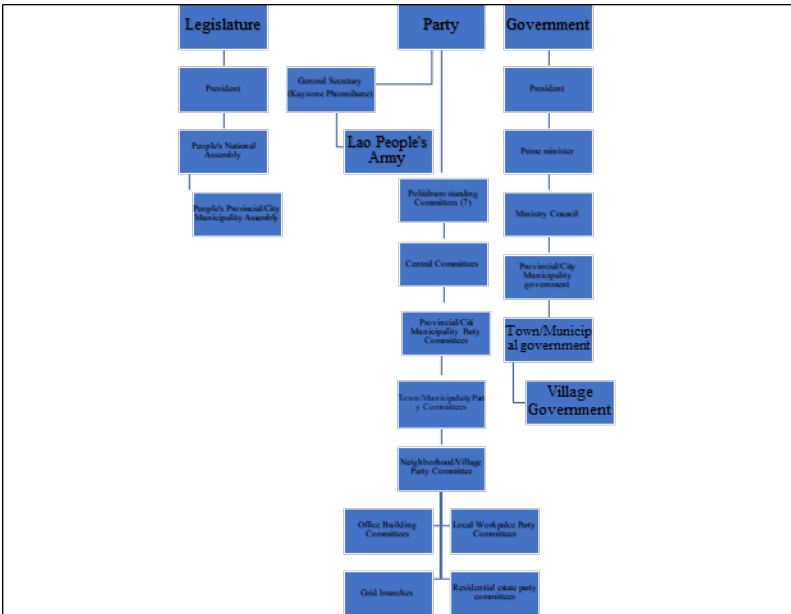


Source: The Economist: Anatomy of Dragon China communist party and government structure 2021. In Bruce Dickson.(2021). “The Party and the People: The Chinese Politics in the 21st century.” Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Retrieved on January7,2023, from <https://www.economist.com/specialreport/2021/06/23/the-cpush-to-revamp-the-chinese-communist-party-for-the-next-100-years>

3.2.3. Post Cold War local government of Lao PDR: Stage 3

The stage 3 of the local government of the Lao PDR that began from 2015 could be defined as the era of the reformation

Chart 9: The structure of administration of the Lao state from 2015 to 2023; modified from “The Economist: Anatomy of Dragon China Communist Party and Government Structure 2021.”



Source: The Economist: Anatomy of Dragon Chinese communist party and government structure 2021. In Bruce Dickson. (2021). "The Party and the People: The Chinese Politics in the 21st century." Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Retrieved on January 7, 2023, from <https://www.economist.com/specialreport/2021/06/23/the-cpush-to-revamp-the-chinese-communist-party-for-the-next-100-years>

The local government of the Lao PDR needs further research in the future, as this topic of politics and government is not allowed by the Lao government. Nowadays, the Lao state has founded the Faculty of Political Science at the higher education level. This is a phenomenon which will bring about changes in introducing new topics of government in the areas of Lao Studies.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned above, the Lao local government is the reflection of nation building on the pathway of socialism. It is a country that lacks labors, industrial sector and technical knowledge to build the socialist country. The first and second generation of Lao leaders had direct experience of living under the colonial regime and the Royal Lao Government. The root of learning a new way of government helped the first and second Lao leaders to try implementing the administration of local government in the release zone from 1964 to 1975. However, the roles of Lao government on local government during WWI is still confidential as it reflected the Cold War problems and anti-globalisation perspectives of the Lao leader. The security of the state must be in must be defended in tandem with the legitimacy of their group, not the utmost benefit of the country as it is indicated "The Party dictates, the State protects, and the People are the masters". The local Lao government can be described as the state that allows certain amount of authority to the local government so that they can handle certain kinds of resources themselves. However, a number of areas such as national culture, education, peace and order are the responsibilities of the Lao state. This article notes that the local Lao government is a reflection of traditional politics and

government in Southeast Asia especially “the system of governing a town” in each province. The governor or village headman has the absolute rights for the area management himself, but the capital punishment needs to be passed over the central government for the judgement.

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Democratization, Conflict and ‘Act East’ Policy: Challenges to Mediate Non-State Armed Actors of Northeast India in Southeast Asia

Athikho Kaisii¹

ABSTRACT—: Non-state actor in Northeast India is a pre-independence phenomenon, and with the exception of Assam, the seed of institutionalizing violence was sown prior to the formation of the states. In course of time non-state actor has turned into non-state armed actor. Experience has proved that the formation of states as the process of democratization is yet to soothe the conflict in the region. With this salient reality, “Act East” seen as a path-breaking policy with a multi-prong strategy aiming to overhaul the image of the Northeast through rebuilding India’s historical ties with Southeast Asia, needs to embed a viable action-oriented democratic mechanism to mitigate the conflict. This paper aims to address how an ambitious approach to “Act East” is crafting a conducive milieu to alleviate the issue of the non-state armed actors in the region.

Keywords : Action-oriented, alternative administration, democratic mechanism, Southeast Asia

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Introduction: Situating the Context

With the consolidation of India's territory in the wake of British withdrawal in 1947, Northeast India as a distinct geographical region became salient in Southeast Asia. Mostly shared with and surrounded by international borders, the region became territorially marginalized and was left connected with mainland India by just a narrow strip of landmass popularly known as "Siliguri Corridor". Accordingly, the region that served as India's gateway to Southeast Asia was altered, and its historical ties with it redefined. Henceforth, the region has begun to focus habitually on the perspective of security, and is often referred to as a "dark side" of the country.

In the hope to provide a strategic approach in the Northeast, the "Look East" policy was initiated during the regime of P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991-92). Since then, successive governments have continued to build its momentum. Indeed, to fortify the policy. Within months of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) coming to power after the successful 16th parliamentary general election, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in his maiden speech at the 12th ASEAN-India summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 12th November, 2014, announced the transition of the policy from "Look East" to "Act East" (Chairman's Statement, 2014). It is regarded as a path-breaking policy with multi-dimensions that aims to revamp the image of Northeast through rebuilding India's historical ties with Southeast Asia. The policy was summed up as a "programme related to restoring the pre-Independence connectivity, which the North East believes was key to its prosperous past" (Bose 2019, 336). Taking the policy to a new height with concrete objectives is commendable, which is a clear indication of a shifting approach towards the Northeast in the post-Independence India. Besides being geographically peripheral, the Northeast is a distinct diverse cultural region in which social taste, culture and ways of life are different from mainland Indians. Culturally, the people of the region are closer to Southeast Asia, for which the "Act East" policy is an ideal approach that is intended for all-round development.

Furthermore, the objectives of the transition to “Act East” are linked with greater geographical scope of the policy and its strategic depth (Palit2016, 83) through an expanded definition of “East” to include Japan, South Korea and Australia (Lee 2015, 68).

Problems, Objectives and Methodology

The past democratization processes and policies that tried to refurbish the region’s image had often ended up in a blame game as “security-centric” became the dominant strategy for the region. Subsequently, the nature and process of democratization has taken its processes as a justified approach in appropriating violence in the state itself. In due course of time, the existing conflict subliminally gave birth to one of the longest-running insurgency movements in Southeast Asia, in the form of the Naga movement. This was followed by Mizo rebellion in 1966.² Proliferation of armed conflicts include 1970’s conflicts in Assam³ and Tripura⁴, the 1980’s conflicts in Manipur followed by Meghalaya in the 1990’s. Although in Arunachal Pradesh the state’s non-state actor is relatively inactive, Naga militants are active in the districts of Changlang, Lohit and Tirap. Thus, with the exception of Sikkim, “conflict” becomes a paradigm to describe the region leading to a strain between the state and the people.

Nonetheless, the Northeast is not at all homogeneous, but

2 With the signing of Mizo Accord in 1985 between the Mizo National Front and the Government of India, which led to the formation of statehood, Mizoram has relatively become peaceful.

3 Unabated migrants from mainland India and influx of Bengali-speaking Muslims from across the border coupled with the sense of bitter experience in the wake of India’s withdrawal in India-China War of 1962 had culminated in the rise of conflict movement in Assam.

4 The growth of insurgency in Tripura is unique in a sense this is the state in India where the indigenous tribal people have been reduced to a minority in their own land.

comprises eight states, inhabited by different communities and tribes, speaking various languages and following different cultural practices and religious beliefs. On account of a huge diversity and complex problems, intra-state conflict is intricate, partly as a result of colonial baggage. For instance, ongoing inter-state boundary disputes, the Naga imbroglio and the current turmoil in Manipur are largely related to colonial legacy. Understanding the complex problems in the region, the focus of the paper will be limited to Manipur and Nagaland. The paper attempts to address concerns like why the binary forces of the state actor and the non-state armed actors continue even after the formation of states? In what way “Act East” is considered as a milestone democratic policy and can mend the conflict situation? In the midst of the institutionalization of violence how “Act East” policy as an ingenious democratic process can restore democratic space? To effectively materialize the grand objectives of “Act East”, it is imperative to embed a constructive action-oriented conflict management mechanism within the policy to mitigate conflict in the region. This study is based on qualitative methods of narrative, observation and critical review.

Conceptual Clarification: Non-State Armed Actors

The term non-state armed actor has been appropriated from Scott’s formulation of a non-state space, where he has elaborated it in some of his well-known works. State spaces according to him are where:

The subject population was settled rather densely in quasi-permanent communities, producing a surplus of grain (usually of wet-rice) and labour which was relatively easily appropriated by the state.

But in non-state spaces:

The population was sparsely settled, typically practiced slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation, maintained

a more mixed economy (including, for example polyculture on reliance on forest products), and highly mobile, thereby severely limiting the possibilities for reliable state appropriation (Scott 1998,186).

Something similar to that of Scott's proposition was a "stateless society", a theory propounded by Clastres. In his famous work *State Against the Society*, he argues that "primitive societies are societies without a State" (1989, 159). But he does not mean to say that the primitive societies are bereft of a political dimension. The difference is that "the thing whose very absence defines primitive society, hierarchical authority, the power relation, the subjugation of men—in a word, the state" (1989, 203). In a "stateless society", the members are relatively equal and follow communitarian principles where they are almost devoid of the notion of masters and slaves.

The framework of Scott's non-state spaces to state spaces involves imposing order on societies that will be controlled through transforming from "illegibility" to "legibility". As Scott writes, "Legibility is a condition of manipulation. Any substantial state intervention in society ... requires the invention of units that are visible. The units in question might be citizens, villages, trees, fields, houses, or people grouped according to age, depending on the type of intervention. Whatever the units being manipulated, they must be organized in a manner that permits them to be identified, observed, recorded, counted, aggregated, and monitored" so that the state can possibly appropriate the best out of it (1998, 183). The state will attempt to maximize the appropriability of production and labour in designing state spaces in order to minimize the cost of governing the area. Popular theory and conjecture over times, propagate that such an attempt has been undertaken in the hope of "civilizing the uncivilized" through institutionalization of democratic institutions as an agent of governance. Non-state spaces have not only been considered primitive, uncivilized and weak but also undemocratic, not conducive for healthy governance.

Governance is considered difficult in the absence of minimal functional democracy. Democracy is believed to be *par excellence* to any other regime. The only way to attain democratic governance is thus to create and institutionalize democratic institutions. Accordingly, the ultimate purpose of transforming non-state space into a state space is for better administration (from the state's perspective), which results in good governance. Hence, with democratized zeal the non-state spaces have gradually been transformed into state spaces across the world. Transforming non-state spaces into state spaces in turn has taken on different forms such as colonialism, imperialism, decolonization and so forth. To contextualize the paper under study, as a part of a colonialism process, the British had formerly annexed North-east India in Southeast Asia in 1826.⁵ Until then not much was known about the region which constituted in Scott's "Zomia" construction of non-state spaces (2009). Prior to the colonial domination, whatever governing systems existed in the region was relatively limited to ethnic and community-based, where the locals themselves ruled. In Northeast, the conversion of non-state spaces to state spaces through the process of democratization and centralization has institutionalized the non-state armed actors. In general, non-state armed groups referred to those groups that were "armed and used force to achieve their objectives and are not under state control" (ICHRP 1999, 5).

Democratization and Conflict: Brief Sketch

Irrespective of the consequences, in any violence related problems, democratic strategy has been advocated to mitigate the situation. Yet, with the exception of the relatively stable nations with strong and long tradition of democratic practice, democ-

- 5 Though British interest in the North East Frontier (Northeast India) particularly, Assam had commenced in the seventeen sixties, intensity has increased with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo.

ratization is often mired with violence. Thus, although democratization is considered as an important democratic approach to mitigate conflict, not every scholar is enthusiastic about the idea that it can eventually alleviate the risk of it. Among others for instance, Mansfield et.al (1995) argued that democratization can be a violent process especially in the transitional stage, as democracy doesn't become mature overnight. The initial phase of democratization can be a potential factor for conflict, and Snyder (2000) suggests two conditions that would favour such a possibility. Firstly, political elites would exploit the situation for their own ends, and secondly, the central government often tacitly allows the political elites to follow a fragmentation approach. Such a situation will then allow the elite political actors (state actors) to manipulate the dividend of democratization for their own ends. Indeed, in such a transitory situation, when "actors find it difficult to know what their interests are, who their supporters will be, and which groups will be their allies or opponents" (Karl 1990, 6), conflict is not ruled out.

It is a situation as Savun et al. noted, "the political elites have difficulty in trusting each other's intentions and promises" (2011, 234) thereby hindering peaceful transitions. Interestingly, some scholars even suggest that "the relationship between conflict and democratization remains unclear and resembles the ancient dilemma about the chicken and the egg" (Mirimanova 1997, 87). Evidently, "the transitions to democracy have occurred under different scenarios, with peaceful transitions in some, and with transitions accompanied by openly violent social conflicts in other case" (Cervellati et al. 2011, 1). Democratic transition is a crucial stage that may eventually lead towards the process of democratization, but its process is not always free from conflict, though it is expected to create a condition of peaceful democratic governance.

More importantly, how the transitional period has led to the growth of democratic institutions will have persistent effects in its democratic practices and functioning. As Rakner et al. point out:

Democratization often entails diffusing power more evenly across a greater number of actors both within and outside government, whilst strengthening state capacity may call for greater centralization of power and autonomy in the decision-making process. State-building requires, above all, the strengthening of state institutions and the consolidation/centralization of state power, while democracy promotion calls for the substantial diffusion and redistribution of state power. Thus, while the good governance agenda tends to assume that 'all good things go together', some tensions are glossed over (2007, 2).

This is because democratization means that the state distributes power, but for it to do so needs to acquire the power first. When the process itself is at times self-contradictory, a certain amount of conflict is bound to happen, which can act as a catalyst that could intensify the tension between state actors and non-state armed actors. Democratization processes as a short-term conflict-inducing phenomenon can be protracted "is when democratization catalyzes widespread social or political violence—either by incumbent governments seeking to retain power by force, or among clashing social forces vying for influence or control" (IIDEA 2006, 9). When an appropriate and systematic device is not in place to deal with the post-democratizing conflict, but allows the same to perpetuate, democratization and conflict can operate in parallel. To make the democratizing process truly a democratic, it is imperative to comprehend the issue from all angles while devolving the process of democratization so that its own consequences will encompass measures to contain conflict.

In Northeast India, democratization in the form of the creation of state allows the institutionalization of violence to continue. Democratization in the region happened along with excessive presence of security forces to assist the state. When democratization in the form of the formation of state was not functioning as expected, perpetuating or even abating violence was alleged to deploy through centrally backed state leaders. In this

regard, it is not out of place to note that as a counter-insurgency measure, violent culture has been institutionalized in the form of *AFSPA* (Armed Forces [Special Powers] Act, 1958) prior to the formation of states, with the exception of Assam. However, to address the Act was not made as a part of the democratic exercise that led to the creation of states. In a way, violence is embedded within the democratization process as the newly created states has not been empowered to address the Act. Whatever the states have recommended on the Act, the ultimate authority to repeal the Act has rested with the Central government.

On the issue of the Naga movement, according to Vaniak “the Indian government’s carrot and stick policy of pouring in development funds, consolidating a Naga elite and carrying out sustained and brutal repression has been largely successful in reducing the political aspirations of more and more Nagas from independence to autonomy and centre-sponsored development within the Indian Union” (1988, 2282). The states were created as a means to resolve the conflict but when the causes of the conflict are not properly diagnosed and pragmatically dealt with, conflict perpetuates. With the proliferation of coercive apparatus of the state, Mathur notes that “failures of legitimization of state power and inability to resolve political conflicts do not appear to be consequences of poor economic performance alone. They lie at the very root of the historical and social processes of state and nation building” (1992, 349). After years of confrontation, the Government of India and NSCN (IM) entered into a ceasefire in August 2007, which itself was an acknowledgement that the issue of non-state armed actors is yet to be resolved with the creation of Nagaland and Manipur states. As a reflection of the inadequacy of the formation of Nagaland to create peace, Chief Minister of Nagaland, Neiphiu Rio asserted that “unless there is a settlement, (unless) there is solution, there is no perfect peace in our land and artificial peace is there and there is no peace of mind” (Morung Express, 15 February, 2022).

Democratization, Conflict and Fragmentation

In Northeast India, before the formation of states as a democratization process, there was a non-state actor within the realm of non-state spaces. Well before the formation Nagaland and Manipur as states, the Naga Club as a non-state actor had stated its aspiration to the visiting colonial's Commission under the chairmanship of John Simon with Clement Attlee and E. Cadogan in Kohima on 10th January 1929 (Franke, 2009) that their territory should not be included within the proposed territorial reorganization. Though the submission came to naught, it set the ball rolling of non-state armed actors in the region. The Naga National Council (NNC), formed in 1946, which was an outcome of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council constituted in 1945 by the then Deputy Commissioner, Kohima C R Pawsey, carried forward the legacy of the Naga Club. NNC as a non-state actor was turned into an armed group in 1955 with the failure to implement the 9-Point Agreement of June 1947, and after declining to participate in the 1952 election.

As compared to other states in the region, the formation of Nagaland and Manipur had altogether a different tale. In essence, Nagaland is an outcome of the Naga movement, and it was created through an agreement, and not based on the State Reorganization Act. It was instituted basically out of a political exigency. However, an agreement that led to the formation of Nagaland was not an agreement between the non-state armed actors (meaning NNC) and the Government of India. Instead, the Naga People's Convention (NPC), formed in 1957, whose actual purpose was to act as the facilitator between the NNC and the Government of India, turned out to be the negotiator and final arbiter when Nagaland was formed. By not making the leaders of the NNC a stakeholder in the agreement, they continue to operate as the non-state armed actors. The failure to comprehend the Naga movement that spread across the sub-region of India but limited the formation of Nagaland to the recommendation of NPC 16 points alone, resulted in continuation of non-state armed actors. With this development, the Na-

gas have been fragmented into followers of NPC who eventually played the role of state actors and those who have continued their allegiance with the NNC as non-state actors. Such fragmentation has changed the landscape of conflict from between the Nagas and the Government of India to within and among the Nagas. Besides, those excluded sections of the Nagas from Nagaland are kept as a perpetual minority in other states thereby making them dependent on the majority community for their overall socio-economic and political development. In turn, the fragmentation strategy of the Nagas has propelled the idea that the Nagas meant those who inhabited Nagaland, and the rest have joined as a part of expansionist policy.

The birth and growth of the factional fighting in the Naga movement is thus not free from the role of the state actors (Kumar, 2007, 27). Though the intensity of factional killing has been reduced significantly, fragmentation within the Nagas proliferated, both at the level of non-state armed groups and civil society. In the first cease-fire (1964), there was only one single non-state armed actor (the NNC), but in the 1997 cease-fire, though it covered the Naga Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) faction, there were other non-state armed groups that the Government of India had to deal with. The policy of inclusive solution in an eventual settlement by taking all the factions onboard is the product of factionalism. The then Government of India's Interlocutor to Naga peace-talks, R.N Ravi's expressed views that "there will be only one peace process and one agreement for the Nagas" is not different (Nagaland Post, 2017). Some of the recent fragmentations have happened right at the door of peace-talks, which is seen as a process of democratization seeking for a lasting solution. When a cease-fire was signed in 1997 between the NSCN-IM and the Government of India other than factions of NNC and NSCN-K, there were no other factions. Today, besides those groups who are outside the purview of the peace-talks, those engaging in the talks are broadly divided into NSCN-IM and 7 NNPGs (Naga National Political Groups). Recently, the NSCN-K faction led by Niki Sumi has announced a cease-fire, as the organization

has resolved to strengthen and support the peace process (Saha, 2020). Furthermore, in November 2021 within the 7 NNPGs, the NSCN (R) was split into two different groups and the newly formed faction declared a “unilateral ceasefire” with the Government of India. On December 31, 2023, again three Naga Political Groups (NPGs)– NSCN/GPRN (Akato), Z Royim-led NNC (Parent Body), and Khango-led NSCN (K)– decided to have a “joint political venture” and engage in political talks with Government of India.

At the level of civil society with some apex bodies such as Naga Hoho, Naga Students’ Federation (NSF), Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA) from some years back, today, Naga society is mired with many organizations like Nagaland Tribes Council (NTC), 14 Tribal Hohos, CNTC (Central Nagaland Tribal Council), etc. Of course, there are other exclusive Naga bodies such as United Naga Council (UNC), All Naga Students’ Association, Manipur (ANSAM), etc. in Manipur and in other states also but all these organizations have been in existence prior to the cease-fire. The Nagas in different states have every right to form their own organizations but it shouldn’t weigh down the larger interest and hinder the functions of the apex organizations. Instead, different organizations can work in the wings to strengthen the apex organizations. As a consequent of the growing number of civil society groups that jeopardized the function of the apex bodies, R.N Ravi, Centre’s Interlocutor to Naga peace-talks was alleged to have divided the Naga society into “primary stakeholders” and “secondary stakeholders”(The Northeast Today, 2019). There is an apprehension that the democratization process of inclusiveness is a contrivance to divide and dictate to the Nagas.

At this fragile moment there is a fear that if an evolving trend is not embarked upon sensibly, it may lead to further fragmentation of the Nagas while rolling a piecemeal solution, of which, the Nagas have had a bitter experience beginning with the Akbar Hydari Agreement or the 9 Point Agreement 1947, the 16 Point Agreement, 1963 to the Shillong Accord, 1975. In

what way “Act East”, is seen as a people-oriented policy that aims to overhaul the image of the region, will cope with such a crucial issue, has been keenly watched. The policy as India’s transforming foreign policy to re-engage Southeast Asia (Bajpayee 2017) will be inadequate to meet its goal without taking care of the home front. In fact, “Look/Act East” is India’s strategic foreign policy in the era of post “cold war” and growing emerging globalized world, from the domestic dimension, it aims at overcoming the region from its handicap of geographical isolation while lagging behind the rest of India in development, and suffers from widespread insurgency movements (Sikir, 2009, 136). To bring to a logical conclusion with mutually acceptable terms of the Naga issue will certainly be a remarkable achievement of the “Act East”. Not to mention the people in Northeast India but the neighbouring countries are also watching the Naga peace-talks, which can form a decisive part of the “Act East” policy. Reaching an amicable solution with the Naga issue will be indubitably a roadmap towards normalcy in the region, and to rebuild India’s ties with Southeast Asia.

When it comes to Manipur, the state was created by combining both the valley and the hills of the region, irrespective of the people’s aspirations. Such an arrangement was in sheer contradiction with the formation of other hill states like Meghalaya and Mizoram, since these states were carved out of Assam as per the wishes of the hill people, although their formation had its own history of struggle, not at all free from conflict. Tensions between the people of the hills and the valley have manifested in various forms since the formation of state in Manipur. The latest was on May 3, 2023, in which the people in the hills called for a “tribal solidarity march” in protest against the demand of the Meiteis in the valley for a scheduled tribe (ST). To become a scheduled tribe is based on certain specific criteria, and whether the Meiteis have met those parameters is not the focus of the paper. Suffice to now at this juncture be that the tension remains fragile and abound with mistrust between the people from the hills and the valley. The “march” and counter-bandh have resulted in a war-like situation losing more than 180 precious

lives and property worth rupees thousands of crores destroyed, and the situation is still far from over. On account of the current ethnic conflict there is almost total separation between the Kuki-Zo of the hills and Meitei in the valley. Even after eight months of turmoil in the state no serious discussion was held either in the State Assembly nor in the Union Parliament. Records show that in the ongoing ethnic clashes around 4800 weapons were looted in various police stations and armories. Lt Gen Rana Pratap Kalita, the then Eastern Army Commander commented that the turmoil in the state is a “political problem” and until the looted weapons are recovered, sporadic violence will continue (The New Indian Express, 21 November, 2023). Something “Act East” policy needs to take into account to bring its desired goal to fruition is to manage the complex relationship between the hills and the valley people with determined political will. Without a suitable pragmatic democratic mechanism to address the protracted conflict between the valley and the hills, the violent situation can impair the objective of the policy.

In Manipur, be it social, economic, or political, there is hardly any mutual shared and common interest between the hills and the valley people, save for formation of a state that has brought them together in one administrative unit. Such a sheer marriage of convenience, which was done essentially for political exigency, does not work at the level of people to people. Democratization, in the form of Manipur state, further heightened the social divide and fragmentation between the hills and the valley people. The creation of state has resulted in legitimizing the hegemonic domination of the Meiteis. It leads to further intensification of the tension between the state actors and the non-state armed actors, who, to safeguard each ethnic community's interest, have nurtured their own armed groups.

Act East Policy: Challenges to Mitigate Conflict

It is a hard fact that Northeast India has been infested with

various armed rebel movements, with demand, ranging from autonomy, homeland to self-rule, making the region violence ridden. Nonetheless, for India to play on a level field as a global player through building a strategic tie with her Southeast Asian neighbours, internal disturbance should not derail its prospect. To rebuild an age-old historical connection with her Southeast Asian neighbours will then require giving a due importance to the region. And for any people oriented pragmatic approach towards healing the region, it would be costly to overlook the demand of the people within the Indian federal system.

Since the formation of Nagaland and Manipur states lack adequate and systematic democratic devices to deal with the non-state armed groups, the democratization process and conflict operate in parallel. The “Act East” policy has yet to find strategies to overcome this deadlock, despite all its appreciations, and is considered as a people-centric milestone approach. Other than generating a certain amount of academic interest, coupled with the media hype, for the locals who have been living under the spectacle of violence for all these years, not much has changed at ground zero. The Government of India, through its Ministry of Development of Northeast region (DoNER) is trying hard to connect the region with the rest of the country. It has been viewed that the Modi government has taken path-breaking decisions for the development of the Northeast through DoNER. However, by focusing on economic development and connectivity alone, and lacking acknowledgement of the distinct culture and ways of life with democratic constitutional protections, “Act East” will be found wanting to change the image of the region; to “mainstream” the region, upholding cultural diversity is imperative. Besides economic and connectivity strategy, DoNER in tandem with “Act East” needs to formalize a democratic mechanism that will uphold the distinctive cultural aspects of the region.

When the symptom of conflict is well entrenched within a democratization process that led to the formation of states, there is a need to revisit the effectiveness of the states as a means to conciliate non-state armed actors. Given the condition that the

democratization mechanism through the formation of state is unable to neutralize the non-state armed actors, “Act East” policy needs to evolve a suitable alternative democratic mechanism to mitigate the conflict. A solution could be to develop an alternative structure of democratic administration. Every complex issue requires a unique model to be solved. To bring about an alternative administrative system of governance, an option that can be explored, is a state within a state administration. Without upsetting the territorial boundary, as territory has emerged as a bone of contention, particularly in the state of Manipur, devolution of powers through dual systems of governance directly financed and monitored by the Central government suitable to the federal principle of India can be considered.

The centrality of territory is obvious in a state, as the state cannot be created out of a vacuum. At the same time, it is the people who own the territory and not the people who belong to the territory. Territory and land belong to the people. Although no state’s territorial boundary is so sacrosanct that it cannot be touched, such an approach is highly emotionally charged at the moment. Unconventional deterritorialized alternative administrative systems of a state within a state can be considered. An “out of box” approach of the devolution of powers mechanism, in which the community who own the territory is made to control the governing system, may help to mediate the situation. Democratic structure of deterritorialized administration and a state within a state mechanism can somehow deal with the competing and contrasting concepts of territorial integration and territorial integrity.

Territory cannot be recreated. It is fixed and immovable, yet the boundary can be reorganized. So, also, institutions, organizations and legislations can be modified and deconstructed depending on the situation. Based on nature, function and requirement, the structure of administration can transcend territories. In today’s world, every independent nation-state is bound by various multilateral organizations and legislations beyond its territory to make it functional. Deterritorialized administration

and a state within a state mechanism will not only help to contain the non-state armed actors but also can facilitate the normalization of the situation in the region. Such an alternative approach of conflict management will be a viable democratic mechanism to curb the movements of the non-state armed groups, which are running parallel 'governments' to formal governments.

Moreover, the existence of the non-state armed groups cannot be seen in isolation of ethnic tension, which was manifest even before the creation of states, particularly, in Manipur and Nagaland. Since non-state armed groups have been nurtured by the respective ethnic communities, various stakeholders ought to express their views. The government as a dominant player through the "Act East" policy may demonstrate its determined dynamic role to bring together different conflicting ethnic groups to a common platform. Likewise, it is imperative to have sustained and healthy communication at the level of people to evolve an atmosphere of mutual respect. No confrontation can change an inherent neighbourhood and co-existence. However, when the perpetuation of territorial *statusquism* is one of the legitimate reasons for continuation of non-state armed actors, it is expected that all the stakeholders spell out the options to redeem the conflict situation. Without exploring the options but just beating the drum of the *status quo* will be as good as stimulating the conflict.

Conclusion

The analysis has unfolded that non-state armed actors in Southeast Asia of Northeast India is a pre-state issue and the formation of states as means of democratization has been unable to curb their activities. The astringent consequence of democratization is essentially due to a top-down approach, since the democratic arrangement that led to the formation of states does not address the issue of institutionalized violence. So, the democratic states continue to function in a well militarized environ-

ment, where large scale deployment of security forces is considered as a necessity to contain the non-state armed actors. Hence, in the wake of the compelling contemporary realities, along with the government's commitment to bring about a facelift of the Northeast through the "Act East" policy, it is appropriate that a sincere alternative democratic system of governance needs to be considered. To prevent the region from deteriorating and to make the "Act East" policy truly people centric, the government needs to muster political will to come out with an alternative system of democratic governance. In this regard, the Naga resistance movement being the forefront of the non-state armed actor movements in the region, reaching a mutually agreeable solution, with flexibility of mind, for peaceful co-existence with it will have far reaching consequences. The conclusion of the ongoing Naga peace talk will surely provide an opportunity to revisit the process of democratization in the region, which would be a milestone achievement of the "Act East" policy.

Disclosure statement

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From government-centric to people-centered government: A Reform of the Administrative Services in Zhejiang Province, China (1992-2018)

Orachorn Saechang¹

ABSTRACT—: The government plays a critical role in providing public services and serving the interests of the public. However, the traditional government-centric mentality tends to prioritize what the government can do rather than considering the needs of the public. This article aims to explore the transformation of the Chinese government from a government-centric approach to a people-centric approach and evaluates the reform efforts. Based on a content analysis of both Chinese and English literature, this study reveals that the Zhejiang government has been engaged in a continuous administrative reform process since 1992, consisting of five distinct phases, leading to a gradual transformation into a citizen-centric government. The recent administrative service reform, known as the “Visit Once at Most”, initiated by the Zhejiang government and implemented nationwide, can most demonstrate the people-centered approach adopted by the government. The reform places significant emphasis on meeting the public’s needs, enhancing satisfaction, and ensuring a sense of gain as fundamental principles for delivering efficient services. The study also finds that administrative decentralization and the establishment of performance legitimacy within the Chinese political and governance system have played crucial roles in facilitating such a transformation. The study concludes with a discussion of the success factors and challenges associated with the ongoing reform efforts.

Keywords : people-centered, government, administrative reform, Zhejiang, China

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Introduction

China, like many countries around the world, has sought to transition from a “government-centric” approach to a “people-centric” service delivery model. This transition is aligned with the global trend of governance. From the Traditional Public Administration in 1887, where the government was overwhelmingly the center of public service delivery, it has evolved into the New Public Management in the late 20th century, where the private sector was involved. Currently, it is the era of post-New Public Management where multi-sectoral governance is required and people is the center of governance for public administration. Since the opening and reform of China in 1978, the Chinese government has continuously reformed public service delivery. The emphasis on the people-centric approach is evident in the increasing use of the word “people” in official reports of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which has increased from 39 times in 1977 to 206 times in 2017 (Guo 2019).

It is widely recognized that China has become a global power in many aspects in a relatively short time. Governmental reform has played a crucial role in China’s rapid development and its emergence as a global power (Yu 2018). The reform process has empowered local governments and the administrative system through fiscal and administrative decentralization (Bai and Liu 2020). This decentralization has improved economic growth by granting more decision-making authority to local governments (Gong, Liu, and Wu 2021; Yu and Gao 2013). The administrative examination and approval system has been a key focus of government reform in China, serving as a mechanism for decentralization of power and tasks. Over the years, the Chinese government, particularly the Zhejiang government, has implemented a series of reforms to create a business-friendly environment, attract investment, and enhance the convenience of public services. These reforms have involved adjusting and decentralizing administrative examination and approval items, as well as innovating, simplifying, and optimizing their functions and processes. As a result, the quality and efficiency of government services have improved

Zhejiang province is one of the leading local governments in China, known for being a highly developed and innovative government. Several of its locally piloted policies have been adopted nationwide, such as the establishment of one-stop service in 1999, the Visit Once at Most reform in 2017, etc. Zhejiang, located in the Yangtze River Delta on the eastern coast of China, consists of 11 prefecture-level cities, 37 municipal districts, 20 county-level cities, 33 counties (including one autonomous county), 618 towns, 258 townships, and 488 streets (The People's Government of Zhejiang Province 2020). Hangzhou, as its capital city, has hosted several international events such as the 11th G20 summit in 2016 and the Asian Games in 2022. It covers a total area of 101,800 square kilometers, ranking eighth in size in the country. The terrain consists of 23.2% plain areas, 70.4% mountains and hills, and 6.4% lakes. With a population of 64.6 million, Zhejiang ranks fourth in terms of economic size among Chinese provinces (Office of the Leading Group for the Seventh National Census of the State Council 2021). In general, China's administrative structure comprises of central government and four tiers of local government. This includes 34 provincial-level governments (23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities, and 2 special administrative regions), 333 cities, 2,843 counties, and 38,602 townships (National Bureau of Statistics 2022).

The administrative reform efforts in Zhejiang province provide a notable example of the progressive shift from a government-centric to a people-centered approach. The reform process began in 1992 and gained momentum with the nationwide adoption of the recent reform of "Visit Once at Most" (VOM) or "最多跑一次" (*zuì duō pǎo yī cì*) in 2018, which signifies the evolving prioritization of meeting the needs and expectations of the people in the Chinese governance system. The VOM introduced by the Zhejiang government in 2017 and implemented nationwide a year later, has been a significant driver of change in public service delivery in China since the country's reform and opening-up period beginning in 1978 (Yu 2018; Lang and Shu 2018). This reform has quickly spread across China, showcasing the experiences and practices that have been widely adopted. Therefore, this study

focuses on the administrative service and approval system reform in Zhejiang province, with a special focus on the VOM reform, to illustrate the transformation of the Chinese government's service delivery from a government-centric to a people-oriented approach. The research aims to address two main objectives: firstly, to investigate the transition in public service delivery from a government-centric to a people-centric perspective through the examination and approval system reform in Zhejiang province; and secondly, to assess the factors contributing to the reform's success and the challenges it faces moving forward.

Literature Review

China is one of the most decentralized countries, especially in terms of fiscal and administrative decentralization, albeit with limitations on political decentralization. Regional decentralization drives economic development by incentivizing local governments to be innovative and competitive (Xu 2011). The decentralization in China began in the 1980s when Deng Xiaoping initiated the Reform and Opening Up policy in 1978. Before this, China was highly centralized. Fiscal reforms changed how local governments at the county level and below collected revenue, incentivizing local governments to pursue economic growth from rural industrialization (Oi 1992). A key feature was the tax responsibility system, which gave local governments a fixed revenue target allowing them to retain earnings beyond contracted amounts for local use. As central government revenues dropped, local revenues rose, creating regional disparities. To recentralize control, reforms in 1994 reclassified central, local, and shared taxes intending to increase revenue for the central government. While decentralization remains complex, local governments were incentivized to manage fiscal revenues, shaping economic development (Jin, Qian, and Weingast 2005).

The administrative decentralization in China after 1978 resulted in a significant transfer of administrative power from the central government to local governments. With this devo-

lution of power, local governments have been granted the autonomy to implement economic policies and tailor services to the specific conditions and needs of their localities (Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 2005). As a result, local governments have been able to experiment with innovative mechanisms for delivering public services, leading to increased efficiency and effectiveness (Malesky and London 2014). However, administrative reform can also contribute to regional disparities in public service delivery. The lack of effective institutionalization of the intergovernmental fiscal system has allowed wealthier regions to provide better public services compared to poorer regions, limiting the development of service-oriented governments (Wong 2009). Furthermore, the absence of clear accountability mechanisms at the local level can give rise to corruption and the misuse of power and public funds (Tsai 2007). Despite the autonomy granted to local governments in making policy decisions, the central government maintains strict control over the personnel system, ensuring that local policies align with the ideology and policies of the central government. Consequently, the central government continues to exert significant influence over administrative decentralization through the centralized personnel system

Administrative reform in China has been driven by the need to maintain social and political stability and adapt to globalization (Q. Wang 2010). These reforms have been relatively coherent and incremental, primarily focused on addressing socioeconomic issues. The early reforms in the 1980s to the mid-1990s focused on restructuring governmental organizations and decentralization, granting local governments more autonomy to experiment with policies that promote rural development. During the 1990s-2000s, the reform shifted towards restraining bureaucratic behavior, streamlining and downsizing bureaucracy to improve efficiency, and introducing performance evaluation systems. In the 2000s, digitization and e-government projects gained prominence, with the central government initiating the Online Government Project (OGP) in 1999 (T. Chen et al. 2023) This transformation aimed to enhance governance, pub-

lic service delivery, citizen-government interactions, and transparency. One notable reform was the Fang Guan Fu reform in 2015, which focused on streamlining administration, delegating power to local governments, strengthening regulation, and improving public service delivery (Ma 2023). Administrative decentralization played a crucial role in this reform, allowing local governments to implement policies tailored to their specific contexts. In recent years, administrative reform has increasingly focused on strengthening state capacity, improving governance and accountability, and combating corruption.

However, the institution exerting significance over the administrative system is the ruling party of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The CPC holds the primary authority in governing Chinese society and the administrative system (Shambaugh 2008). Party leadership is the key element of the Chinese governance system. Party officials generally hold important positions in the administrative system and play vital roles in policy implementation. This unique feature of the Chinese political system, known as the party-state dichotomy, places the party above the state or the administrative system (Bai and Liu 2020). The promotion of cadres within the party is based on their performance, which is closely tied to the party's ideology and principles. The performance assessment system reinforces the effectiveness of party governance as promoted cadres remain committed to the party (Whiting 2017). Consequently, the administrative structure facilitates the top-down implementation of party policies and directives (Heilmann 2018). The ideology of the CPC, based on various guiding principles from Marxism-Leninism to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, shapes the objectives and principles of China's administrative system, guiding decision-making processes, policy formulation, and implementation (Heilmann 2018). Thus, the administrative structure in China is closely influenced by party leadership, the performance assessment system, and the ideology of maintaining economic development and social stability.

In terms of governance, decentralization has been a key

tool in driving social and economic development in China since the 1980s. The national government continues to delegate administrative power while ensuring the alignment of local policies with national policies through a centralized personnel system. However, the implementation of administrative reforms varies across regions due to cross-regional disparities. Each province has been given autonomy to pilot and experiment with innovative policies (Wang, 2010). Considering the importance of administrative reform, it is intriguing to examine how leading local governments, such as Zhejiang, have implemented these reforms, and the impact they have had on governance and public service delivery.

Research Methodology

This study employs the qualitative methodology of content analysis to investigate the transformation of the Chinese government into a people-centric government through the reforms of administrative services in Zhejiang province, with a special focus on the VOM. Due to the rarity and significance of this reform, it serves as a crucial starting point for comprehending the evolution of the Chinese administrative reform. It then traces back to the historical reform of administrative services in China which began in 1992 until the current reform in 2018. To ensure a comprehensive review of the literature, this study examines both Chinese and English peer-reviewed publications. The researcher accesses relevant scholarly articles through two databases: Google Scholar and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). These databases are recognized for their extensive coverage of academic literature from various disciplines. Finally, literature on the development of administrative services and examination and approval system reform are included and used for further content analysis.

Five Phases of Administrative Service Reforms in Zhejiang Province

The examination and approval system in Zhejiang province underwent a series of reforms starting in 1992, with a focus on adopting a people-centric approach. This shift in perspective aligns with the country's development plan, which transitioned from an emphasis on economic growth to people and social development in the 2000s (Fewsmith and Gao 2014). At the core of this transformation is administrative decentralization, which granted local governments autonomy to pilot local policies throughout the reform process (Wu, Ramesh, and Yu 2017). Local governments showing superior performance were given additional autonomy, otherwise, they were given additional support and capacity building to assume more responsibility. The reform in Zhejiang province progressed through five phases, culminating in a shift from a government-oriented approach to a people-centered perspective (Lang and Shu 2018). These phases were initiated after Deng Xiaoping's Southern tour in 1992 and aimed to transition from a government-centric to a people-centered government (Yu 2018). The five phases of reform included reconstructing vertical administrative power, exploring a centralized examination and approval system, integrating functions and reengineering administrative processes, redefining and limiting government power, and ultimately transitioning to a people-centered government through the VOM reform in 2016.

Phase 1: Reconstructing the vertical administrative power of local government (1992-1998)

The first phase involved reconstructing the vertical administrative power of local government, which is aligned with the administrative reform directions of the central government. This was achieved through the "Strengthening the Power of the Strong County" to "Expanding the Power to Strengthen the County" reform, where higher-tier governments (provinces and cities) devolved socio-economic approval power to lower-tier governments (counties) (Yu 2018). This decentralization aimed

to strengthen county governments, enabling them to adapt and respond more effectively to socio-economic changes in rapidly developing regions. The decentralization of power began in 1980, with special economic zones (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen) receiving administrative approval authority similar to provincial-level authorities. The hierarchical administrative decentralization was as follows: Special Economic Zone, Economic and Technological Development Zone, Coastal Opening-up City, Coastal Economic and Technological Development Zone, and Mainland regions, respectively. The extent of decentralization varied, based on regional and administrative structure factors, with different levels of government gaining varying degrees of autonomy.

In Zhejiang province, the decentralization of power not only occurred but also deepened through the “expanding the power to strengthen the county” reforms in 2002, 2006, and 2008. This expanded the devolution of power to empower every county government, rather than exclusively focusing on strong counties. As a result, certain counties gained approval authority comparable to that of cities, leading to provincial-level management of the county system and the empowerment of county governments (Yu 2018). Effectively, the county governments, the backbone of policy implementation agents, were empowered.

Phase 2: Exploring the effective use of local government power through the establishment of one-stop administrative service centers (1999-2005)

During the second phase, one-stop administrative service centers were established to address issues such as access difficulties, poor services, staff attitudes, and arbitrary charges during the examination and approval process (Zhao, Xin, and Liangbo 2018). Unlike previous reforms that were top-down and driven by the provincial government, the establishment of administrative service centers was a bottom-up initiative led by cities and counties. The examination and approval process involved multiple departments and complex procedures, resulting in increased

costs and reduced efficiency for the public. To address this, the one-stop administrative service centers physically consolidated the approval functions of various departments into a single service hall, allowing the public to complete multiple administrative tasks in one location. Unlike previous reforms that primarily focused on adjusting administrative power among local governments, the goal of these service centers was to explore the effective use of local government power.

The model of one-stop service reform was first explored by many city and county governments in Zhejiang province in 1999, with Jinhua City taking the lead in establishing the first one-stop service center. This model quickly gained popularity and was applied nationwide. By 2005, Zhejiang province alone had 101 service halls, while a total of 2,912 service centers had been established in 31 provincial-level governments across the country (Yu 2018). More than a thousand administrative licensing and non-administrative licensing approval items have also been reduced through the innovative one-stop service halls (Zhao, Xin, and Liangbo 2018; X. He and Zhang 2018). Physical consolidation was a prominent feature of this early-stage reform.

However, a notable shortcoming of this reform was that it was primarily a simple adjustment of the existing administrative process and did not involve a systematic reconstruction of procedures and powers. Although some service centers proposed the idea of parallel approval, it was not effectively implemented. For instance, the Jinhua Administrative Service Center lacked administrative coordination and supervision despite having service windows for various departments. As a result, it functioned more like a “mailing and receiving room,” providing physical integration of document submission without bringing about substantial changes to the approval system (Yu 2018).

Phase 3: Deepening the integration of examination and approval functions and reengineering the process (2006-2012)

While the one-stop service hall model had initially improved service delivery, it soon encountered limitations as the reform progressed. The lack of approval authority, internal coordination, and supervision hindered the restructuring of administrative authority among different departments and the optimization of administrative procedures, thus failing to reduce costs for the people (Yu 2018). To address these challenges, Zhejiang province intensified the reform of the examination and approval system in two stages (Duan 2018; Yu 2018). The first stage, from 2006 to 2008, aimed to integrate the examination and approval functions of different departments into a true ‘one-stop’ service. However, this stage relied on window staff for preliminary review and material transfer, while specific approval authority still resided with each relevant department, leading to reduced efficiency. In response, Zhejiang province introduced the concept of “Two Integrations and Two in Place” (Yu 2018). Two Integrations involved sorting out examination and approval items within each agency and integrating them at both the departmental and service center levels. Two in Place required each department to ensure that approval items and authority were in place at the service center. This approach streamlined the examination and approval functions, reducing the number of sections from over 150 to 44 in the Fuyang District of Hangzhou City in 2014 (Yu 2018). The service center thus transformed from a centralized mailroom to a centralized service hall for departments.

During the second stage of the reform (2008-2012), Zhejiang province implemented parallel and online examination and approval authority across departments. Parallel approval enabled multi-departmental linkage and co-approval with the aid of digital technologies. This approach, initially used in corporate investment project approval, was extended to citizen-related affairs. Leveraging internet technologies, parallel approval reduced costs, improved administrative efficiency, standardized government operations, and enhanced government accountability to

the public. The Zhejiang government began to use parallel approval as early as 2001, after the central government initiated the Online Government Project (OGP) in 1999. From 2009 onwards, service centers in Zhejiang province adopted parallel and online approval as crucial means to enhance the efficiency of public service delivery.

Phase 4: Self-constraining the power of the local government through the “Four Lists and One Network” reform (2013-2016)

This reform aimed to clarify the statutory powers of local governments, regulate and constrain administrative power, and reconstruct the relationship between the government, market, and society. This is an immediate response to the reform of “Fang Guan Fu” launched by the central government to streamline the administrative service in 2015 (Ma 2023). This reform aimed to delegate power to local governments, strengthen regulation, and improve services. The “Four Lists and One Network” referred to the four lists of government power, government responsibility, corporate investment negative list, and fiscal special fund management list, while the one network referred to the Zhejiang Provincial Government Service Network. The reform required local governments to operate within the authorized powers defined by laws and regulations, curbing excessive interference in the operations of micro-market entities (J. Wang 2018). Only when permitted by laws and regulations could the government intervene in specific micro affairs of the market and society.

During the reform, all departments were required to sort out and merge administrative powers under laws and regulations, eliminating administrative powers lacking a legal basis. This resulted in a significant reduction of administrative power. For instance, the administrative power of provincial departments decreased from 12,300 items to 4,236 items (Yu 2018). Municipal and county governments also reduced or delegated administrative power, clarifying the main administrative power of departments at all levels. For example, the administrative power of Fuyang District of Hangzhou City reduced from 7,800+ items

in 2008 to 6,100+ items in 2014 and the common administrative power also reduced from 2,500+ items to 1,534 items (Yu 2018). The reform also introduced a negative list for enterprise project investments, empowering the private sector to engage in any investment project as long as it was not listed. This change reconstructed the relationship between the government, market, and society, reducing the need for government approval in business and enterprise activities and adjusting the scope of government intervention in market operations.

In addition, the Zhejiang Provincial Government Service Network was launched in June 2014. This online platform provided various government services, published the administrative power and procedures of governments at all levels, and ensured the proper exercise of power. Through the government service network, 101 districts and counties, and 42 provincial administrative departments in Zhejiang province announced their respective administrative powers (Yu 2018). This allowed for the simultaneous provision of online and offline public services and laid the solid foundation for the next phase of reform.

Phase 5: Transforming from a “government-centered” to a “people-centered” government through the “Visit Once at Most” reform (2016-present)

Previous reforms in Zhejiang province began in 1992, despite increased efficiency and objectively responding to the economic and social development at different times, had a government-centric focus and failed to translate into a strong sense of gain for the public (Yu 2018; Fan and Chen 2017; X. He and Zhang 2018). To address this issue, the then Vice-Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee and the governor of Zhejiang province, proposed the VOM reform at the Economic Work Conference of the Provincial Party Committee in December 2016, emphasizing a people-centered approach and urging the government to reform based on public experiences, satisfaction, and sense of gain (Yu and Huang 2019). This reform was piloted locally in 2017 before being implemented nationwide in

2018). It required the government to prioritize public requirements rather than focusing solely on what the government could provide, leading to internal reforms at all levels of local government (Zhong 2018). Significantly, the VOM reform utilized digital technologies as the primary tool for transforming the public sector and delivering services, as they proved to be effective and user-friendly (Huang and Yu 2019; Duan 2018). It also transformed the government into a holistic organization better to respond to social and economic development (Yu and Gao 2018). The VOM platform facilitated multi-department collaboration, consultation and complaints, to ensure transparency in governance (S. He and Yang 2018).

Under the VOM reform, the concept of “One Affair” was introduced, which redefined public services based on public definitions. Previously, the one affair for the citizen was understood as various tasks approved by multiple departments. Now, the one affair required government departments to integrate the administrative examination and approval authority. The reform aimed to achieve a one-time visit for completing all necessary procedures either through onsite or online services. Digital technologies and online platforms were utilized to deliver these services conveniently and efficiently. These services were also integrated into frequently used apps like Alipay and WeChat for accessibility purposes (Duan 2018). Besides, physical service centers were optimized with comprehensive service windows and increased staff to minimize the need for multiple visits. Practically, it meant that these services could be completed via the ‘one window acceptance and integrated approval’ service (Fan and Chen 2017). Effectively, online services aimed for zero visits while onsite visits aimed for one visit when all required documents were provided.

The VOM reform analyzed the priority of services and collected feedback from the public. It identified a hundred high-frequency services such as business registration, investment approval, real estate registration, and social affairs (S. He and Yang 2018). The reform rearranged public resources and updated the one affair list based on public needs (Huang and Yu 2019). Ob-

jectively, the service for one affair was digitally prioritized by the needs of the public. As a result-oriented reform, the citizens and businesses were empowered to voice their user experiences and evaluate the effectiveness of the government reform while the performance of VOM reform was assessed as part of the government performance evaluation (Yu and Gao 2018; Yu and Huang 2019). Feedback mechanisms such as hotlines, online message boards, mobile applications, and surveys were established to optimize services and hold the government accountable (Zhao, Xin, and Liangbo 2018; Yu and Gao 2018). Intelligent management systems utilizing big data and machine learning were employed to monitor real-time data on public behavior and satisfaction. This data helped improve the quality and responsiveness of public services (Huang and Yu 2019). The VOM reform resulted in reduced processing time for complaints and high levels of public satisfaction (Z. He 2018; Li 2018). Li (2018) found that 95.7% of more than 20,000 respondents expressed high satisfaction with the reform.

Overall, the VOM reform in Zhejiang province has achieved significant accomplishments in transforming the government from a government-centered to a people-centered approach. The reform prioritized public needs, utilized digital technologies, collected feedback, and improved the quality of public services, resulting in increased public satisfaction and a greater sense of gain.

Discussion and Conclusion

The transformation from a government-centric mentality to a people-centered government in Zhejiang province aligns with the central government's directions for administrative reforms and builds upon previous administrative reforms implemented since 1992. This transformation has been made possible through the continuation of administrative decentralization and the entrenchment of performance legitimacy in the Chinese po-

litical and governance system.

The recent VOM reform in Zhejiang province exemplifies the shift towards a people-centered government, starting with its local pilot before being implemented nationwide following the endorsement of the central government. The reform can be understood within the context of five distinct phases of administrative service reforms in Zhejiang. The first phase focused on reconstructing administrative power (1992-1998), aligning with the central policy to restructure governmental organizations during the 1980s-1990s (Q. Wang 2010). The second and third phases aimed to restrain bureaucratic behavior through the establishment of one-stop service centers and the reengineering of government functions and processes. In line with the national policy of e-government and digitization in the 2000s, the Zhejiang government utilized online platforms, with significant developments occurring in 2001 and 2009 when parallel and online examination and approval authorities were initiated across departments. During the fourth phase, the Zhejiang government further regulated its own power and integrated online and onsite examination and approval systems. The latest VOM reform most demonstrates a people-centered mentality, prioritizing the needs, satisfaction, and sense of gain of the public as the starting point and outcome of the reform. The localized initiation, piloting, and subsequent nationwide implementation of the reform illustrate a mixed approach combining bottom-up and top-down elements.

Several factors have contributed to the success of the transformation towards a people-centered government. Firstly, it was a top-level policy design led by high-ranking local officials, setting priorities for local governments in Zhejiang province and aligning with the overarching policies of the central government, particularly the Fang Guan Fu reform. Secondly, the gradual shift from a government-based mentality to a people-centered approach was facilitated by administrative decentralization over a period of three decades. This decentralization granted local governments a degree of autonomy to pilot and implement innova-

tive policies that directly addressed the needs and requirements of the public. Moreover, the success of the transformation was supported by the performance legitimacy deeply embedded in China's administrative and political system. Local governments were incentivized to reform in order to drive economic growth and maintain social stability. Additionally, it was also due to the performance evaluation system of the centralized personnel system that balances local policy autonomy and central policy directions. Local governments were forced to adapt to changes and prioritize public needs. Consequently, the experimental policies carried out by local governments were coherent and aligned with the national policy while still allowing room for regional innovation and localized practices. This dual focus on alignment with national policy objectives and flexibility in implementation contribute to the overall success of the people-centered governance reform.

However, the reform faced challenges. Some local governments failed fully to restructure their power or interpret the "people-centered" approach effectively. Some remained stuck in a "duty-oriented" logic, measuring success based on quantitative numbers rather than the quality of services. The implementation of the "one-window acceptance and integrated service" was inconsistent, with different departments still handling the approval process (L. Chen and Tong 2018). Furthermore, the sustainability of the reform is reliant on top leadership commitment, which may change periodically. Establishing mechanisms and systems that can accommodate leadership changes and ensure long-term sustainability is crucial (Yu 2018). Additionally, there is a risk that the local government may prioritize the needs of businesses over the general public, or change the reform priorities over time. A long-term mechanism is needed to maintain a people-centric approach to delivering public services. Despite these challenges, the Chinese government's move towards a people-centered approach and the implementation of reforms contribute not only to economic growth, but also to improving people's quality of life.

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Development of the cities: the Kazakh Case¹

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ABSTRACT— The article is devoted to the development of Kazakh capital city Astana. The methodology of the research provides literature review on issues of urbanization and economic growth, comparative study, use of empirical and descriptive methods, and based on official statistics and statistical methods. The research confirms that status of the city and capital status of Astana ensure its competitiveness at the national level and in comparison with some leading regional Kazakh cities such as Almaty, Shymkent and Aktobe. The main indicators of the socio-economic situation in Astana are comparatively better. In particular, the capital city has relatively low rates of poverty and unemployment. Moreover, in Astana indicators of average life expectancy, average monthly wages and gross regional product per capita are higher. Also, considering dynamic growth of the population the article emphasizes the need to develop rural areas of the Astana agglomeration in order to provide the capital city with the basic foodstuff and construction materials.

Keywords : Kazakhstan, urbanization, economic growth, competitiveness, development

JEL Classifications: P25, R12

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Literature review

The development of the study of urban economics marks down four periods (Quigley, 1998). The first period, the first decade after WW1, covers the first empirical analysis of the factors affecting firms and households within cities. The second period, beginning in the mid-1960s, sheds a light on the intrinsic motivations of location within urban settlements. The third period in understanding of urban development is associated with the three-year study of New York City and provided a unique opportunity to examine the fundamental factors affecting industrial development and locations of economic activity. Finally, the fourth period, which began in the 1980s, is related to the study of the nature of economic growth.

On the issue of improving regional policy the million-plus cities were defined to be the backbone of the global competitiveness of Kazakhstan³. The economic growth researchers favor accelerated urbanization because they believe that large agglomerations contribute to economic growth. Empirical evidence confirms that no country achieves a high level of GDP per capita without urbanization (OECD, 2017, p. 67). In OECD countries, megacities with a population of at least half a million represented 45% of the total population and generated 52% of GDP in 2018 (OECD, 2020, p. 60). Moreover, between 2001 and 2018, all megacities in OECD countries, with the exception of Greece, experienced GDP growth. Another example, between 2000 and 2012, Colombia's capital city accounted for 24% of the country's GDP (Sanchez-Serra, 2016, p. 17). China is one of the largest urbanizing countries in absolute terms (Kamal-Chaoui et al., 2009, p. 5), and its economy grew almost 20 fold between 1979 and 2009 (Tyurin and Tyurin, 2018, p. 228). The concentration of human, social and intellectual capital, and financial resources result in the leadership of cities at the national

3 «UNITY OF THE PEOPLE AND SYSTEMIC REFORMS ARE A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR THE NATION'S PROSPERITY», *State of the Nation Address by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. September 1, 2021. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/poslanie-glavy-gosudarstva-kasym-zhomarta-tokaeva-narodu-kazahstana-183048>;*

and regional levels (Koshanov, 2019; Manaeva, 2021). Urban development is characterized by a positive relationship between the level of urbanization and per capita income, entrepreneurship development and innovation (Glaeser, 2010; Konovalova, 2020). For example, Colombia's three main cities generate more than 70% of the country's innovation (Duranton, 2015, p. 16). Moreover, other studies confirm a positive correlation between city size and productivity levels (Quigley, 1998). An assessment conducted in Germany showed that a 10% increase in city size increases productivity by 0.2% (Ahrend and Lembcke, 2016, p. 6). And one reason for this correlation has been attributed to the concentration of the skilled workers in cities (Glaeser, 2010).

At the same time, it is said that urbanization is a precondition for economic development, but not a guarantee of it (OECD, 2017, p. 17). Some countries have become highly urbanized without significant progress in terms of GDP per capita. And this is typical for many Latin American countries like Brazil (OECD, 2017, p. 67). The study of Western European cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants found that since 1960 there has been no direct relationship between city size and growth rates (Boussauw et al., 2018, p. 4). Urbanization in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo is a direct consequence of conflict and deterioration of rural living conditions, rather than national development (Nallari et al., 2012). Another factor that reduces the relationship between urban development and economic growth is population density. According to the OECD, cities in low-income countries have the highest population density in the world, whereas in high-income countries they have the lowest population density (OECD, 2020, p. 102). Moreover, some researches argue that urbanization in developing countries has led to an increase in urban poverty (MD. ASHIQ-UR-RAHMAN, 2012). One indicator of that is the lack of housing. Besides that, the ability of households to use housing as a productive asset provides opportunities for home-based entrepreneurial initiatives. Each state solves the problem of affordable housing within available economic resources, and there is no universal model in this matter. Urban development is also linked to infrastructure

development. Researches in India and Nigeria show a significant impact of city infrastructure on economic performance (Ghani et al., 2016; Osabonien, 2016). In turn, separate attention is paid to transport infrastructure. Inadequate transport infrastructure is acknowledged as the main cause of labor market contraction in Colombia and, accordingly, the need to increase the share of investment in transport infrastructure to improve connectivity between territories is emphasized (Sanchez-Serra, 2016). So that one hour is the limit of time that households are willing to spend on travel and the suppliers are able to deliver efficiently on a daily basis (Kamal-Chaoui et al., 2009, p. 35).

This research looks at the development of Kazakh capital in the framework that city development led to economic growth.

Kazakh case

Urbanization process in Kazakhstan is characterized by the growth of urban population in the largest cities due to migration from rural areas and small depressed cities (Nurlanova, 2016). Another study argues that urbanization in the former-Soviet republics was related to *“the nature, scale and spatial distribution of economic activities”* (Nallari et al., 2012, p. 42). The territorial development of Kazakhstan is characterized by uneven and sparse settlement of regions and, accordingly, the development of urban agglomerations is recommended to be planned as an integral part of the development of rural areas, small and mono-towns (Koshanov, 2019). Also, the wage gap is the most important driver of interregional migration in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2017, p. 74). Another research shows that prospects for growth and low pay were described as major reasons for internal migration to Astana (Tibekov, 2010, p. 135).

For January 1, 2022, the population of the capital city Astana was 1,239,886 people⁴, and following the UN classification it belongs to the medium-sized cities (Nallari et al., 2012, p. 18). According to forecast, the population of Astana will reach

⁴ Bureau of the National Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: www.stat.gov.kz;

1,455,796 people by 2030⁵. Today Astana is not one of the top ten cities in the world in terms of quality of life neither according to Mercer nor to the Economist⁶. Moreover, some foreign researchers assert that Astana is a prosperous capital city, and that the relocation of the capital from Almaty to Astana was “*a symbolic resource offering alternative visions of nationhood*” (Alwehab, 2018, p. 220). A brief look at the development history of Astana is given by Tibekov (2010, p. 132).

Akmola was founded in 1830 as a Cossack fortification, and in 1862 acquired the status of a town. In 1954-1959, the policy of the development of Tselina (underdeveloped, scarcely populated, high-fertility lands) covered also Central Kazakhstan, and in 1961 Akmola was renamed to Tselinograd, as the center of Tselina. Tselinograd became a major agricultural center with developed research and educational institutions in this sector, famous for its dairy products and bread “*karavay*” (round loaf). Today Kazakhstan is among the world leaders in the export of the wheat. On December 10, 1997, the capital of Kazakhstan was moved from Almaty to Astana. In 1998, the city was renamed to Astana, which means «capital» in Kazakh language. Among the reasons for moving the capital city noted an economic development of the region and the country as a whole, its strategic location of being away from the borders with the neighboring countries. Also, as Astana is located in the center of the country, it has an equidistant distance from all regions of Kazakhstan (West, North, East, South).

In 2021, the gross regional product (further GRP) of Astana amounted to 10.63% of the national value⁷. The structure of GRP is dominated by service sector (wholesale and retail trade,

5 *World Population review*. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/astana-population>;

6 *Quality of living city ranking*. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/>;

7 *Gross regional product of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. Bureau of the National Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/11/statistic/8>;

real estate operations, professional, scientific and technological activities). In 2020, the share of «*Transport and warehousing*» activity in GRP was 5,8%, and this performance is linked to plans for the construction of light rail transport (further LRT). The LRT was planned to build in 2008, but an active phase of construction started only in the autumn of 2017. In January 2022 the country's leadership decided to change the purpose of use of the unfinished LRT facilities. The decision was based on high costs and low return of the project as well as corruption scandals. Despite that, at the end of 2022, the construction was re-planned to continue in an optimized design. The project is scheduled to be completed within three years. However, given the chronology of the construction, it is difficult to assess the possible impact of the project on the development of Astana. While the unfinished facilities ruin the image of the city, international experience with the construction of LRT system shows that their implementation was largely not based on socioeconomic returns and cost recovery, but in order to create a positive image of public transport and urban renewal (Nicolaisen et al., 2017). Also, one of the key sectors of Astana economy is construction, and its share in GRP was 7%⁸. Since the capital moved to Astana, the volume of construction work performed in 2003-2020 has increased 9 times.

Table 1 – **Indicators of Astana development in dynamics**

Indicators	2018	2019	2020
GRP per capita, thousand tenge			
Republic of Kazakhstan	3 382,5	3 755,7	3 766,8

8 Bureau of National Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/268012/statistical_information/publication;

Astana	6 359,5	7 075,8	6 873,6
Average monthly salary, tenge			
Republic of Kazakhstan	162 673	186 815	213 003
Astana	240 320	266 796	302 504
Unemployment rate, %			
Republic of Kazakhstan	4,9	4,8	4,9
Astana	4,5	4,4	4,6
Share of the small and medium enterprises in GRP, %			
Republic of Kazakhstan	28,4	31,7	32,8
Astana	48,6	55,1	56,8
Innovation activity rate, %			
Republic of Kazakhstan	10,6	11,3	11,5
Astana	14,7	14,8	12,6
Ожидаемая продолжительность жизни, лет			
Republic of Kazakhstan	73,1	73,2	71,4
Astana	76,2	76,7	73,5
The level of digital literacy of the population (6-74 years), %			
Republic of Kazakhstan	79,6	82,1	84,1
Astana	85,4	88,7	91,3
Average prices for new housing, tenge/m ²			
Republic of Kazakhstan	266 863	293 518	307 600
Astana	340 706	373 656	392 682
<i>Note: compiled by the author on data of the Bureau of National Statistics</i>			

Socio-economic indicators of Astana (Table 1) confirm its competitiveness at the national level. However, high housing prices confirm the assertions that urbanization is inevitably accompanied by an increase in demand for housing and prob-

lems in providing affordable housing. Despite the fact that the level of innovation activity in Astana was higher than the republican indicators⁹, in 2020 the share of product innovation only amounted to 20%. The main reasons of limiting innovative activity of enterprises are lack of demand for innovation and lack of financial resources¹⁰. Also, calculation on the graduates from higher educational institutions¹¹ and the population aged over 24 years¹², shows that human capital coefficient for Astana equals to 0.02. This level was stable for the period 2018-2020, and is not enough for innovative breakthrough.

The next step in assessing the development of the capital city is a calculation of the competitive index for Astana as defined as (Manaeva, 2021):

$$I = (I_{\text{economic}} + I_{\text{socio-demographic}})/2,$$

where I – competitive index, from 0 to 1 (the higher the better);

I_{economic} – arithmetic mean of the sum of standardized indices of economic factors and $I_{\text{socio-demographic}}$ – arithmetic mean of the sum of standardized indices of socio-demographic factors (Table 2).

Standardized indices for each relative indicator (per capita or share) of economic and socio-demographic factors are determined as:

9 *Statistics of Innovations*. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/23/statistic/5>;

10 *Statistics of Innovations*. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/23/statistic/5>;

11 *Information and analytics system «Taldau»*. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://taldau.stat.gov.kz/ru>;

12 *Publications*. «Demographic Yearbook for 2016-2020». [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/268012/statistical_information/publication;

$$\mathbf{X_i = (X_{if} - X_{min}) / (X_{max} - X_{min})},$$

where: X_i - standardized i indicator of the city; X_{if} - actual i indicator of the city; X_{min} - minimum value of the i indicator in the sample of cities; X_{max} - maximum value of the i indicator in the sample of cities. The sample of the cities include Astana, Almaty (former capital and the biggest city), Shymkent (the South Kazakhstan) and Aktobe (the West Kazakhstan), all of which recognized as centers for economic growth.

Table 2 – **Competitive Index calculation**

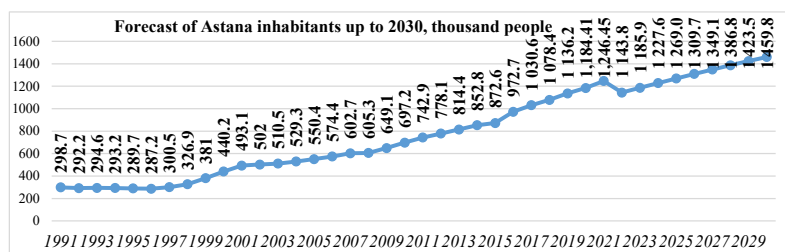
	Astana	Al-maty	Shym-kent	Ak-tobe
Index of the gross regional product per capita	0.99	1	0	0.21
Index of the level of activity in the area of product and process innovations	0.93	1	0	0.51
Index of the expenses on innovations per capita	0.77	0.50	0	1
Index of the share of people employed in SMEs	1	0.86	0	0.95
Index of the volume of retail trade per capita	0.55	1	0	0.46
Index of the volume of investments into fixed capital per capita	1	0.34	0	0.29
Index of the volume of manufacturing industry per capita	0.70	0	0.14	1
Median index of economic factors	0.85	0.67	0.02	0.63
Index of the natural increase rate	0.98	0.12	1	0
Index of the life expectancy at birth	0.82	1	0	0.23
Index of the share of poor to the total number of poor in the republic*	1	0	0.54	0.83
Index of the unemployment rate*	1	0	0.17	1
Index of the volume of main types of health-care services per capita	0,62	0,23	0	1
Index of the volume of main types of educational services per capita	1	0,59	0,11	0
Index of the share of employed people with higher education	0,83	1	0,69	0
Median index of socio-demographic factors	0,9	0,4	0,5	0,4
Competitive Index	0,87	0,54	0,25	0,53

Note: compiled by the author.

* - indicators of the indices of share poor to the total number of poor in the republic and unemployment rate were defined as: $X_i = (X_{max} - X_i f) / (X_{max} - X_{min})$

Calculation of the Competitive Index illustrates that Astana is more competitive city in Kazakhstan as its indicator equals to 0.87 (Table 3). Including, the index of economic factors equals to 0.85 and the index of socio-demographic factors is 0.9. Herewith, it should be noted that the competitiveness of Astana is ensured by the support of the state for the development of the new capital.

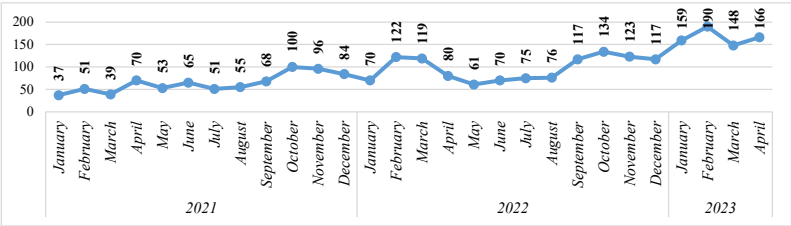
Since the structure of GRP is dominated by service sector, the further development of the capital city's economy will depend on the population number. In this connection, a forecast of the number of inhabitants of Astana was made for the period from 2021 up to 2030, by the use of data on population movement¹³ and statistical methods (Graph 1).



Graph 1. Compiled by the author on data of population movement Bureau of National Statistics for the period 1991-2021 and statistical methods to forecast population number

¹³ Demographic Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/61/statistic/5>;

However, actual number of residents of Astana in 2022 exceeded the forecast data (Graph 1) by 14.3% and as of January 1, 2023 amounted to 1354.5 thousand people¹⁴. The geopolitical situation had an impact, among other things, on the population of Astana. An obvious increase in the number of immigrants was noted in February 2022 and has continued since September 2022 (Graph 2). In 2022, share of the immigrants from the Russian Federation was 33.8%. This situation could be related to the start of the Special military operation and mobilization in the Russian Federation. Therefore, in Astana, the inflation rate in December 2022 amounted to 23% (for comparison, in December 2021 - 8.8%, in 2020 - 7.7%)¹⁵. In January-February 2023, compared to January-February 2022, the consumer price indexes amounted to: food products - 126.5%; non-food products - 131.3% and rental housing - 121.4%.



Graph 2. External immigration flow to Astana by month, people.

Source: Bureau of National Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/industries/social-statistics/demography/>;

¹⁴ Bureau of National Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/industries/social-statistics/demography/>;

¹⁵ Bureau of National Statistics. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/industries/economy/prices/>;

The impact of this trend in the long run is not the purpose of the article. It is obvious that the population number of Astana will depend on further developments in the neighboring Russia, as the total border area is more than 7000 km². Considering multinational and multi-confessional composition of Russian population, not only the total number, but also the structure of the population of Astana will change. Moreover, the immigrants from Russia mainly educated people of working age, which will also have an impact on the local labor market.

Furthermore, the capital city is the first in implementing the «Smart city» concept. Various initiatives are being implemented within the Project, including situational center, which receives data from video surveillance systems, photo and video recording of violations, the intelligent contact center of Service 109 and chat bots in social networks that all allow the local executive bodies automatically to communicate with the residents¹⁶. According to the «Digital Kazakhstan» State Program's implementation data, 99.2% the households of Astana had access to the Internet in 2020, and only 37.2% of them used e-government services¹⁷. As regards to the Astana agglomeration, 71-98% of the households had access to the Internet, and only 1 to 37% of them used e-government services¹⁸. The highest rates were noted in the Tselinograd district, which is the closest to the capital city. Thus, the development of Astana and the close proximity to it have a positive impact on the digital development of the surrounding areas.

16 *Decision of the Maslikhat of the city of Astana dated November 15, 2019 No. 450/57-VI «On the development strategy of the city of Astana until 2050»;*

17 *Statistics of Information and Communication Technologies. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/268012/statistical_information/industry/7129;*

18 *Statistics of Information and Communicationsion Technologies in regions. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/247783/statistical_information/industry/1129;*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic situation is clear (Table 3). In particular, in 2020 compared to 2019 and 2021, the share of the unemployed has noticeably increased. Life expectancy, the volume of industrial production, the real money income index and the passenger turnover of all modes of transport have decreased. Moreover, in 2020 in Astana, the proportion of deaths from respiratory diseases, influenza, acute respiratory infections and pneumonia was 16.58%, which is 2 times higher than in 2019. And for the period 1991-2021 the highest mortality rate in Astana is also observed in 2020-2021, 6.17 and 7.0 thousand people, respectively.

Table 3 – Dynamic of socio-economic development indicators of Astana

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Death number, thousand people	3,9	4,2	4,3	6,2	7,0
Life expectancy at birth, years	76,21	76,21	76,75	73,49	72,87
Index of real income, % to the previous year	98,2	99,6	104,2	99,7	106,2
Share of the population with incomes below the subsistence level, %	0,8	0,9	1,1	1,5	2,2
Share of registered unemployed in the economically active population, %	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,7	0,3
Number of people registered with employment agencies as unemployed, thousand people	2,4	2,7	2,9	4,0	2,1
Volume of industrial production, % to the previous year	106,4	101,5	101,1	91,4	110
Passenger turnover of all types of transport, % to the previous year	107,0	105,3	111,1	36,9	112,3

<i>Note: compiled by the author on data of the Bureau of National Statistics «Dynamic of main socio-economic indicators». Mode of access: URL: https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/268012/dynamic</i>					
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The development of Astana has been envisaged in the concept of entering the capital into the world's top 10 cities by 2050¹⁹. The development of Astana until 2025 and 2050 also reflected in the respective development programs. In particular, the Astana Development Program until 2025 addresses such key issues as housing affordability, lack of places in school and pre school organizations, and growing food costs²⁰. The latter amounted to 51% of the households spending in 2020²¹. The program for the development of Astana until 2050 provides solutions for the following key tasks²². *Firstly*, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and increasing their share to 74% of GRP. It is noted that at present the sector of SME is mainly represented by the headquarters of mining and state-owned enterprises. *Secondly*, the development of the ICT sector that accounts for 1% of the total gross value added and 1.5% of the total number of employees. *Thirdly*, ensuring affordable housing, which is the main problem for 49.4% of the

19 «On approval of the Concept of entering the capital into the ranking of the 10 best cities in the world by 2050», Government Decree of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 29, 2014, 1394. [Electronic source]. Access through the Information and Legal System «Adilet»;

20 Decision of the Maslikhat of the city of Astana dated December 30, 2021 No. 129/18-VII «On the development plan of the city of Astana for 2021 – 2025»;

21 Monitoring of the standard of living of the population in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2020. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/64/statistic/6>;

22 Decision of the Maslikhat of the city of Astana dated November 15, 2019 No. 450/57-VI «On the development strategy of the city of Astana until 2050»;

residents. In turn, the housing market in Kazakhstan has some peculiarities. First, due to the underdevelopment of the stock market, housing is the most common means of investing savings. As a result, the population with savings have several dwellings, while others have none. Secondly, the legislative right to individual housing construction in Astana is currently not being implemented, despite the increase in the number of applications for the provision of land plots. Moreover, according to the OECD, in Kazakhstan, only 4% of the housing stock is social (OECD, 2017, p. 13). The housing ownership rate is 97%, and thus the housing rental market is underdeveloped, with the exception for Astana and Almaty, where the rental housing market is 26% and 8%, respectively (OECD, 2017, p. 57). Also, the OECD review mentions repeated accidents caused by poor construction quality; high mortgage rates; the unsatisfactory condition of up to 80% of heating systems; high losses during heat distribution; the need to repair or replace 64% of water and sewer networks (OECD, 2017, p. 14, 133). In general, the Astana Development Programs until 2025 and 2050 have one significant drawback, which is the lack of development issues for the Astana agglomeration. Therefore, the issues of providing the capital city with foodstuff and construction materials have not been considered.

The territory of the Astana agglomeration includes Astana (the core of the agglomeration) and 4 districts of Akmola region²³, where 74.8% of settlements are 30-60 km from the core of the agglomeration. A sociological survey made in the agglomeration area showed that more than a quarter of respondents (27%) make daily trips to Astana (Abilov et al., 2017, p. 77). The purposes of travel are labor for 27%, leisure for 28%, and shopping for 34%. According to the structure, the agglomeration is monocentric, formed around the core city Astana. Research argues that the monocentric structure of agglomerations is characterized by a further shift to a polycentric structure,

23 «On approval of the Interregional scheme of the territorial development of the Astana agglomeration», Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated November 8, 2017, 726. [Electronic source].

Accessed through the Information and Legal System «Adilet»;

which in turn is the optimal form of spatial organization for the realization of the agglomeration effect (Kuricheva and Kurichev, 2018, p. 92). The Astana agglomeration belongs to the largest type by size, with more than 1 million people. In terms of the rate of development, it belongs to the type of particularly dynamic (the average annual growth rate of the urban population over 20 years is more than 5%). And in terms of the coefficient of urban agglomeration development, it is the most developed, with a coefficient equal to more than 50²⁴. The main goal of the Astana agglomeration is to provide the capital with food and construction materials. However, current production of the basic food does not meet the needs, calculated according to consumption rates²⁵ (Table 4).

24 The indicator was calculated as: $K=P(Mm+Nn)$, where P – is the population of the agglomeration, number of people; M – is the number of cities in the agglomeration; m – is the share of urban population in the population of the agglomeration; N – is the number of urban-type settlements in the agglomeration; n – is the share of urban-type settlements in the population of the agglomeration;

25 «On approval of scientifically based physiological norms of foodstuffs consumption», Order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 9, 2016, 503. [Electronic source]. Accessed through the Information and Legal System «Adilet»;

Table 4 – Food availability in Astana in 2020

/	Indicators	Consump- tion rate, kg/person/ year	Demand, kg	Production, kg ²⁶	Provi- sion, %
1.	Bread	42	49 745 262	15 547 000	31,25
2.	Potato	100	118 441 100	78 700 000	66,45
3.	Vegetables	149	176 477 239	17 300 000	9,8
4.	Meat of all types	78,4	92 857 822	21 604 500	23,27
5.	Milk and dairy products	301	356 507 711	95 300 000	26,73
6.	Eggs, units	265	313 868 915	363 468 600	115,8
	<i>Note: compiled by the author.</i>				

Besides that, there are also a high share of import for construction materials, the absence of innovative construction materials and the materials with higher value added costs²⁷. Moreover, a comparison of the forecast data for 2020 with the actual data for 2020²⁸ shows that while exceeding most of the projected indicators for livestock, there was a significant underachievement of the projections by 60% or more for the production of potato and vegetables (Table 5).

²⁶ Statistics of Industries. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/268012/statistical_information/industry/71151;

²⁷ Decision of the Maslikhat of the city of Astana dated November 15, 2019 No. 450/57-VI «On the development strategy of the city of Astana until 2050»;

²⁸ «On approval of the Interregional scheme of the territorial development of the Astana agglomeration», Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated November 8, 2017, 726. [Electronic source]. Accessed through the Information and Legal System «Adilet»;

Table 5 – **Assessment of the achievement of forecast indicators**

	Forecast for 2020	Fact for 2020	Execution, %
Cattle, animal units	46400	66297	42,9
Including cows	20751	31286	50,8
Horses, animal units	20500	34897	70,2
Sheep and goats, animal units	52800	43256	-18,1
Forage crops, hundredweight	3791846	5562200	46,7
Potato, hundredweight	1231550	485220,4	-60,6
Vegetables, hundredweight	660938	110729,8	-83,2
<i>Note: compiled by the author on data of the Bureau of National Statistics²⁹ and Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On approval of the Interregional scheme of the territorial development of the Astana agglomeration»</i>			

Concluding remarks

The development of Astana as the city and capital shows that urbanization is related to economic growth. Furthermore, this research confirms competitiveness of Astana at the national and regional levels. In particular, at the national level, Astana has relatively low rates of poverty and unemployment, the higher rates for life expectancy, average monthly wages and gross regional product per capita. Also, the main indicators of the socio-economic situation for Astana are comparatively better than for some leading regional Kazakh cities such as Almaty, Shymkent and Aktobe. The development of the capital city and proximity to it have a positive impact on the development of nearby agglomeration territories. At the same time, there is a necessity to

²⁹ *Main indicators on districts of the Akmola oblast. [Electronic source]. Mode of access: URL: <https://www.stat.gov.kz/region/247783/dynamic>.*

make amendments and changes to the Programs for the development of Astana until 2025 and 2050 in order to provide the citizens of Astana with an adequate foodstuff, ensuring housing and job securities, taking into account the influx of the people from Russian Federation due to the current geopolitical situation.

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Consociational Democracy in Post-War Lebanon: Maintaining Negative Peace and Stability Amidst Sectarian Divisions

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ABSTRACT— Is consociational democracy the only viable solution for maintaining direct negative peace and stability in contemporary Lebanon? This paper argues in favour of consociational democracy as the most effective approach to preserving direct negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. The rationale behind this claim stems from the impracticality and unsuitability of alternative solutions, particularly transformative liberal approaches, within Lebanon's specific context. Implementing such alternatives would jeopardise cooperation among elites representing different sectarian groups, leading to a perilous power vacuum and the potential for civil war reoccurrence. To contribute to the academic discourse, this paper systematically examines Lebanon's post-war regime and sectarian cleavages, identifying it as a consociational democracy through primary resources like the Lebanese constitution and the Taif Accord. Additionally, it critically analyses pertinent literature encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research, enriching the scholarly debate on this topic.

Keywords : Consociational Democracy, Post-war Lebanon, Cleavages, Sectarianism, Negative Peace

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Introduction

Consociational democracy has traditionally been seen as the default solution for preserving direct negative peace. This negative peace, in a narrow sense, refers to an absence of large-scale conflicts such as when a ceasefire agreement is enforced. In a broader sense, it encompasses not just the absence of war (direct violence) but also the nonexistence of other forms of violence, such as structural violence (such as inequality, injustice and personal dissatisfaction) and cultural violence (such as racism and nationalism) as outlined by Galtung (1969, 2007). Therefore, it is appropriate to use the term ‘direct’ negative peace to articulate the limited objective of consociational democracy, which specifically targets the absence of direct violence without necessarily delving into the realms of addressing structural or cultural violence.

Consociational democracy is also seen as instrumental in fostering stability within nations characterised by profound sectarian divisions (Jabbra and Jabbra 2001; Saouli 2019; Dixon 2011). This political system, however, has come under intense criticism for its romanticisation of the elite role and grand coalition (Andeweg 2000; Hudson 1976; Aboultaif 2019; Horowitz 1985) and for its ineffectiveness in resolving the conflict (Selway and Templeman 2012; Gate et al. 2016). An illustrative case study is post-war Lebanon from 1989 to 2022. Lebanon had previously experienced consociational democracy before the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, with this system being identified as a key factor contributing to the conflict. Surprisingly, even after the civil war ended, Lebanon continued to be governed by the same political regime characterised by a grand coalition consisting of major sects, including Maronite Christians, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, and certain cultural autonomy (Lijphart 1977; Aboultaif 2019). Each sect possessed veto power in crucial government decisions and proportionally represented their own sect in the parliament. This situation raises the research question of whether consociational democracy remains the only viable solution for maintaining direct negative peace and stability in con-

temporary Lebanon.

This paper argues that consociational democracy remains the only solution to maintain direct negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. The rationale behind this claim is that alternative solutions, particularly transformative liberal approaches, are impractical and ill-suited to the specific context of Lebanon. Implementing such alternatives would disrupt the cooperation among elites representing different sectarian groups, leading to a dangerous power vacuum and potential civil war. Contributing to the existing academic debate, this paper systematically examines the post-war regime and sectarian cleavages in Lebanon, characterising it as a consociational democracy using primary resources such as the Lebanese constitution and the Taif Accord. Additionally, it critically engages with relevant literature, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research, to enrich the scholarly debate on this topic.

This paper will be structured as follows: In part one, I will delve into the sectarian cleavages present in Lebanon. Subsequently, in part two, I will define consociational democracy and offer an overview of the system development in post-war Lebanon. Part three will also address and respond to the criticisms of consociational democracy, including both idea-based and power-based critiques, as well as exploring liberalist alternatives. Moreover, I will draw a conclusion, to sum up the argument.

1.) Sectarian Cleavages in Lebanon

Lebanon demonstrates a clear manifestation of sectarian cleavage, reflected in the representation of 11 major sectarian groups in parliament (Democracy Reporting International, 2017). This division has its origins in the historical reinforcement of confessionalism and sectarianism, dating back to the 19th century under Ottoman rule. The conflict between feudal lords (Muslim Druze) and peasants (Christian Maronites) resulted in several Maronite revolts during the 1820s and 1840s, resulting in the civil

war in 1860 (Richani 1998, 20). In response to these tensions, the Concert of Europe (France, Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia) established the “Mutasarrifate” in the 19th century, a central administrative council comprising proportional representatives from diverse sectarian groups. However, this system was dissolved in 1915 as a result of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, giving way to the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1920. Under the League of Nations Mandate, France assisted in the drafting and adoption of the 1926 constitution, explicitly implementing the concept of sectarianism. The constitution specifically mandated confessionalism as the primary basis for political representation. Notably, Article 24 ensured an equal distribution of parliamentary seats between Muslims and Christians, with proportional representation among various sects on both sides (ConstituteProject 2022, 6).

After the mandate period ended, Lebanon achieved independence and introduced the “1943 National Pact,” an unwritten agreement. This pact aimed to strengthen Lebanon’s autonomy, self-governance and freedom from external interference by Western and Arab powers. The National Pact encompassed crucial principles, including the presidency being exclusively held by a Maronite Christian, the prime minister position reserved for a Sunni Muslim, and the speakership of the House designated for a Shiite Muslim (Najem 2012, 13). Additionally, the Council of Ministers, comprising 99 members, adhered to a specific ratio, with 6 seats allocated to Christians and 5 to Muslims. The National Pact remained in effect until 1989 when the signing of the Taif Accord signified the conclusion of the civil war (1975-1990) and the dawn of contemporary Lebanon.

Despite internal dynamics, external factors such as the political situation in Palestine and Syria played a significant role in exacerbating sectarian divisions within Lebanon. Geographically entangled in the Arab-Israeli conflicts of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006, Lebanon was compelled to accommodate Palestinian refugees, impacting the country’s demographic composition and, consequently, the sectarian power distribu-

tion, particularly between Muslims and Christians (Aboultaif 2019, 124). Furthermore, these refugees, not devoid of political agency, organised themselves militarily after 1967 and utilised Lebanon as a launching pad for challenging Israel.

Syrian involvement also had a substantial influence in intensifying sectarian divisions as it used pre-war Lebanon as a buffer zone in its conflict with Israel. The Assad regime, which was predominantly Shi'ite, strategically supported Lebanese Shi'ites through political parties and militias like Hezbollah (Najem 2012, 35). This support aimed to project Syria's power beyond its borders and shape Lebanon's political landscape in its favour. Additionally, by indirectly confronting Israel through Hezbollah support, the Assad regime sought to position itself as a defender of Arab and Muslim interests, further solidifying its regional influence. Post-war, Syria assumed an increased role, assisting Lebanon in the Taif Accord and positioning itself as a security guarantor by stationing military forces on semi-permanent bases. This allowed Syria to intervene in Lebanese politics, exemplified by extending President Elias Hrawi's and Michel Aoun's terms despite constitutional limitations (Aboultaif 2019, 177). Thus, sectarianism, combined with external factors such as Palestine and Syria, heightened sectarian cleavages in Lebanon, leading to the development of a consociational democracy aimed at preserving direct negative peace and stability.

2.) Consociational Democracy and its Development in Post-war Lebanon

Consociational democracy is a political system aiming to build a fragmented but stable democracy in the form of direct negative peace- the absence of large-scale conflicts- and stability (Aboultaif 2019, 214) and lay a foundation for a proper transition to liberal democracy (Wilson 2020, 703). To reach these goals, it is required to achieve compromise and accommodation among leaders or elites from different sects in deep sectarian

cleavages (Jabbra and Jabbra 2001; Saouli 2019; Dixon 2011; Richani 1998; Lijphart 1968, 1969, 1977, 1981, 1984, 1999).

Lijphart (1968) proposed four requisites for leaders and six conditions for consociationalism to flourish. Those leaders must be able to acknowledge possible instabilities, be committed to maintaining the systems, reach a mutual understanding through communication, and come up with solutions satisfying the demands of major sects (Lijphart 1977, 53-54). Six structural conditions include the presence of distinct sectarian lines, multiple balances of power, a grand coalition of government, external threats, a prosperous economy and manageable small countries. Nevertheless, those requisites and conditions were quite ideal and ambiguous; as a result, they were compressed to be four core features of consociationalism: grand coalitions, veto power, proportionality and segmental autonomy (Lijphart 1977; Aboultaif 2019).

Before examining the relevance of consociational democracy to Lebanon, it is important clearly to define the main characteristics of its four core features. First, a grand coalition government includes representatives from all major sects in the executive body. This accounts for minority concerns and ensures that the minority do not permanently hold the opposition position (Lijphart 1977, 25). Second, veto power can be regarded as a tool for minority communities to safeguard their vital interests and block threats against them (Lijphart 1977, 36-37). The veto power can be utilised in different ways, including the implementation of double majorities. This means that certain laws require both an overall majority in the parliament and government, as well as the support of a majority of representatives from all specific ethnic groups (Aboultaif 2019, 110). Furthermore, the principle of proportionality is to guarantee that every sect in the country acquires specific shares in the political system, including the public sector, government, parliament, and armed forces, corresponding to their respective shares within the overall population (Lijphart 1977, 38-39). This principle is crucial in ensuring that the composition of representatives in

both the executive and legislative branches accurately reflects the state's deeply divided demography. Lastly, segmental autonomy is defined as a distinct realm of sects' governance that partially or fully independently manages their own affairs, whether cultural or territorial, without interference from central authorities. With these key aspects of consociational democracy defined, this paper argues that post-war Lebanon has been governed by consociational democracy.

Grand Coalition

In Lebanon, the principle of a grand coalition is based on the division of the top three executive positions along sectarian lines since the 1943 National Pact. After the civil war, the Taif Accord also maintained this kind of tradition; however, the previous president's power - such as unilaterally dissolving the Chamber, postponing the convention of the Chamber for a month, vetoing bills passed by the Chamber, or even sacking the PM and the cabinet (Richani 1998, 24) - was undermined. For example, the president is required to request the Council of Ministers to dissolve the Parliament and hold new elections (UN Peacemaker 1989, 5). Moreover, the Taif Accord favoured the PM in a way that this position is the actual head of the executive branch and can counter-sign most decrees signed by the President. Despite the power adjustment, the PM must still go through the process of nomination. This involves mandatory consultations between the president and speaker and the president's consultations with parliamentary blocs.

Veto Power

In Lebanon, the National Pact of 1943 first introduced the concept of the minority veto, which aimed to ensure that no sect within the country could impose its will upon another one. Subsequently, the Taif Accord stipulates that significant government

decisions encompassing actions such as constitutional amendments, declaration and revocation of a state of emergency, decisions regarding war and peace, public mobilisation, international agreements and treaties, the state budget, and comprehensive development plans, require the support of a two-thirds majority within the cabinet (Carnegie, 2016). This implicitly provided veto power for one of the three major blocs of ministers, namely those representing the president, the speaker of parliament, and the PM. More importantly, the Doha agreement was specifically signed in May 2008 in order to end the series of protests led by Hezbollah supporters. These protests called for increased power and a response to the Siniora government's actions, which included conducting surveillance and shutting down the telecommunication system (Najem 2012, 81). This agreement allowed Hezbollah to acquire veto power to block any decisions on the question of disarmament and especially the international tribunal on the assassination of former PM Rafic Hariri in 2005.

Proportionality

Proportionality was first implemented in the 1926 constitution and the National Pact; the Taif Accord first increased the seats in the Lebanese Parliament to 108 in 1989 and to 128 in 1992, equally divided between the Christians and Muslims. Out of the total allocation of 64 seats for Christian representation, the Maronite community held the majority with 34 seats, followed by the Greek Orthodox community with 14 seats. The Melkites (Greek Catholics) accounted for 8 seats, while the Armenian Orthodox community held 5 seats. In addition, the Armenian Catholics, Protestants, and other Christian minorities each held 1 seat. Turning to the Muslim seats, the Sunni and Shiite communities held an equal share of 27 seats. The Druze community was represented by 8 seats, while the Alawite community held 2 seats. The electoral system in 2017 also reflected this principle and applied a proportional list-voting system. Under this system, seats are allocated to party lists in the first phase and

to individual candidates in the second phase using an electoral quotient and the largest remainder method. Furthermore, voters are given the opportunity to cast two votes: one for a list or party of candidates and another for individual candidates (Democracy Reporting International 2017, 19).

Segmental Autonomy

This paper argues that sects in post-war Lebanon possess only cultural autonomy. There is no formal recognition of the land or territory belonging to one particular sect, as stated in Article 1 of the constitution “Lebanon is an independent state, with indivisible unity, and complete sovereignty” (Constitute Project 2022, 3). Nevertheless, major sects were roughly concentrated in particular areas; the Shiites are in the South, the Sunni are in the North, and the Maronite Christians are in the West (Tran 2018). Rather than territorial autonomy, each sect independently administers its socio-cultural concerns, such as education and the judicial system. Regarding education, most elementary students were driven to attend sectarian private institutions, typically founded by and intended to serve one of Lebanon’s sects (Najem and Amore 2021, 112). Lebanon’s constitution recognises the importance of sectarian identity and prerogatives within private life. This encompasses marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance regulations. For instance, if a couple from different religious backgrounds intends to marry, it can be a complex or challenging process within the country itself if their respective religious traditions do not permit such unions. Additionally, various religious traditions have differing stances on divorce, with some allowing it and others prohibiting it. To accommodate this system, Lebanon has established 15 separate personal status courts, including 12 Christian denominations, 4 Muslim groups, and courts for adherents of the Druze and Jewish traditions (Human Rights Watch 2015).

The post-war regime in Lebanon can be characterised as

a consociational democracy, marked by a grand coalition that includes the major sects of Maronite Christians, Shiite Muslims, and Sunni Muslims. Under this system, each sect has cultural autonomy, holds the power to veto significant government decisions and is proportionally represented in the parliament through elections. However, despite the potential benefits of consociationalism, the post-war regime in Lebanon has faced substantial criticism for its ideological stance and its effectiveness in addressing its profound sectarian cleavages.

3.) Replies to Criticisms of Consociationalism in Lebanon

It is argued here that consociational democracy remains the only solution to maintain negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. To do so, this paper aims to defend consociationalism by replying to criticisms and alternative proposals put forth by liberal political thinkers. Criticism can be broadly divided into two categories: idea-based and power-based critiques.

Idea-based Critiques

Critiques have been raised regarding the underlying assumption of consociational democracy, specifically regarding elite and coalition government. One concern is that the consociational model is too elitist and romanticises the cooperation among elites from different sects, suggesting that such cooperation in the form of a grand coalition would automatically result in direct negative peace and stability (Andeweg 2000, 519; Hudson 1976, 111). However, this assumption overlooks the fact that this kind of cooperation can turn into intense competition among sectarian groups; elites may use their power to obstruct and veto the political process, prioritising personal interests over national ones, causing political stalemate and tensions between groups (Aboultayf 2019, 195; Horowitz 1985, 575).

Two noteworthy examples of post-war Lebanon illustrate these points. Hezbollah accused President Siniora's government (2005-2009) of colluding with the Americans against the resistance and demanded his resignation (El-Husseini 2009, 240). In November 2006, Shiite ministers resigned from the government, but Siniora rejected their move. Consequently, under pressure from Hezbollah, Berri, the Shiite Speaker of the Parliament, decided to prevent the parliament from convening until a new government was formed, effectively shutting it down for two years until May 2008 when a new President was elected after the Doha Accord (Salamey and Payne 2008, 470). Therefore, cooperation does not always bring peace, and not all elites prioritise the national interests as this example uses veto rights leading to a deadlock or even jeopardising the entire system.

Alternatively, Michel Smaha, a former MP and minister, was arrested by the Lebanese Information Bureau for his involvement in a Syrian plan to smuggle TNT into Lebanon (Shaheen 2015). The intention was to use the explosives to target cars in different parts of the country and assassinate Sunni politicians. Smaha confessed to smuggling 25 kg of TNT and 170,000 dollars from Syria, with the aim of carrying out attacks during religious festivals and attempting the assassination of Sheikh Malek al-Sha'ar (Mufti of Tripoli) and Sunni MP Khaled ad-Daher. This collaboration between a member of the political elite and Syria, intending to disrupt peace and communal coexistence in Lebanon, highlights that elites within a deeply divided consociational democracy may not always cooperate with other sects and may resort to undemocratic violent means to harm others.

This set of critiques presents an idealised view of democracy, suggesting that it solely revolves around the will of the people or the majority, while portraying the role of elites as inherently antagonistic to democracy. However, in reality, elite plays a crucial role in shaping political policies by sponsoring political parties and exerting influence over decision-makers and public opinion through various means, including media platforms, campaign events, and press releases. Therefore, it is natural for

any democratic system to involve the participation of the elite. Moreover, there is no consensus on the extent to which elites should be politically involved in a democratic regime. Hence, the role of elites in post-war Lebanon is both justified and necessary to maintain a delicate balance for peace and stability. Hezbollah's use of veto power to demand Siniora's resignation can be viewed as a positive step taken by Lebanese elites to resolve conflicts through non-violent means. The author realised that this event resulted in a political deadlock for approximately two years; however, the model is not perfect, as no political regime can claim to be flawless due to each country's unique characteristics. Consociationalism particularly suits the post-war context of Lebanon as consociationalism effectively managed the conflict, preventing it from escalating into a civil war. Additionally, it serves as a reminder that even within a political system that aims to promote peace and coexistence, not all political elites consistently adhere to rational behaviour and seek non-violent means to resolve conflicts. However, it is important to note that the Lebanese system was able to effectively respond to the case by prosecuting Michel Smaha. This successful prosecution showcases the system's commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring accountability for those who engage in illegal activities or attempt to undermine peace and communal harmony.

Power-Based Critiques

This set of critiques pertains to the implementation of consociational democracy. The focus of this paper is on the critiques derived from quantitative studies as they can assess the implementation empirically. Based on statistical evidence, several empirical studies argue that consociationalism is likely to increase political violence (Selway and Templeman 2012) and trigger armed intrastate conflicts (Gate et al. 2016). Selway and Templeman (2012) put forth a relevant hypothesis suggesting that when there is high ethnic fractionalisation, proportional representation (PR) and parliamentarianism, two key elements

of consociationalism, tend to exacerbate political violence in the form of riots and deaths. Their theoretical framework posits that PR accommodates extremist parties, reinforces ethnic divisions, and hampers important government decisions due to the inclusion of numerous actors. However, these studies have certain limitations. Firstly, there is a mismatch between the concept of consociationalism and the measures used; the ability of ethnic groups to veto should be also measured empirically. Secondly, their framework lacks logical coherence in explaining how PR intensifies violence when there is high fractionalization. Extremist parties and distinct ethnic/sectarian lines are common features of countries with a consociational democracy. Therefore, the correlation between PR and these features may not necessarily exist, or it could be the case that these features drive countries to adopt the PR system. Lastly, the correlation's statistical significance is inconclusive, as only model 6 demonstrates significant results (Selway and Templeman 2012, 1557).

Gate et al. (2016) categorised power-sharing into constraining, dispersive, and inclusive models. The constraining model limits elite power and safeguards minority rights, while the dispersive model distributes authority, such as through federalism. The inclusive model involves designated groups in decision-making. The authors hypothesised that only countries with constraining power-sharing are less likely to experience civil war. This is because the constraining model increases the costs of repression and violence, making commitments to civil peace more credible. However, inclusive power-sharing often fails to safeguard the rights of ordinary citizens, leaving them vulnerable to government repression, including torture and forced disappearance. This not only jeopardizes the stability of peace but also exacerbates social divisions by solidifying entrenched positions within the government and incentivising elite challenges to state authority for personal gain.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Firstly, different types of power-sharing were vaguely defined, as the constraining model overlaps with inclusive power-sharing. The

article primarily bases the inclusive model on consociationalism, which should encompass limiting elite power through veto mechanisms and protecting minorities through proportionality. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks employed by the authors were undermined by ambiguous definitions of the different power-sharing types. The logic connecting the inclusive model to the lack of protection for ordinary citizens is insufficiently supported. Thirdly, there is a mismatch between concepts and measures. The measurement of constraining power-sharing solely focuses on the ability to protect minorities, rather than evaluating the capacity of the check-balance system. Similarly, the measurement of the inclusive model solely relies on grand coalitions and veto power, which does not capture the entire concept. Lastly, although constraining power-sharing shows statistical significance, confounding variables such as population and GDP also exhibit statistical significance, potentially influencing the model and the onset of civil war (Gate et al. 2016, 522).

Despite the criticism of consociationalism, Wilson (2020) discovered that PR and parliamentarianism may decrease the risk of conflict in deeply divided contexts. The author's framework focuses on highly fractionalised settings where ethnic groups are numerous but smaller in size. In such situations, alternative strategies like coalition building become more appealing for mobilising support. When constituent groups have distinct preferences represented by diverse ethnic identities, they are more likely to perceive the government as legitimate. This leads to greater support for peaceful dispute resolution, as their interests are represented through participation in coalitions and the existence of local autonomy. Political institutions that facilitate this, such as PR, parliamentary democracy, and federalism, enable groups to engage in negotiations and advocate for their interests, reducing the likelihood of conflict arising from their differences. While the author overlooked the measurement of veto power as a part of consociationalism, this article offers several strengths. Wilson (2020) developed a sound theoretical framework, utilised a reliable dataset like the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, employed multiple data sources to capture the complex concept

of ethnic and ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, and conducted various robustness tests to validate the findings.

Liberalist Alternatives

In post-war Lebanon, various transformative liberalist alternatives to consociational democracy have been proposed, some including the promotion of a single national identity, secularisation, and reform (Jabbra and Jabbra 2001, 85). The concept of a single national identity entails the idea of an independent Arab state in which shared language, culture, historical roots, and genealogy unite the citizens together. Lebanese individuals are seen as having the potential to contribute positively to the broader Arab world through cultural, political, and economic leadership. Secularisation, on the other hand, involves the complete elimination of sectarianism from all state institutions, ensuring the separation of religion and the state. Simultaneously, individuals should have complete freedom to practice their religious beliefs without any constraints. The reform agenda consists of establishing a monopoly of force for the state, implementing electoral reform, undertaking bureaucratic reform, initiating economic and social reform, protecting minority rights, and promoting political socialisation.

However, this paper argues that transformative liberal solutions are impractical and not suitable for the specific context of Lebanon. Implementing such solutions would completely undermine cooperation among elites from different sectarian groups, leading to a political vacuum and chaotic power struggle, which could ultimately result in the risk of civil war. Firstly, imposing a single national identity in a country with 18 sectarian groups is not a viable or reasonable idea. It would trigger serious debates over which ethnicity should dominate, considering Lebanon's distinct sectarian divide. Each sect has developed its own unique cultural practices and languages since the implementation of the 1926 constitution. Therefore, attempting to unite them based

on shared languages and cultures would be extremely challenging, if not impossible.

Secondly, a complete elimination of sectarianism from post-war Lebanon would be disastrous. No sect would willingly allow such an eradication as sectarianism is deeply ingrained in their identity. There would undoubtedly be massive resistance against such a proposition. Even if sectarianism were to be eliminated, the everyday practices of living within the same sect would persist. Finally, all the proposed reforms, although ideal, are impractical in the post-war Lebanese context. While monopolising force may seem like a reasonable plan, Lebanon's complex history includes a long-standing rivalry with Israel. Hezbollah has been the primary force dealing with Israel and is unlikely to agree to disarmament. This is evident from their mobilisation efforts against Siniora and the STL, which resulted in the Doha Agreement granting Hezbollah formal veto power. Even if Hezbollah agreed to disarm and join the weakened national army, Lebanon would lose an experienced and well-equipped military capable of defending against external threats. Other reform projects, ranging from electoral reform to political socialisation, would face significant challenges, provoke massive protests, and directly challenge the existing status quo that has maintained direct negative peace and stability in Lebanon since the civil war.

Conclusion

This study argues for the continued relevance of consociational democracy as the most viable solution for maintaining direct negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. Throughout this paper, this study highlights that direct negative peace is the type of peace that post-war Lebanon's consociationalism aims to achieve, as it specifically targets the absence of direct violence (war or large-scale conflict) rather than addressing structural or cultural violence. This assertion is drawn from a comprehensive analysis of the Lebanese context, its historical sectarian cleavages, and the development of consociational democracy as a political

system.

The examination of sectarian cleavages in Lebanon revealed deep-rooted historical divisions dating back to the 19th century, with the imposition of confessionalism under Ottoman rule and subsequent developments such as the 1943 National Pact. External factors, including the political situation in Palestine and Syria, further intensified these sectarian divisions, leading to the emergence of consociational democracy as a response to the need for a governance system that accommodates both pre-war and post-war Lebanon's diverse sectarian landscape.

Consociational democracy, characterised by a grand coalition, veto power, proportionality, and segmental autonomy, provides Lebanon with a valuable system to maintain sustained direct negative peace. This form of governance has proven effective in preventing large-scale conflicts in Lebanon's profoundly divided society since the end of the civil war in 1990. A grand coalition fosters cooperation and compromise among elite representatives from diverse sectarian communities within formal political structures. This reduces tensions and distrust by ensuring all groups have a voice in decision-making and cannot be marginalised. Mutual veto rights guarantee that no single sect can unilaterally impose policies severely detrimental to other sects' interests. This safeguard prevents aggressive majoritarianism that could trigger grievances and violent backlashes from minorities. Additionally, proportional representation and allocated government positions provide communities with tangible assurances that they will not be excluded from political power. This creates a sense of investment and participation in the political system, discouraging any inclination toward extra-legal challenges. Finally, segmental autonomy in religious and cultural affairs allows Lebanon's diverse sectarian mosaic to preserve its unique identities and practices without state interference. This reduces fears of assimilation that could otherwise produce instability.

In addressing criticisms, both idea-based and power-based, it is acknowledged that consociationalism is not without

flaws. Instances of political deadlock and competition among elites were highlighted as potential drawbacks. However, these challenges were contextualised within the specific conditions of Lebanon and compared to the potential risks of alternative liberalist approaches (a single national identity, secularization, and reform). Those liberal practices were deemed impractical and ill-suited to the country's unique circumstances, as implementing such alternatives would risk disrupting cooperation among elites representing diverse sectarian groups, potentially leading to a dangerous power vacuum and the reemergence of civil conflict.

Through a systematic examination of the post-war regime in Lebanon, utilising primary resources such as the Lebanese constitution and the Taif Accord, and engaging with relevant qualitative and quantitative research, this study contributes to the scholarly debate on consociational democracy. This research enhances our understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with maintaining peace and stability in Lebanon, which provides valuable guidance for policymakers and stakeholders invested in the peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon.

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