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## Introduction

### ***IAFOR Journal of Asian Studies* Volume 4 Issue 1: Ethnicity, History and Political Reporting**

#### *Ethnicity in South Asia: The Sri Lankan Context*

This paper examines the ethnic tensions in South Asian politics with a focus on the Sri Lankan context and the issues raised by the growth of political parties that have a narrow focus on particular ethnic interests. These parties might achieve their ends with the use of violence and sectarianism, and as a result, substantial levels of conflict might ensue. The paper provides interesting insight into how nation building, and internal stability affect ethnicity and presents a historical account of the conflict and co-existence of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in a time of growing influences from other cultures. The study examines the political unrest which contextualises the ethnic problems arising from the linguistic, cultural and historical distinctions between Sinhalese and Tamil communities, existing, in what the author describes aptly as a “a mosaic of self-aware communities distinguished from another along ethnic, religious or linguistic basis”. The author offers sobering insight into how these have fostered a young generation with political aspirations prone to nihilism and violence due to the abandonment of the rule of law. The interaction of ethnicities, the violent attempts to address and remove ethnic grievances, provide a strong and relevant picture of how in today’s context, people may be more conscious and accountable of how national, regional and global catalysts impact on ethnicity, its distinctions, nationhood identification, politics and stability.

#### *Revolution, Forgery and the Failures of Historical Materialism: Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” as a Guide to Reading Mao Dun’s Early Fiction*

Challenging a perception of a preordained fabrication of history as a way of interpreting communism in China, the author delves deeply into how *Stone Tablet* by Mao Dun reveals an engagement and acceptance of Marxist ideas but are redolent of writings before the Capital in examining historical paradoxes; the idea that men make history but under pre-existing circumstances transmitted from the past. The author colourfully yet powerfully examines through critical discourse how Mao explores historiography and historical materialism through fiction and how the writings of Walter Benjamin and Mao are concerned that materialist explanations of historical in reality result in paradox, disillusion, and challenge the deployment of theology towards one’s own ends. That Marx has failed to see the return of theology is explored by Mao and Benjamin, and the author gives a rare academic insight into Benjamin’s exploration of how Messianism was influential on Mao as revealed in *Water Dragon*. The author concludes that Mao Dun developed through his writings the beginnings of “an original philosophy of history that could contend with the failures of twentieth century communist political movements” and this is significant in bringing a new perspective and appreciation of a challenge to the possibility of popular revolution in a literary and allegorical context.

#### *Impact of Political Freedom and Uncertainty Avoidance on Anonymous Source Use in Media*

This paper examines the use of anonymous sources in political reporting in India and Pakistan through the analytical frameworks of how political freedom and uncertainty avoidance affects the prevalence of the anonymity of sources. The study presents context through how the hostile environment surrounding a lack of political freedom must be balanced with the need for

credibility in reporting, the systems in place in various newspapers for the attribution of sources and media and reporting through times of political unrest with a focus on India and Pakistan during 2014. This year, 2014, was a period involving significant political change and unrest in India and Pakistan and this study looks at the news reporting and usage of anonymous sources from a scholarly perspective using qualitative analysis of story samples from the Times of India and Dawn (India). The authors found that significant limitations on political freedom in Pakistan such as through enforcement measures including assassinations and desires for uncertainty avoidance in Pakistani society had profound effects on their findings and that in India, there was greater reference to rank in party hierarchy. The study has been contextualised in relation to political freedom in the respective countries and gives interesting and rare academic insights into the socio-political context around anonymous source usage in political reports.

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## **Ethnicity in South Asia: The Sri Lankan Context**

Rajkumar Singh, B.N. Mandal University, India

### **Abstract**

Ethnicity has gained prominence in South Asian politics today for two reasons. First, the growth of sectarian political parties throughout the region has amplified and redirected ethnic issues to the political limelight. These parties have arisen, or have been resurrected by parochial interests, because of the government's inadequacy or inability to remove ethnic grievances. These parties differ from national parties in that they have a narrow political base, represent the interests of only particular ethnic groups or segments thereof and are dedicated to achieving political ends through violence. Second, the ethnic factor in South Asian politics is sustained also by the international role of the regional countries. In general, it is not only as the case of South Asia, but this alike, most regions of the world are affected by the complexities of ethnicity in which the same catalysts, be they national, regional and global, play an active part. In each case, interaction among these forces make an ethnic group more conscious and accountable in today's context. The findings of the study and descriptions thereof are useful universally and would be helpful for future study that might be conducted in this sphere.

**Keywords:** ethnicity, outside factors, Sri Lanka, grievance-formation, political bargaining

## Basics of Ethnicity

Sri Lanka has been suffering the problem of ethnicity and has struggled to establish peace and social stability since independence. Communal and ethnic conflicts, separatist tendencies, inter-state terrorism and the practice of militarisation are prolonged challenges for the nation. The ethnic tension in Sri Lanka is between the Sinhalese and the Lanka Tamils. The present tragedy is the result of political and cultural rivalry between them, and the ineptitude of the national leadership in reconciling their differences (Kodikara, 1993). The chauvinistic and obstinate attitudes from both the sides aggravate the ethnic problem, and this has led to the creation of space for secessionist tendencies against the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka and demands for an independent state. The conflict is manifested in a variety of ways ranging from political protest to ethnic violence, and from terrorist insurgencies to guerrilla warfare. Ethnic conflicts arise when the multiethnic personality of such a state-centric nation is not adequately expressed in its power structure and in its political system. If it is reduced to the virtual dominance of the major ethnic group, then the very rationale of “nation” is jeopardised and provokes political self-assertion of minority ethnic groups (Maass, 1999). Despite its small size, the island of Sri Lanka is marked by a relatively wide diversity of ethnic groups, divided by language, religion, and to a lesser extent by caste.

At large, the issue of ethnicity is closely related to nation-building and internal stability. Initially the pattern of political development was on the lines of the Western notions of modernisation and its leaders hoped that with the ongoing process of modernisation, parochial attachments would simply disappear. In the course of time and with the rapid expansion of communication and transportation networks, ethnicity in the regions has invalidated most of these assumptions associated with the national development process. As a result, within each country, the separate cultural identities of regions, far from losing social significance and becoming blurred, have in fact reasserted their cultural/regional identities by politically mobilising themselves in order to confront the state system which has failed to recognise or protect their interests. They have rejected the continued validity of national symbols and values and have redirected their allegiance to ethnic symbols and values in order to fight for greater influence within their societies (Hassan, 1993). In most cases the discriminatory policies of the national leadership have encouraged ethnic communities to rise above parochial attachments to form a unified political order.

In the context of ethnicity, instability is a condition in which the established political order is under challenge because of policies that directly and adversely affect certain ethnic interests. In extreme situations this may lead to partial disintegration of the polity while in less serious instances, primordial sentiments tend to reassert themselves. In the circumstances, the best that can be hoped for is to contain them (Enloe, 1973). But we must recognise the fact that often the primordial sentiments are not necessarily obstacles to internal stability; rather institutionalised discriminations that lead to ethnic cleavages are the actual causes of instability within a polity. To attain any measure of permanence in internal stability in political systems, structural changes and attitudinal changes are a must. The first structural change in this direction should be the restoration of a democratic set up where it is absent, as in Pakistan, and where it is present, its redefinition such that the majority tyranny does not become the order of the day, as has been the case of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Above all, a sense of fairness and justice must also prevail among those who exercise effective decision-making power, so that they are not perceived to represent the exclusive interests of a particular ethnic group. They must transcend narrow interests and formulate policy options that seek to benefit all groups within the polity.

## **Ethnicity in Sri Lanka**

Ethnic peace is elusive in Sri Lanka as divergence exists in trying to date the ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese majority community and the Tamil minority community. Recently, a victory has been achieved on the military front, but there has been no advance on the political front. The country is multi-ethnic in nature with varied racial and religious groups inhabiting the island. In Sri Lanka, there is no Christian or Buddhist ethnicity: there are Sinhalese and Tamil ones. It is also an interesting part of Sri Lanka's in that the two principal communities, the Sinhalese and Tamil, both originated from India. The first to go to the island were the Sinhalese. Later the Tamils attacked the Sinhalese and ruled a part of Sri Lanka and maintained their supremacy in the northern part of the country. The rivalry between these two communities has not died out yet and has an important bearing on the political life and history of the country (Chakravarti, 1978). Thus, the root of the present long bloody ethnic conflict that the nation has seen in recent times is the result of historical competition and enmity. In addition, the linguistic and religious cleavages tend to reinforce each other, that is, the members of each major linguistic group tend to share the same religion. For instance, the Tamils including Tamil Christians take one side and Sinhalese, including Christians, the other. It is because the Tamil Christians were internal to and a part of Tamil or Jaffna society, economy, trade, agriculture and so on. Similarly, Sinhalese Christians were internal to another cohesive socio-economic unit (David, 1996). Physical structures of the island nation have contributed to the widening chasm between the two ethnic communities in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The two major ethnic communities of Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, are poles apart in terms of language, religion and cultural points of view. The Sinhalese are a distinct ethnic group speaking the Indo-Aryan language, Sinhala. They trace their origin to north India, claiming to be the earliest civilised inhabitants on the island. Most of the Sinhalese practice a variant of Theravada Buddhism which received continuous support from the rulers since it was introduced on the island in the 3rd century BC. Today, most Sinhalese consider themselves to be the protectors of Buddhism. Meanwhile, the Tamils as a minority group have a distinct identity in racial and cultural terms. They trace their ancestry to the same period, that of the Sinhalese arrival. They are mostly Hindus and speak the south Indian Dravidian language Tamil. A significant number of them converted to Christianity after the arrival of European powers. However, they both had the same legal status in Sri Lanka during the British rule.

The origin of ethnicity can be traced back to the 1920s when the Indian Tamils organised first in the form of a cooperative movement and later under the Jaffna Youth Congress, a social movement against caste distinctions in Sri Lanka (Narayan, 1998). It was the result of the reluctance of the Sinhalese to take to the regimented life of the estates. The period also witnessed arising political questions relating to the representation in legislature. It posed a threat to the Sinhalese who were opposed giving large numbers of Indians the right to vote as recommended by the Donoughmore Commission in 1928. From the view of the Sinhalese, it meant 1) a dilution of the electoral strength of the Kandyan Sinhalese in most of the constituencies in the Kandyan areas; 2) the possibility of Indian Tamils being returned as representatives of Kandyan Sinhalese constituencies in the event of the splitting of the Kandyan Sinhalese vote between rival candidates; and 3) the likelihood, especially at the time of the Donoughmore reforms of British planters, and/or Indian state Kanganies herding the Indian vote in favour of the candidate of their choice. Later in 1929, the report of the Commission was debated in the Ceylon Legislative Council and the provision relating to the franchise of the Indian immigrants was modified by imposing several restrictions and the communal character

of representation continued thereafter.

### **Ethnicity Gained Complexity**

Earlier the changes effected in the composition of the Legislative Council, in 1909 and 1920, did not go far enough to satisfy the Ceylonese reforms, but in 1923 the Legislative Council was expanded so as to have a majority of Ceylonese unofficial members with a large elective element (Wilson, 1979). At this stage, a cleavage occurred between the Sinhalese and the Ceylon Tamils. While the latter with the support from other majority groups, namely Indians, Muslims, Burghers and Europeans, wished communal representation to be maintained, the Sinhalese reformers asked for the introduction of the territorial principle. In other words, both communities – the Sinhalese and the Tamils – became principal rivals in establishing their cultural superiority and administrative hegemony over the other. Family and familiar locality is often of central significance in the nourishment of loyalty to group and its associated territorial space (Robert, 2009). Thus, in most instances a Sri Lankan's patriotism to his island entity is built upon local experiences and sentimentalities.

In the history and politics of Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities are fragmented through customs and separate higher from lower orders. There is nearly a complete absence of inter-caste marriages. Several members of the lower status caste groups have seized the opportunities provided by the modern economic system and have become wealthy. These differences in wealth have created wide class cleavages that cut across boundaries of caste, religion, and language. Because of all these divisions, Sri Lankan society is complex, with numerous points of conflict. The uneven capitalist development that was characteristic of the plantation raj created serious socio-economic divisions within the Sri Lankan society.

The ethnic identities in Sri Lanka strengthened especially in response to the growing influence of Christian religion and English language in matters of social and cultural living in the mid 19th century. In the period, the Buddhist revivalist movement started, it now one of the relatively few nations in the world where Theravada Buddhism has a large following. The Buddhist cultural movement asserted the rightful place of Buddhism and it established a special relationship between Buddhism, the Sinhalese people and the island. The central theme of the movement was that Sinhala Buddhists alone had the original rights to Sinhaladvipa and Dhammadvipa – the land of the Sinhalese and the land of Buddhism respectively. By the time of independence this type of Sinhalese-Buddhist ethno-nationalism had become part of popular thinking. This apart, a fear of Indian domination, particularly of being swamped by the Tamils from across the Palk Strait, figured prominently in the Sinhala-Buddhist discourse.

### **Clash of Ethnic Identity**

In response to the evolution of ethnic identities in Sinhalese, the Tamils of the island felt threatened. In the line of Sinhala thinking, Tamils, Muslims Christians or other non-Sinhalese did not have a place. Although decades before independence there was no such feeling and initially English educated Sinhalese and Tamil elites worked together for constitutional reforms. In 1919 they came together under the banner of Ceylon National Congress whose first president was Sir Ponnambalam, a prominent Tamil. But soon the differences between the two communities surfaced in 1920 following the constitutional reformers which introduced territorial representation. These differences centred on the question of communal representation. While the Sinhalese insisted upon representation according to population strength, the Sri Lankan Tamil wanted representation more than their numbers. The divergent



racial-religious-linguistic congruence of the two communities of Sinhalese and Tamils is further accentuated by a territorial factor. The northern Tamil district being proximate to Tamil Nadu provided for easy inter-state contact and to worsen ethnic strife. This factor may have led to Tamil secessionist demands which posed a threat to the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Inevitably along with such domestic factors that influenced the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, external forces have played a critical role in aggravating the conflict.

The Sinhalese and the Tamils are not separated by ethnic divide only but educationally, psychologically and geographically too. A recent study about national harmony revealed that there is no school in Ceylon where there is a positive, well-integrated and gradual programme for racial integration, working hand in hand with the community agencies, for the realisation of the aim of making the children better Ceylonese citizens. Under the psychological factor the Sinhalese tend on occasion to group the indigenous Tamils with the Tamils of south India and view them in their entirety as the Dravidian peril. Geographically Tamils, in general, reside in the northern and eastern part of the island and the latter are conservative and community-conscious. Even when opportunities for employment and commerce took them to the Sinhalese areas, they developed flourishing self-contained settlements of their own. These parting tendencies in both the communities developed and strengthened further due to the defective or biased progress in the constitutional history of the nation.

Even culturally, the island Sri Lanka is divided into two nations, namely, Tamil and Sinhala. They have been rivals in the past; they are rivals in the present; and are likely to continue to be rivals in the future. It is a mosaic of self-aware communities distinguished from one another along ethnic, religious or linguistic basis. The political life of Sri Lanka has been closely bound up with these communal and other social differentiations. These traditional groupings formed the basis of politically the most significant loyalties, interests and demands. The Sinhalese and Ceylon's Tamil communities could associate these loyalties with past kingdoms and with specific territories. Because of the force of historical traditions, there emerged within Sri Lanka forms of identity among the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil communities of the country (Jacob, 1983). Although the policies of the British were guided by the objective of creating a homogeneous society in the island, advancement of social mobilisation generated new aspirations and demands and widened concerns with educational opportunities, urban employment and government services, and thus heightening the potential for communal conflict (Samaraweera, 1963). In fact, the nation building experiment in Sri Lanka was based on the language of the majority community, namely the Sinhala, and the religion of the majority, namely Buddhism, that further paved the direction of nationalism based on communal identity.

### **Ethnicity in Independent Sri Lanka**

The deterioration of relations between the two communities of Sri Lanka continued as before after independence of the island nation in 1948, but especially after 1956 when the “Sinhala Only” policy was adopted by the then government. Earlier the Sinhalese and the Tamils were self-conscious about their differences and were mutually suspicious, they were not hostile prior to the language issue. It was the political controversy surrounding the language dispute in the first decade of independence that generated the most severe regional feelings among the Ceylon Tamils. Consequently, communal antagonism became sharper than they had been for generations. After the language controversy the Federal Party (FP) became the principal spokesman of the Ceylon Tamils, replacing its rival the Tamil Congress (TC) which had advocated responsive cooperation with United National Party (UNP) government. Years after

independence the government of the day initiated discriminatory policies harming the interests of Tamils at large creating vacuum for conflicts and antagonism between Sinhalese and Tamils. The issues of discrimination responsible for bringing tussle and bickering were language, administration, education, employment, colonisation of land and the power devolution.

Soon after independence, the island nation had adopted a Presidential system which was found unsuitable to the heterogeneous nature of Sri Lankan society pushing the country into an ethnic mess. In fact, the unitary system in Sri Lanka had completely failed because of the parochial and inhuman attitudes of the Sinhalese political society in satisfying the preserved aspirations of the multi-ethnic people and therefore, the demand of decentralisation and democratic processes had been raised continuously in order to accomplish socio-political equity. The Tamils claimed that due to Sinhalese majority, the Tamil minority cannot get access in the political activities and participation in the governance and the decision-making process of the country (Khobragade, 2007). A strong section of the people believes even today that if Sri Lanka had been provided with the federal constitution at the time of independence, the Sinhalese and the Tamil leaders might have been able to bargain with each other from their political power bases at the centre and the region and the prolonged ethnic conflict could have been prevented.

The grievance-formation on the part of Tamils from the beginning led the making of Federal Party in Sri Lanka in 1949. It was totally devoted to the cause of a separate state for Tamil Eelam and in fact laid the foundation of two-nation theory in the country. It strongly pleaded in favour of a Tamil Eelam and stated in Party's resolution of 1951. The Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka constitute a nation distinct from that of Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood: firstly, that of a separate historical past, in this island at least as ancient and glorious as that of Sinhalese; secondly, by the fact of their being a linguistic entity, entirely different from that of Sinhalese with as unsurpassed classical heritage and a modern development of language which makes Tamil fully adequate for all present day needs; and finally, by reason of their territorial habitation of definite areas, which constitute over one-third of the island (Khobragade, 2009). The political failure of democratic system and chief political parties in resolving Tamil grievances led to the demand of a separate Tamil state, the Tamil Eelam.

Actually, the dysfunctional nature of island's democracy remained unable to make a convincing argument that all the problems that might arise within this could be resolved within the framework of democratic institutions. Because of the politically active young people it had created a sense of nihilism, which considers everything as permissive. In the political field, it means a belief in violence for its own sake. In that kind of situation, the whole young generation would have no political aspirations except for protest for its own sake reflects as to how deeply the dysfunctional nature of Sri Lankan democracy has affected the entire nation and particularly the young. The abandonment of the rule of law and the authority of institutions, which was already visible in 1958, became a much greater problem in the years that followed, with a similar political approach by subsequent governments and even radical experiments to undermine democracy and rule of law.

For the deteriorating ethnic situation of Sri Lanka, the political system adopted in 1948 and the succeeding governments that enjoyed power in a discriminatory manner were responsible. It is said that the history of relations between the Tamils and central government has been a succession of missed opportunities. Even before Independence under the self-government allowed by the British government since 1931, communalist attitudes dominated political life,

culminating in the Tamil claim for parity of Parliamentary representation between the Sinhalese majority and the minorities. Almost in the span of thirty years the political life of the island nation was run by two major political parties – the UNP and the SLFP. In the first phase, each of these parties had a nine-year tenure – the UNP from 1947 to 1956 and the SLFP from 1956 to 1965. In the second, the UNP with its allies had a five-year-run, 1965-1970, while the SLFP, with its partners completed its 1970-1977 term. Despite their long and repeated innings, UNP and SLFP governments, which were clearly Sinhalese dominated, had toyed with the idea of concessions, and all promises came to nothing for the minorities of Sri Lanka.

### **Ethnicity Turned Violent in Sri Lanka**

The 1970s was a decisive one in the political life of Sri Lanka. Sinhalese-Tamil relations deteriorated considerably during the period of United Front rule 1970-77. The Federal Party withdrew in June 1971 from the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly when the latter voted out its resolution on language rights. In 1972, most of Tamil political groupings including the powerful Indian Tamil CWC formed the Tamil United Front (TUF) under the leadership of FP leader SJV Chelvanayagam for purposes of joint political action. In the same year, Chelvanayagam, on behalf of the TUF, resigned his parliamentary seat to obtain a mandate for the establishment of a sovereign “Eelam Tamil” nation. The TUF, in its convention in May 1976, changed its name to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) resolving the restoration and reconstruction of free and sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam to safeguard the very existence of Tamil nation in this country. The Sinhalese paradigm of one country, one nation, one language and one people, compelled Tamil youths to rise against Sinhalese chauvinism.

As a result of the policies of pro-Sinhala governments in Sri Lanka, the two dominant sections of Tamil parties – the Federal Party and Tamil Congress – united to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1975 and it, in its Vaddukoddai resolution, adopted on 14 May 1976, a call for the creation of a separate Tamil state of Eelam. Besides citing the existence of an historical Tamil Kingdom in the southern Jaffna districts as the legal basis for a claim to the Eelam state, nine additional reasons were given: the disfranchisement of Indian Tamils (1948 and 1949); Sinhalese colonisation of traditional Tamil lands; the Sinhala Only Act; the favoured position of Buddhism; inequality of opportunity; severance of ties with South India; permitting and unleashing communal violence against Tamils; terrorism against Tamil youth; and the 1972 constitution (Vaddukoddai Resolution, 1978). In reaction to the long-biased policy from the pro-Sinhala government, Tamil militancy emerged in Tamil areas with a number of Tamil militant organisations to fight for their rights against the unending oppressive rule.

With the Tamil political leaders, and their failure in political bargaining and power politics, Tamil youths raised arms against the government. The armed uprising gave birth to political violence as the only means. The armed struggle for the establishment of Tamil Eelam manifested in a variety of ways ranging from political protest to ethnic violence and terrorist insurgencies to guerrilla warfare and ultimately the ethnic conflict became a central problem in Sri Lankan politics. It was the failure of many years of peaceful demonstration by Tamil leaders to win their freedom from the successive Sinhala majority governments, who showed no concern for the Tamil grievances. In addition, it was the result of political and cultural rivalry between the Sinhalese and the Lankan Tamils and the ineptitude of the national leadership in reconciling their differences. While some have interpreted this ethnic rivalry as a clash between two, a “sub nationalism”, that of the dominated Buddhist elite and of the minority Tamil elite of the northern peninsula (Wilson, 1979), more often, it seen in political

terms in which the Sinhalese have consistently sought to diminish the cultural and political salience of the Tamils in post-Independence Sri Lanka.

### **Conclusion and Result**

In the initial years, following the independence of Sri Lanka, it was believed that the country would soon attain political stability and the major ethnic groups would get integrated into one nation. But the chasm between the Sinhalese and the Tamil – Sri Lanka's two major ethnic groups – has widened since then and a fundamental shift took place in state society relations. Some in the country believe that elements within the ruling party actively promoted violence, partly to destabilise their own government to enhance their position in a factional struggle for control, and partly to embitter relations between Sinhalese and Tamils in order to promote Sinhalese hegemony. The government maintained that the riots were caused by violent separatist elements within the Tamil minority and by Marxists seeking to overthrow the regime and to promote a general conflagration (Manor, 1984). The anti-Tamil riots of 1958 and the insurrection of 1971 were viewed by the governments in this context.

The anti-Tamil riots of 1958 were remarkable because Sinhalese society accepted them as triumphant violence. In the Sinhalese political consciousness, the violence of 1958 is regarded with pride. Violence was how Tamils who had exceeded the behavioural limits of an ethnic minority could be put back in their proper subordinate place. In a society where ethnic relations are hierarchically ordered, ethnic violence then was also a structural mechanism of re-establishing domination and submission (Uyangoda, 1996). The aftermath of 1971 insurrection also witnessed how even a confrontation of limited violence between the state and anti-state forces could ultimately strengthen and expand the institutional bases of state violence. It was indeed during this confrontation that the state argument for political violence expanded to include the moralistic argument that the state had a legitimate right to exercise violence to protect the people, and that that right should be protected from public scrutiny. In the post-1971 years, any minor political provocation was certain to evoke the violent responses of the state. In the face of a new situation, the character of the Sri Lankan police and armed forces had changed completely over the last decades. Whilst before 1971 they were simply a force for the maintenance of law and order, they later found themselves engaged in military operations, firstly in 1971 with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) revolt and then, after 1974, with the increase in Tamil terrorist activity.

Around the mid-1970s the extremist Tamil groups began to demand a separate state of Tamil Eelam and have been carrying out a prolonged guerrilla struggle.

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**Revolution, Forgery and The Failures of Historical Materialism:  
Reconsidering Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"  
through Mao Dun's Early Fiction**

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**Abstract:**

The story "Stone Tablet" (1930), written by Chinese author Mao Dun (1896-1981), contains elements of a critique of Marxist historical materialism, as well as of pragmatist models of historiography that were influential in early twentieth century China. My analysis shows the way in which this story, based on Ming-dynasty classic of tales of anti-government outlaws, *Water Margin*, intersects with the work of Weimar German writer, and fellow Marxist intellectual, Walter Benjamin in questioning the possibility of modern popular revolution and thereby reopens an aporia surrounding the question of history in Marx's writing prior to *Capital*. As opposed to a view of Mao Dun's early work that sees these stories as part of a period of transition towards a mature style of socialist realism, this study proposes that at this stage in his work as a writer Mao Dun was developing the beginnings of an original philosophy of history that could contend with the failures of twentieth century communist political movements.

**Keywords:** history, fiction, Republican-era China, German philosophy, revolution, dialectic, Marxism

## Introduction

The newly-released mainland Chinese mini-series *Autumn Harvest Uprising* (秋收起义) imagines the lives of the founding members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the days following the Communist purge in Shanghai in April 1927 and dramatically depicts the widening schism between the Communists and Nationalists that divided the country. The show portrays the political conflict that occurred subsequent to the what is known in English as the “The Shanghai Massacre,” and in Chinese as the “April 12th Incident” (四一二事件), and it began airing on August 1, 2017, with a release date that memorialized the CPC military action in Jiangxi known Nanchang Uprising (南昌起义) – held to be the party’s first revolutionary action. Its release was also auspiciously timed for a year being celebrated by the party as the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the CPC. For a story that risks being filed away as a stodgy government boilerplate history, in a savvy and high-tech Chinese society that has long since moved on to more exciting entertainments, the engrossing melodrama of *Autumn Harvest Uprising* – and the highly-polished quality of its screen images – attest to the inevitable return of history back into the present: not only to the fact that history is continually remade in the present, but also to the notion that the key to understanding the present may actually lie in the way that images of the past are reproduced for the present moment.

Since its premiere, the show has drawn an audience of more than 200 million in China, drawing viewers who seek a glimpse of the ruling party as it was when it was only partially formed and still its delicate infancy. Among other well-known communist cultural figures, the mini-series features a spry and youthful Mao Zedong, and a callow and rather curmudgeonly Chen Duxiu. The melodramatic allure of the show arises partly from private scenes in which powerful allies of the ruling Nationalist government, often meeting in closed offices, fall after their weakness and corruption is revealed. Likewise, the heroes of the story, future heads of the party like Mao, rise from the obscurity of everyday life in their kitchens or living rooms to attain the moral clarity that is their destiny. The dramatic force of the show also owes much to the slipperiness of the historical setting. Take, for example, the *mise-en-scène* of one shot featuring Chen Duxiu as secretary of the communist party in Wuhan, deliberating over whether or not the communists should break with their colleagues in the Nationalist government over the incident in Shanghai. Above him is a communist banner featuring Sun Yat Sen, surrounded by Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin, alongside the star that signifying Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist government – an image still present on the flag of Taiwan R.O.C (Figure 1). While historically accurate, the confusion of the banner – its linking of conflicting iconographies of nation, ideology and revolution – provides a visual parallel that amplifies Chen Duxiu’s feelings of incomprehension over how the party should respond to the Shanghai attacks. Out of such historical ambiguities, the show carves out a clear ideal of the 1927 Autumn Harvest Uprising as people’s revolution – clearer still because of the morass of messy partnerships and rivalries out of which the call to revolution emerges.





Figure 1: A scene from *Autumn Harvest Uprising*

As an event that displays the inevitability of historical change and confers an ultimate legitimacy through popular mandate, the moment of revolution is a matrix of meaning in a nation's collective imaginary. This presents a difficulty not only for representation of such an event, but also in terms of understanding the ways in which revolution creates a relationship between history and the present.

Portrayals of early events in CPC history have not always been drawn with such broad strokes and clear lines. Mao Dun was among the first Chinese writers to attempt to portray first-hand the effects of the events in Jiangxi on young revolutionaries. Although by the early years of the 1930s Mao Dun was to become China's foremost social realist fiction writer, as well as one of the most widely-read commentators on literature and politics, the first years of his career as a writer were dominated by grave anxiety over the early formation of the communist party as a political entity. Instead of the sustained moment of revolution that would coalesce into the worker's state that they had theorized, the many years of the consolidation of the party under the leadership of a small group was a period of frustrating uncertainty for Chinese communists who had already experienced numerous anti-climactic defeats and partial victories.

The proclamation of the Jiangxi Soviet as the first Chinese Soviet Republic (中华苏维埃共和国) in 1931 would initiate the process of the establishment of a party hierarchy that would begin with naming Mao Zedong as leader of the Soviet Republic. However, for communist-affiliated writers this initial campaign would offer little material for particularly dramatic storytelling: rather than a revolution that launched a new nation by mobilizing the working classes into fighting for one common cause, a communist government had formed as the result of a slow, methodical and piecemeal process.

Mao Dun's decisive statement on the theme of revolution in the aftermath of this period finally came after three years of reflecting on the events of what came to be called The Autumn Uprising, as part of a series of stories in which he moved beyond the style of literary naturalism that he attempted in his earliest fiction and drew upon the Ming-dynasty classic *Water Margin* (水浒传). In the most provocative of the *Water Margin* stories, "Stone Tablet" (石碣, 1930), Mao Dun stages a dialogue between two characters from the original novel in a narrative that ends with a representation of the impossibility of taking a revolutionary step that alters the course of history.

David Der-wei Wang (1992) has concluded that the story's underlying message of history as preordained fabrication has grave implications for understandings of modern Chinese history embraced by Chinese communists in that it:

has the potential to reduce the absolute mandate of communist revolution, as [Mao Dun] and his fellow leftists believed it to be, to merely one of the more efficient lies in history ... [and thus it] threatens to tear apart from the inside the total historical discourse on which Mao Dun's works are based (p. 49).

This statement rightly sees the story as a departure from a viewpoint that accords with Marxist theories of history, however, Wang's evaluation fails to give full consideration of the story as an expression of Mao Dun's own original viewpoint on the problems of history considered philosophically and arrived at through Mao Dun's close study of Marx. Mao Dun wrote the story after a period of doubt in communism, but it also nonetheless arose from ideas drawn from the theoretical framework of Marxism, with which Mao Dun was deeply engaged. Reading the story alongside the work of Walter Benjamin shows the ways in which the concerns of Mao Dun's fiction intersect with the contemporary work of other Marxist-influenced intellectuals of the time, revealing a common commitment to forging an alternative set of philosophical considerations for understanding history as a modern object of knowledge.

### **Marxist Intellectuals Questioning Revolution: The Aporia of History and the Dialectical Approach**

For the communist intellectual of the 1920s and 1930s, mass revolt could not only be looked to to usher in a new worker's state, but revolution also affirmed an outlook of historical development based in practices of materialist historiography. In early twentieth-century Republican China more specifically, the concept of revolution was accepted as the engine of future-oriented change not only by the public, but also for the Chinese historians who were Mao Dun's contemporaries and interlocutors. The country had, after all, begun its existence as a modern state with the Xinhai Revolution (1911) and the nation's founding figure, Sun Yat Sen, had established a Chinese Revolutionary Party (中华革命党) in an early period of conflict when the country had plunged back into disorder. Several major historians of the time even viewed the country's modern history as one long period of revolution. Jiang Tingfu (1895–1965), for example, a scholar who is considered a founding figure of modern Chinese historiography, fully acknowledged the emergence of modernity in China as a process of revolution. In a 1934 essay he reiterated this viewpoint, while at the same time wondering what this revolution would produce:

after our autonomy was lost, we were divided; division leads to revolution ... Doubtless, we have experienced more than thirty years of revolution, and the consciousness of our people has greatly advanced .... I am not saying that

revolution can not be at all successful ... but can a spirit of the people form? (p. 123)<sup>1</sup>

Mao Dun's story "Stone Tablet" intervenes in this general acceptance of revolution as a historical process by engaging modern modes of historical knowledge through a representation of the event of revolution as concept fraught with paradox, perhaps to the limit of its very impossibility. Although most commonly associated in Marxist thought with the action of the founding of a worker's state, early on, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx himself had commented on the tautological conditions of political revolutions in modernity in observing that tragic events inevitably return as farce. Writers like Mao Dun and Walter Benjamin, both heavily influenced by Marx and Marxist politics, had long been students of the political economy lessons of *Capital*, but each respectively returned to the lines of thought inquiring into the grasp that history holds over present social reality, and the doubts over revolution that Marx had expressed in texts like *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in the years before the completion of *Capital*. Their writings reflected a shared anxiety over the fundamental negation of human will in any model of temporality that attempts to link history with progress. Marx had famously outlined the puzzling tautology involved in understanding the limits of human consciousness within historical change further on in the essay: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." (p.5).

Within such a view of temporality and human action, social change based in popular revolution becomes an impossibility insofar as all volunteerism is negated. History proceeds according to the confluence of pre-existing circumstances and even violent or radical changes in the mode of production, or in class relations, arise directly out of a material precedent. Thus, revolutionary actions based on the expressed will of an individual or group are always ultimately linked causally to past political formations and social hierarchies based on these material conditions, and a seemingly new era would merely be the repetition of a historical precedent with an altered outward form. A new consciousness or spirit – a new era of the people, of the workers, and so forth – could only form following a break with history, but the nature of such a break in the chain of materiality is unthinkable beyond the realm of the hypothetical.<sup>2</sup> Mao Dun and Walter Benjamin both contend with Marx's early dilemma that all historical change must proceed according to vast material revolutions at the level of the mode of production. The result was an aporia for philosophers aiming to understand modern revolution, as the inescapable and implacable reach of the past into the present would seem to preclude actual or direct revolutionary agency, individual, class or otherwise.

Mao Dun and Benjamin's shared preoccupation with questions of the return of the past speaks to the fact that among Marxists in the 1930s there was a strong sense of the looming difficulty of the philosophical aporia that history presented the Marxist intellectual theorizing revolution. Their writings look back to Marx at a period in which he had begun to articulate a broader philosophical project inspired by his engagement with Hegel. In doing so, they reopen

<sup>1</sup> All translations from Chinese texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> The hypothetical contradiction presented by revolution as a sudden break that is also in continuity with history is present throughout Marx's writing, for example, in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in which Marx famously describes a proletariat that propels itself into a course of revolutionary historical change: "compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class [and which] ... by means of a revolution... [the proletariat] makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production" Marx, K. (1972). *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. The Marx-Engels Reader. New York: Norton, p. 491.

questions of history that were left incompletely resolved in Marx's writings on political economy. For Marxist intellectuals facing the uncertainty of the future of communism, their queries followed from serious doubts in Marxist historical materialism as a method of understanding the past. However, while the historian-protagonist of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" strives at every turn for a more and more committed materialism that nonetheless escapes his reach, Mao Dun's fictional stonecutter exemplifies a figure who hands work directly upon the very material of history.

These writers raise the possibility that rather than asserting revolution as a guiding principle of historic change that will eventually lead to a greater understanding of the present, the failure of revolutions to materialize in reality instead indicates that the totality of the past might be unavailable to philosophy as a discrete, or separate, object of knowledge. History, thus regarded, could only be understood through its influence upon present reality. As the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" describe, such irresolvable questions led Benjamin to reorient the work of the historian, or what he comes to call the "materialist historiographer," towards the study of the present and away from a past reconstructed through linear chronology and causality. Benjamin's account still provides for a revolutionary Marxist dialectic that would constitute a "leap in the open air of history" and provides an example of such a break in the period of the French Revolution (p. 261). In evoking the ways in which revolutionary events enact such a "leap," Benjamin gives examples of anachronism whereby the signs of the past became "charged with the time of the now" and "blasted out of the continuum of history" (p. 261). In Mao Dun's case, however, the problematic coincidence of history and the present led to a deeper scrutiny of the role of the hidden laborer engaged in the invention of events that later appear as revolutions. Through this figure, a modern propagandist as master craftsman that is neither political leader, storyteller nor intellectual, Mao Dun's story depicts revolution as a cultural construct, in which history is a fiction constructed from the materials of anachronism. In agreement with the basic Benjaminian premise that the present can never escape history, Mao Dun's view nonetheless departs from Benjamin in seeing all revolutions as narratives of deception based in a manipulation of temporality. The suspension, and preservation, of anachronism means that the business of making history is still dialectical but based in the canceling out of truth. Moreover, far from constituting the "leap in the open air," that Benjamin describes, such narratives are at their most effective carefully planned by those in power to most effectively use the influence of the past to make history.

Mao Dun's set of stories based on *Water Margin* are a remarkable departure from the rest of the writer's oeuvre, most of which were set in contemporary times with everyday people as protagonists, reflecting his tireless advocacy for forms of literary realism.<sup>3</sup> The story "Stone Tablet" uses the anachronism of the novel's Song-dynasty setting to play with assumptions about history as discourse and to put the theme of revolution under scrutiny. Anachronism and, more generally, the deliberate manipulation of historical facts to alter the present, is produced most clearly in a narratological way in the story's conception: the invented scene comes just after the seventieth chapter of the original text and the forged, buried, and then unearthed tablet will change the course of the rest of the original novel, as the writing on the stone will putatively establish the hierarchy and legitimacy of the group of warrior-protagonists. The short story is thus fundamentally structured by the notion that history is always already written beforehand: that undisclosed actors construct historical narratives in ways that long precede, and are even imperceptible to, general understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> In the 1958 essay "Occasional Reflections on Nighttime Reading" ("夜读偶记") Mao Dun elaborates theoretical views that stress the importance of realism to Chinese literary culture.

The central plot device of the burial and rediscovery of the tablet in “Stone Tablet,” succinctly captures Mao Dun’s pessimism regarding the revolutionary breaks in history. Although the past – the field of historical accounts through which the totality of social relations might be understood and interpreted – might contain buried evidence of great historical change, these buried monuments of history might also all be forgeries. “Stone Tablet” was written by Mao Dun during a momentary lapse in his participation in the CPC and, like Benjamin’s theses on history, it examines temporal paradox as an intellectual approach in an attempt to evoke the ways in which those in power retroactively recreate their own versions of past – versions of the past that thereby become the predicate and prehistory of a present moment that they seek to control. Unlike Benjamin’s more detached meditations, Mao Dun thus sought to take up a dialectical practice of writing – with a tale that required a simultaneous thinking of the past within the present – to represent the flaws that the perennial failures of popular revolution exposed in Marxist modes of historical materialism.

### **Reasoning through the Failed Promise of Revolution: Mao Dun’s Early Fiction**

The tales of gallant and heroic men embittered by the corruption of ruling power in *Water Margin* served Mao Dun well as a vehicle for representing the nascent problems that Chinese communism faced as a political and cultural movement in the 1920s. The depictions of the fraternity of legendary heroes of the story resonated with principles of socialist politics of class warfare and redistribution of wealth for readers who sympathized with Mao Dun’s communist viewpoints. More specifically, when the story was published in 1930, as one in a series of three stories of speculative fiction by Mao Dun – two of which were drawn from *Water Margin* – there would have been strong parallels between these exiled heroes and communist militants fighting in the rural provinces and moving towards becoming a coherent political party with a strong leader.

Three years prior, in the summer of 1927, Mao Dun was in Jiangxi near Mount Lu (庐山), staying with a group of communist intellectuals that had left Shanghai after the Nationalist-dominated government had begun to target communist agitators. These intellectuals considered the push in Jiangxi as the culmination of their activism in communist politics; a moment that they hoped would culminate in what they called “The Big Revolution” (大革命). In the months to follow, and after Mao Dun and many other intellectuals in his group ended their sojourn in Jiangxi, a final campaign was launched by the communist military leadership that had stayed behind, which would later be known as the Autumn Harvest Uprising. Although a full military campaign in Jiangxi against the Nationalist government was ultimately impossible, the events in Jiangxi would go on in CPC history as the first serious action of the communist People’s Liberation Army. Nevertheless, at the time these were considered largely unsuccessful campaigns and tactical defeats.

With keen anguish, Mao Dun later recalled the failure of the push in Jiangxi to produce the revolution of which he dreamed. A study of Mao Dun’s diaries and memoirs by Zhang Guanghai (2012) describes the way in which the events in Jiangxi led to a formative experience of disappointment in the writer in the face of what he saw as the failure of “The Big Revolution.” Closely following his day-to-day life, but unable to pinpoint the precise cause for his break with the party, Zhang quotes Mao Dun’s later recollections in which the author describes how his strong feelings of dismay stemmed from the fact that over the course of the revolution he encountered an array of people supporting incongruous revolutionary goals – from non-believers posing as far-leftists to determined fanatics – all driven to action, with either

blind passion or in their own self-interest. Throughout, he was most deeply troubled by what he saw as the “opportunism” of the revolutionary militants who had traveled to engage in activism. Additionally, Mao Dun also relates that at this point he had begun to question whether the theories espoused by the representatives of international Marxist-Leninism within the group of Chinese communists could effectively grasp the complexity of the Chinese social and economic situation (p. 20).

Faced with disappointment in orthodox communism, Mao Dun would venture into fiction as a mode through which he could negotiate the internal conflicts of emotion brought on by the failure of his ideal of revolution. Zhang Guanghai observes that in the writer’s early attempts at fiction in the novellas collected in the volume *Shi* (《蚀》) expressed Mao Dun’s “doubts about communism’s policies on revolution through the form of the novel and literary criticism not long after he left the [communist] party.” Zhang continues by stating that the “stories became a powerful tool for Mao Dun to deal his innermost contradictions” and that, through the creation of stories, he rendered his own reactions to the revolutionary period into narrative, thereby “establishing his own form of reasoning” (p. 21).

The characters of this fiction are rough and mimetic depictions of youth undergoing dilemmas over the misconceptions and relativism that lies behind the ideal of revolution. Despite the fact that in *Shi* Mao Dun’s reinvention of fiction as its own mode of reasoning was in an incipient form the text still contains an urge towards an alternative way of capturing history. As Lan Dazhi (1998) has written on Mao Dun’s work in this period, Mao Dun meant for these stories to act as conduits for the totality of the lived experience of revolution among the young people of China in the 1920s and 1930s in a way that could not be conveyed through the accounts of historians:

A historian of revolutions must properly narrate the affairs of history strictly according to revolutionary ideas, but when an author writes about revolutions it permits him to freely describe the personal experiences and impressions of a literary work in his [portrayal of] historical processes, it permits him to unconsciously permeate the [character’s] confusion and doubts, it permits an entirely different voice to emerge. (p. 25)

With his first attempts at narrative in *Shi*, Mao Dun summoned mind and body to reproduce the sensation of historical events through fiction. This pursuit would continue to occupy him for the next half-decade as he explored other ways that fiction could supersede historical writing.

### **History as Forgery: Representing Historical Paradox and Confronting Modern Chinese Historiography in “Stone Tablet”**

The characters that Mao Dun selects from *Water Margin* for “Stone Tablet” are Xiao Rang, a scholar and calligrapher, and Jin Dajian, sealmaker and craftsman carver. In these contrasting figures, he portrays an underlying opposition between intellect and labor that double as representations of the internal conflicts within revolutionary political movements. The basic narrative conflict that opens the story stems from the scholar’s annoyance as he observes the stonecutter carving the tablet and laughing under his breath – a mirthful laughter, as he is carried away with his work, and a chuckling over the secrets that they are privy to in carrying out the plot of forgery. The laughter occurs at an intersection of labor and affect and represents a release of the undirected revolutionary energy of the proletariat that Bakhtin (1984) called

“the least scrutinized sphere of the people's creation” (p. 4). However, this energy remains in its potential state, as it has no place in the plot organized by the outlaw leaders.

Xiao Rang takes it upon himself to admonish Jin Dajian for his irreverent laughter, but he also has deep reservations over their plan and its outcome. He launches upon an internal diatribe that not only describes his misgivings, but also allegorizes the dilemmas that an intellectual like Mao Dun faced moving from the initial euphoria of communist theory into a practical association with communist activists:

Drinking wine from the big bowl ... schemes in which they divided up the loot on the big scale, originally asking for everyone's approval only depended on the word 'fairness'; they just would not suffer injustice and that was why they took to the wild to become outlaws. To be without 'fairness' just does not suit the hero of the wood (绿林好汉). All as one take the lead, all as one trade-off upon the lion- skin seat in the hall of the loyal and righteous. Of course there is also the ordering of number one and number two, but this is just purely for the record! There is no outlaw group that doesn't keep this kind of 'record,' and anyway this 'main seat' ('主座') must be given by common acclamation, there should be no hidden motive or deception. Unfortunately, General Wu Yong's 'plan' looks a bit too much like craftiness. (p. 203)

Xiao Rang is dubious of the plan for the forgery that was devised by the sorcerer-outlaw Wu Yong. He ruefully ponders the loss of the “all for one and one for all” principles of the outlaws in their initial years – the preceding half of *Water Margin* – in which they lived as a communal brotherhood.

The faint laughter of the Jin Dajian continues on until Xiao Rang decides to rebuff the stonecutter's impudence by explaining the seriousness of the quandary involved in their task. He starts by asking Jin Dajian how he would compare two of the leading heroes of the group – Lu Junyi, who was formerly a wealthy landowner, and Song Jiang, who had been a farmer's son and deputy of a local court before becoming an outlaw. Jin Dajian responds heartily that “both are famed heroes throughout the land” (p. 204). Somewhat stymied by the enthusiasm, but not to be misunderstood, Xiao Rang rephrases “hmm...Brother Jin, good and bad, these are always there, just rank who is superior” (p. 204). Asked to create distinctions in a group whose guiding principle is equality, the stonecutter again responds with complete credulity with the simple conviction that “men become have always become fellows just by joining the group” (p. 204).

Although he feels trusting of the man's innocence, Xiao Rang feels compelled to cut down Jin Dajian's naive sincerity and convey the significance of the hierarchy that must be established through their act of forging this stone. Instead of accepting the answer that just by joining the group the men all become equal as fellows, Xiao Rang insistently states that the men do not all have the same “background.” To clarify, Xiao Rang lists the former occupations of the outlaws (including sons of wealthy households in decline, former Daoist priests and men who ran brigand's inns) and makes distinctions between those who were and were not members of the imperial court. The opacity of this word for “background” stands out as a critical discrepancy at this moment in the story: “background” (出身), a word implying where or how one's self was produced, becomes a sign that stands out in its arbitrariness – in its shifting relation to history. Having connotations of both class, identity and even possibly the body, and indicating a

completely different range of social positions based on the historical context in which it is read, this term reveals traces of Marxist historiography at the core of the story.

The word for “background” that Mao Dun employs through Xiao Rang is a shifting semiotic unit that marks the absolute historical difference between different social conditions in different eras. The given significance of the term must be linked to a specific temporal context and the term only has meaning within the larger order of social relations of that context. Thus, what follows from the distinction that Xiao Rang is naming with the word “background” is that plot, characters, settings, and even the language of the story itself must be read and deciphered differently depending on the historical context tied to the word. For the critical theorist of literature, this word is a juncture in the story at which the reader has to decide whether the story should be read as a subversive critique of modern politics, or simply as a yarn that imagines a historical moment that is long past. In the former reading, fluctuating with regard to the political economy of society, the invocation of this term for “background” can bring capital into focus as the dominant force in modern society. As such, in modern times this word’s usage frequently becomes linked to economic class and would stand clearly juxtaposed against the feudal relations of landed property-owners of the Song Dynasty setting of the story. Rather than allowing for a generalized and transhistorical social reality, the term brings to light changes separating the premodern and modern contexts of the story.

The splitting of the story that occurs with this term correlates with key elements in Marxist thought on history. In the notes he prepared previous to composing *Capital* and collected in the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973) attempts to understand the knotty relation between the social and the historic in a passage that establishes a way of reading history along the lines of Marxist thought. He writes that “in all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others.” A key to all other social designations, and thus crucial to reading these relations in history, Marx calls this “form of production” “a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity” (pp. 106–107). Behind the seemingly simple task of ranking the men and assigning hierarchy, Mao Dun’s word for “background” catches the illumination of capital, as Marx describes it, and thus becomes a figure of speech that reflects the order of the modern (or premodern) political economy.

Upon being asked to rank the men, the Jin Dajian detects unfairness and he begins to discern the way that the men are being singled out from the fraternity. He refers to this as the influence of “private affairs” (私事), with the connotation that these are plottings between individuals not decided by the entire group. To this, Xiao Rang responds with confident trust in following the plan of these individuals as it unfolds into the group’s common destiny. The reference to “private,” signals related ideas of individual motives, and refers back not only to the very early concerns that Mao Dun had over the opportunism of revolutionaries, it carries overtones of the new forms of Chinese historiography that had emerged with Liang Qichao, which promoted individual moral and educational improvement as a historical praxis. As Jiang Mei (2017) summarizes Liang’s ideas – which were highly influential among historians in the early years of the twentieth century in China – individuals are the focus of the study of history in that they are seen as “members of an ethnic group [that] ... develop mass consciousness ... [who will then] realize that they are masters of the nation and subjects of history”(p. 79).<sup>4</sup> As a representative voice of such a view in the story, Xiao Rang is confident that the objectives of the individual will inevitably benefit the group, as well as society, as a whole. The text thus

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by Carissa Fletcher



involves not only Marxist historical materialism, but also strains of Chinese pragmatist philosophy of history, with the greater aim of disrupting both of these intellectual traditions.

As Xiao Rang attempts to finally assuage Jin Dajian of his reservations in this manner, he suggests that the ultimate ingenuity of the plan that they are carrying out is that, with their momentous actions, the group's destiny will achieve an objective even beyond that of the will of “heaven” itself. He refers here to “heaven” as it is an element in a phrase that is ubiquitous throughout *Water Margin* – and immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the text: “to deliver justice on heaven's behalf” (替天行道). In place of this, he says, they will assert the “will of heaven” (天意). To this, the stonecutter strongly protests by saying that “the will of heaven is vague and unclear” (p. 205) and he questions Xiao Rang with regards to how this should be brought about.

The wordplay in their interaction revolves around the phrase “to deliver justice on heaven's behalf.” As the recognizable slogan associated with the acts of heroism of its protagonists, altering the phrase is a sign of a radical break in the ethos of the group of outlaws. Changing this phrase implies that the outlaws will no longer be representatives of just action that accords with the ideal of the way that things are done in heaven. To this, Jin Dajian queries in utter shock, “are we called upon to replace heaven itself?” (p. 205). In effect, this is a syntactical lapse that stands in for a revolutionary break. Of course, these passages in Mao Dun's text also most likely deliberately echo Marx's famous statement in “Theses on Feuerbach,” that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (p. 571), yet Mao Dun's characters do not embrace the idea that such a universal standard of justice can be a reality. As such, in disbelief and disapproval the stonecutter carves a message that will be included with the forgery on the stone and thus be transmitted to posterity: “It seems that even the fiercest fellows among us are still defined by personal relationship – you must name them individually according to their background: On the behalf of ‘heaven’ this will be the way” (p. 207).

As a cultural artifact, *Water Margin* indeed fulfills his words: in the chapter that follows each hero is singled out according to their rank and nickname and, indeed, each enters popular lore known individually by his own fame and reputation. In this way, they are not unlike the familiar cast of CPC characters in the television show depicting the founding myth of revolution discussed at the beginning of this essay.

In the story's conclusion, through Jin Dajian's protests, Mao Dun conjures up the force of historical difference within capitalism: read in a capitalist society, with each character fetishized as a heroic individual and subject to the inescapable pull of “background,” even a centuries-old classic of insurrection like *Water Margin* stands to lose much of its power of subversion. Even more ominously, the story depicts the loss of the power of collectivity, so that even classical heroes are no longer able to act on behalf of “heaven.” Even though they have gained autonomy and a freedom from idealism, they are left unmoored from a common purpose and reason for being. This final word on representations of modern revolutions rejects the naive positivism of historiographers like Liang Qichao, and the ostensibly scientific formula of a combination of individual, race, and nation as destiny that they embrace.

The ending also brings a negation of simplistic hopes for a Marxist worker's revolution imagined within a historical materialist point of view, with the conclusion that even “heaven” has become a powerful forgery and a theological conceit. Although “heaven” substantiates the heroes' claims to individual fame, the idea of heaven has been converted from an omnipotent

force into a human-made fiction that serves the short-sighted purposes of the outlaw leadership. In other words, rather than constituting an integral part of a narrative based on an ethos in which the heroes act on behalf of heaven, heaven has become monolithic, monumentalized, and only meaningful in direct reference to the heroes whose rise it has authorized. To put this outcome in terms of what Mao Dun saw in the creation of a narrative of modern communist revolution: in creating the hierarchy that is necessary to lead the people, and thereby fabricating an inviolable order to give legitimacy to this hierarchy, the very essence of communism, the immanent principle of equality of a people involved in mass politics, is lost. The problem of provoking historical transformation through revolutionary praxis is thus instead portrayed in terms that overlap with Walter Benjamin's writings on history in their attention to the insurmountable paradox that consumed Marx in his writings on revolution previous to *Capital*, during the period in which Marx probed the irresolvable dilemmas presented by Hegel's concept of the "Spirit" of history.

### **Haunted by the Spirit of Hegel: Theology, the Failure of Revolution and the Messianic in Mao Dun and Walter Benjamin**

Mao Dun expresses an outright denial of revolutionary possibility in "Stone Tablet" by portraying the fabrication of a new order of heroes and hierarchies upon the collapsed ideal of an egalitarian, communal revolution. Mao Dun indicates that this false image of revolution is seamless because it is accompanied by a theological ploy to create a new form of "heaven" as the guarantor of revolution – a heaven that will be secular, ideological and materialist to match the conditions of a putatively new era. In the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin recounts the very same trick – played in order to give an audience an impression that the grounds of historical change can be fully known – through the figure of the chess automaton, which he describes as "a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which ... is wizened and has to keep out of sight." He continues on to say that such a device is comparable to the "puppet," which he states stands in for "historical materialism" in modern philosophy (p. 253). Both writers thus agree that Marxist materialist accounts had failed to fully foresee the clandestine return of theology in the modern political state, which would dilute the terms of a worker's revolution by replacing belief in the ultimate authority of the people with a belief in the omnipotence of the progression of modern historical change.

Troubled by doubts that materialist explanations of historical reality might only result in a chain of further contradictions, both writers concentrate on moments in which material reality gives way to ephemerality. Seen in this light, the failure of the working-class revolutions that Marx predicts as eventualities which will gradually lead to the transformation of global societies – and, more generally, the failure of modern history to produce the lasting popular revolutions that Marx foresaw – becomes a consequence of the unresolved problems of philosophical idealism. Through their speculations on theology, both writers suggest the need for theories of historical change to return to a focus on Marx's early encounters with Hegelian philosophy of history.

As an object of knowledge that he could only describe as "Spirit," Hegel (1988) refers to the predetermined nature of history as having a quality of "self-consciousness ... [in which] subject and object—coincide" (p. 20). He concisely expresses the paradoxes involved in such an object of knowledge – that is, history as it can be engaged by philosophy – with a comparison to the work of his philosophical predecessor Gottfried Leibniz, namely, with his use of the term "theodicy." He writes:

To that extent our approach is a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God. Leibniz attempted a theodicy in metaphysical terms ... so that when once the evil in the world was comprehended in this way, the thinking mind was supposed to be reconciled to it. Nowhere, in fact, is there a greater challenge to such intellectual reconciliation than in world history. (p. 18)

Carrying the term from a metaphysical into a philosophical register, Hegel thus indicates that concept of theodicy is an apt figure for imagining history as a closed system within which knowledge and reality are mutually intertwined. For Hegel, however, knowledge must come to a “reconciliation” with the reality that it has a hand in creating, not to achieve this would be to lapse into an illusion that the question of history is a superficially metaphysical one – namely, one in which human agency would be surrendered as part of an eschatological worldview (and an essentially theological one) featuring only a figure of God (or good) and evil.

In the premodern narratives of deception and intrigue in *Water Margin*, Mao Dun found human agency irrecoverably lost in an endless current of repeated historical precedent, in which those who make, or rewrite, history deploy theology to their own ends. Benjamin, on the other hand, sought in premodern theology an opportunity to recover the dialectical resources of philosophy that would provide “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past”(p. 263). Benjamin extracts his concept of “messianism” from the anachronistic theological worldview that traps modern societies in the illusion of a heaven-ordained forward movement through the storm of progress. In other words, Benjamin salvages this concept as a mode of self-consciousness out of the abyss of the metaphysics of modern history as theology. On this point, the disillusioned pessimism of Mao Dun and the melancholic optimism of Walter Benjamin actually converge in a figurative language for thinking historical paradox that reconciles knowledge and belief: both writers use a premodern scenes of a sacred ideal materialized on earth (for Benjamin, the figure of the messiah and for Mao Dun the heaven-sent tablet) to seize upon the ways in which theological constructs continue to compromise materialist accounts of history by offering illusions of progress in lieu of knowledge of history. In short, the writer revisits an instance of historical return to find a key to understanding epochal change embedded in premodern cultural forms. Mao Dun’s story thus amplifies Walter Benjamin’s call for critical that will throw aside myths of forward progress and instead focus the energies of the intellectual on the sites of history’s return. In other words, to understand historical change, one must not look for a revolutionary break that initiates an unprecedented future, but rather learn to interpret the disguises that the departed forms of the past take up upon their return to the present.

By exploring the conjuncture of the present through characters facing the corruption of an earlier dynasty, Mao Dun's story opens up a poetic space in which to newly read the present through its relationship with the past. Although the two writer’s views of historical materialism have much in common, in many ways, Mao Dun’s historical poetics made the initial discovery of the “messianism” that will forever be tied to Benjamin’s intellectual legacy. Benjamin would begin to formulate his own theses on history not long after Mao Dun’s story was written, having reached a similar impasse with materialist theories of history, and he establishes the concept as a theoretical intervention that cuts across both materialist and idealist accounts of history. Benjamin extends the theological usage of “messianism” in order to describe the powerful philosophical force of reconciliation that the study of history can have to liberate knowledge of the present from the grip with which history seems to hold it. As Benjamin writes, such a viewpoint has the power to “to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears... singled out by history at the moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of tradition and its receivers ... of becoming a tool of the ruling classes” (p. 255). Mao Dun, for his part,

was doubtless struck by such a “messianic” image when he was reading the passage in the original text of *Water Margin* that most likely inspired his story: a strange section of the tale in which “heaven’s eye,” (天眼), opens in the sky above the heroes as an omen that a sacred stone tablet has been buried below.

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## **Impact of Political Freedom and Uncertainty Avoidance on Anonymous Source Use in Media**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper undertakes a quantitative study of how political freedom and uncertainty avoidance affect anonymous sourcing in political news. It undertakes a quantitative comparison of anonymous source usage in political reports between India and Pakistan. The authors studied whether there would be significant difference in anonymous source usage between Pakistan and Indian media due to Pakistan having less political and media freedom. Using the theoretical construct of uncertainty avoidance, the authors researched whether anonymous sources in Pakistani media were identified more by their rank or position in political parties than anonymous sources in Indian news stories. They also studied whether Pakistani media gave reasons for anonymous sources seeking anonymity more than Indian reports. The study used news stories from the *Times of India* and *Dawn* as samples. The authors found that anonymous source usage in Pakistani media was significantly higher than Indian media. The authors attributed it to lack of political freedom in Pakistan. They also found that Indian political reports identified anonymous sources with their official hierarchy significantly more than Pakistani political reports. However, Pakistani political reports gave reasons for sources seeking anonymity significantly more than Indian political reports. This was attributed to higher Uncertainty Avoidance Index in Pakistan. The authors also found that Pakistani media had a significantly higher number of anonymous sources not identified by any information related to their involvement in event or incident the sources were talking about. This was attributed to lack of political freedom.

**Keywords:** Anonymous sources, India, Pakistan, media, politics, *Times of India*, *Dawn*

## Introduction

Journalists attribute news to sources as part of their professional routine. While most sources are identified by their names and official designation to accord credibility as well as objectivity to news stories (Zelizer, 1989), many of them are not named in news stories when journalists feel their sources would be exposed to retribution or hostile action for having supplied media organizations with critical information (Gilson, 2003). Journalists face a regular dilemma in using anonymous sources. On the one hand, using them may result in loss of credibility for journalists because people will not be able to verify news (Bell, 1991), while on the other hand, not using anonymous sources would result in important news not being published (Hoyt, 2009). Many news organizations have guidelines for using anonymous sources, for instance, the Associated Press (“Associated Press,” 2013). However, many media outlets do not have established rules for using anonymous sources in news, for instance, the South African newspaper *Mail & Guardian* (“Mail & Guardian,” 2010). While using anonymous sources in news reports, many media organizations, for instance, the Associated Press (2013), have made it binding on journalists to provide information about the hierarchy of the source in his profession or whether the source was in some way involved in decision making on the information attributed to him or explain reasons for the source seeking anonymity. This enhances journalistic credibility among the audience.

Allen (2008) linked journalistic credibility with transparency. However, he argues that transparency and media credibility are not always linked. Nevertheless, he urges media organizations to adopt transparency in providing news, for instance, naming sources in news reports (Allen, 2008). The use of anonymous sources denies audience the knowledge of source availability and the relation of the source with the news event about which the source has provided information to the journalist. Research has found that news reports, in which information was provided to the audience by anonymous sources, were considered less credible than those in which such unnamed sources were not used (Sternadori & Thorson, 2009). The term anonymous sources has often been used for both full and partial anonymity in academic scholarship. The term has also been used interchangeably by academics and scholars with the terms veiled sources (e.g., Culbertson, 1975), unnamed sources (e.g. Adams, 1962) and confidential sources (e.g., Strupp, 2005) in news stories.

This paper undertakes a quantitative study of how political freedom and uncertainty avoidance affect anonymous sourcing in political news. The paper compares anonymous source usage in political news between India and Pakistan because the two nations have different levels of political freedom and uncertainty avoidance. The study, using the theoretical constructs of uncertainty avoidance and political freedom, takes into account political news in Indian and Pakistani media in 2014, because both countries went through political upheaval during that period. India held national elections to elect a federal government, while Pakistan went through political unrest and terrorism in 2014.

## Literature Review

### Anonymous sources in news media

Political news media are heavily dependent on official sources. However, official sources at times seek anonymity while giving news to journalists. Duffy and Williams (2011) found that the use of anonymous sources in 2008 on the front pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in the United States was similar to those in the decades before the Watergate scandal. Smith (2007) argued that people were supportive of anonymous sources being used in



a story about governmental wrongdoing, but not in news reports that mounted a personal attack on an official. Zhang (2011) found rampant use of anonymous sources in news stories in China. A study of news reports that appeared in the Chinese press between 2001 and 2010 and that turned out to be false showed that half of the news stories attributed information to only anonymous sources (Zhang, 2011).

Pjesivac and Rui (2014) found that people in the United States and China rated news stories with named sources as more credible than those stories that had only anonymous sources to provide news. Li (1998) carried out a content-analysis of the sources used in *The New York Times*' coverage of China. He argues that anonymous source usage increased during the student protests in China in 1989. He found that nearly half of the sources quoted in the stories were not identified by any kind of information. *Washington Post* associate editor Bob Woodward, known for his role in the Watergate scandal coverage, argues that it is difficult to get news using named sources from places such as the White House or Pentagon. He therefore advocates the use of anonymous sources (Shepard, 1994). In view of the fact that anonymous source usage may impact journalistic credibility, Carl Lavin, deputy managing editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, argues against the use of anonymous sources by journalists. However, he also cautions that the need to use anonymous sources must be balanced with the need to provide important news that cannot be obtained using other means to the public (Crary, 2005).

There have been instances when reports attributed to anonymous sources have later turned out to be inaccurate. For instance, *Newsweek* in 2005, broke an investigative story attributed to one, unnamed military source (Seelye & Lewis, 2005). The magazine reported that an American official at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility had shown disrespect to the Muslim holy book, the Koran. The magazine later retracted the story on the ground that the unnamed source was unsure of the news he had provided to the reporter (Seelye & Lewis, 2005). Though the story was attributed to many military sources, the editors later said that it was based on only one anonymous source (Seelye & Lewis, 2005).

Blankenburg (1992) found that between February 1990 and February 1991, words such as "sources said" or "officials said" were used in 30% of stories from the *LA Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. The use of vague descriptions of sources cited in news stories is also a matter of concern to journalists and scholars. The magazine *Newsweek*'s editor-in-chief Richard M. Smith in a letter to the publication audience argued against the use of the phrase "sources said" (Kurtz, 2005). Sternadori (2007) found that between 1994 and 2002, as many as 19 percent of the anonymous sources in non-winning stories and 12 percent of the anonymous sources cited in Pulitzer and Investigative Reporters and Editors award-winning stories were veiled in a manner that one could not identify whether they were governmental sources. Little, if any, quantitative research is available on the use of anonymous sources in political news in South Asia.

### **Media-government relations in India and Pakistan**

Pakistan came into being after the division of India in 1947. Pakistan has, at times, seen turbulent relations between its government and media. The nation has had more than 30 years of military rule alternating with democratically elected governments ("Let's start," 2016). Often Pakistani media has been subservient to the military rulers of the country through self-censorship (Younus, 2015). The country's official electronic media is owned and controlled by the federal government, while the government exercises indirect control over print media. The government influences news content by offering advertisement contracts to only those media organizations that adhere to its demands, and by offering houses and land to journalists. For

instance, the federal government offered journalists land to construct houses in order to get favorable press coverage at a time when their anti-terrorist operations were not going well. However, those journalists that do not do the federal government's bidding are often intimidated (Riaz, 2008).

Notwithstanding whether the Pakistan army is ruling the country, it continues to influence the politics of the nation (Khan, 2015). The Pakistan army has often faced allegations of illegally detaining and killing reporters who have brought out investigative stories about its wrongdoings (Jalal, 2014). For example, noted Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir had attributed an assassination attempt on him to the Inter-Services Intelligence or the ISI, which is a spying agency affiliated with the Pakistan Army ("Hamid Mir," 2014). During the military rule of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan witnessed censorship of its media through the press advice system of the military regime. Violations of rules laid out by the military government were punishable with a prison term of up to 10 years and payment of a fine ("Pakistan," 2015). Later, despite the Nawaz Sharif-led civilian government's pressure on the media to not publish news against the government, many media organizations and journalists continue writing against the government of the day ("Pakistan," 2015). There are more than 1,500 newspapers and journals published in Pakistan. The *Dawn* with a daily circulation of 675,000 copies is the largest selling English-language newspaper in the nation ("World press," 2015).

According to Freedom House ratings, the Pakistan media is not free. The ratings gave the country a press freedom score of 64 on a scale of 0-100, where 0 symbolized free media and 100 meant a country with no media freedom ("Freedom of," 2016). The Freedom House also ranked Pakistan low on political freedom. It gave the nation a score of 30 on a scale of 0-40, where a score of 0 meant a country with absolute political freedom while a score of 40 meant the country had no political freedom ("Pakistan," 2016).

While Pakistan alternated between democracy and military rule, India remained a stable democracy since it won independence in 1947 (Guha, 2009). The media in India remains largely free and has always spoken out against authoritarianism and abuse of power ("Indian media," 2015). The media in India faced restrictions briefly between 1975-77 when the nation was placed under emergency by then prime minister Indira Gandhi. The emergency was marked by press censorship and restrictions on civil rights of the people of the country. However, once the emergency was lifted the media continued to report without restrictions ("India media," 2015). The early 1990s saw economic liberalization in the country resulting in a surge of foreign investment in and growth of the India media (Chakravarty, 2003). As many as 105,443 newspapers and periodicals in 23 languages are registered with the Indian government (Dubbudu, 2015). The *Times of India* with over three million daily circulation is the most widely read English-language daily in India ("World press," 2016). Though the federal and state governments in India did not try to impose restrictions on the media, there have been cases of violent attacks on journalists for exposing governmental wrongdoings. For instance, journalist Jagendra Singh was burned alive after he published a story about a politician who had raped a woman (Pleasance, 2015). According to Freedom House ratings, the media in India is partly free ("India," 2016). It gave a press freedom score of 40 to the country on a scale of 0-100. The Freedom House also gave India a score of 20 on political freedom on a scale of 0-40, where a score of 0 meant a country with absolute political freedom, while a score of 40 meant the country had no political freedom ("India," 2016). The press freedom and political freedom scores for India reflected that there was more press and political freedom in India than in Pakistan. The press and political freedom scores lay out that there is difference on both parameters, that is, press and political freedom between India and Pakistan.

Therefore, this research becomes important because anonymous source usage may also be linked to political and press freedom. With more political and press freedom, people will be more open about their views and anonymous source usage will be less in such nations.

**Hypothesis 1:** Anonymous source usage in Pakistan media will be significantly higher than Indian media.

### **Uncertainty avoidance**

The Uncertainty Avoidance Index measures the degree to which an individual can tolerate uncertainty (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede based uncertainty avoidance on three features: 1) the degree to which people will flout guidelines established by their employers, 2) the degree to which people seek stability in their jobs, and 3) the frequency of people feeling uncertain or nervous at work. He also gave an uncertainty avoidance comparison between various countries.

Huo and Randall (1991) measured uncertainty avoidance between managers at workplaces in Beijing and Hong Kong in China. The Uncertainty Avoidance Index was slightly higher in Hong Kong as compared with Beijing. Wu (2008) compared leadership styles between the United States and Taiwan. He found that there was no significant difference between them. He, however, argued that university workers in both the countries had high uncertainty avoidance values. Yun (2008) studied the relation between excellence in public diplomacy and Hofstede's dimensions using data from 52 embassies in Washington DC in the United States. He found that the dimension of uncertainty avoidance had a significant association with excellence in public diplomacy initiatives of countries. He found that countries with low uncertainty avoidance scores were more accepting of excellence in public diplomacy than countries with high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Hofstede ("The Hofstede," 2015) gave India a medium-low score of 40 on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, while Pakistan got a high uncertainty avoidance score of 70. The Uncertainty Avoidance Index gives a score between 0 and 100, where 0 means a country where uncertainty avoidance is at a minimum, while 100 symbolizes maximum uncertainty avoidance. According to Hofstede, India is a patient country where tolerance of the unexpected is much higher than Pakistan. Hofstede argues that Pakistani society is not accepting of unorthodox ideas and the Pakistani people are bound by rigid rules that are seldom flouted ("The Hofstede," 2015). In light of Hofstede's higher uncertainty avoidance score for Pakistan, it can be argued that Pakistani media would use anonymous sources in such a manner that would help bring down uncertainty levels among its audience. In doing so, they may identify anonymous sources by their official hierarchy or rank within political parties. To avoid uncertainty among the audience, Pakistani media may also give reasons for such sources to seek anonymity more than Indian media organizations.

**Research Question 1:** Will Pakistani political reports identify anonymous sources with their official hierarchy or rank more than Indian political reports?

**Research Question 2:** Will Pakistani political reports give reasons for anonymous sources seeking anonymity more often than Indian political reports?

## **Method**

### **Samples**

To study anonymous source use in political stories the English-language dailies *Dawn* in Pakistan and the *Times of India* were chosen. The *Times of India* is the most widely read English-language newspaper in India with a daily circulation of over three million ("World press," 2016). The *Dawn* is the largest selling English language newspaper in Pakistan ("World

press,” 2015). The time frame of the study was between Jan. 1, 2014 and Dec. 31, 2014. The year 2014 was marked by major political developments in both India and Pakistan. India held national elections in 2014 to elect a prime minister. The elections resulted in a victory of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) whose leader Narendra Modi became the prime minister, replacing the Congress party’s (Cong) Manmohan Singh from prime ministership (“Narendra Modi,” 2014). For this study two Indian entities were chosen: BJP and Cong.

In 2014 Pakistan witnessed political upheaval. Allegations of rigged elections resulted in street protests against prime minister Nawaz Sharif from members of the political party Tehreek-i-Insaaf. There were allegations that the Pakistan army was inciting the protests against the civilian government to retain its control over politics in the country (Siddiqui, 2014). Also, Pakistan witnessed in 2014 a massacre of 141 school children by the terrorist outfit Taliban (“Pakistan Taliban,” 2014). The political party, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN), is at present in power in Pakistan (“Nawaz sworn,” 2013). Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) is the primary opposition party in the country (“PPP’s Khursheed,” 2013). For the study of anonymous sources in political news in Pakistan three entities were chosen: PMLN, PPP and Pakistan army.

To obtain story samples from the *Times of India*, the authors conducted LexisNexis Academic searches with the search term BJP in the headline AND the search terms given in Appendix . Similar searches were conducted for the Congress party with the search term Cong in the headline AND the search terms given in Appendix . To obtain story samples from the *Dawn*, the authors carried out LexisNexis Academic searches with the search term PMLN in the headline AND the search terms given in Appendix . Similar searches were conducted for the Pakistan People’s Party with the search term PPP in the headline AND the search terms given in Appendix . Another search was conducted with the search term army in the headline AND the search terms given in Appendix .

In all 957 stories were returned by the searches. After removing duplicates, the authors were left with 865 stories (611 from *Times of India* and 254 from *Dawn*). All types of news stories, including editorials, news reports and features were included in the study. As many as 150 stories from the *Times of India* and 120 stories from *Dawn* were randomly selected for the study.

### **Data analysis**

A quantitative content analysis was carried out on the stories included in the sample. The unit of study was an anonymous quote. A coding sheet was developed for the analysis. Included in the coding sheet were the following items: “Number of anonymous sources?”; “Number of anonymous sources not identified by any information?”; “How many anonymous sources identified by hierarchy within party (for instance, a senior leader said)?”; “Does the story say any anonymous source wanted anonymity (for instance, a source said on condition of anonymity)?”; “If the answer is ‘yes,’ how many anonymous sources wanted anonymity?”; “For how many anonymous sources a reason for anonymity has been given?”

The data obtained was entered into an SPSS file and statistical analyses were carried out.

### Intercoder reliability

To establish intercoder reliability, as many as 20% of the articles were independently coded. The coders had several rounds of discussions about the coding process for the study. The coders were able to resolve their differences through regular discussions about the coding process. Stories not included in the final sample were coded by the coders. Reliability coefficients in terms of Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) ranged from 0.75 to 1.00. A majority of the items reached alpha levels more than 0.90.

### Results

In answer to our first hypothesis, our analysis based on independent sample t-test showed that anonymous source usage was significantly more ( $N = 270$   $df = 268$   $t = 4.5$   $p < 0.05$ ) in *Dawn* political reports (mean = 5.20  $SD \pm 1.98$ ) than in *Times of India* political reports ( $4.04 \pm 1.62$ ). Therefore, the result supported hypothesis 1.

In answer to our first research question based on independent sample t-test we found that *Times of India* political reports ( $1.34 \pm 0.70$ ) had a significantly higher number of anonymous sources ( $N = 270$   $df = 268$   $t = 2.1$   $p < 0.05$ ) whose hierarchy in the political parties was mentioned as compared with *Dawn* political reports ( $1.14 \pm 0.55$ ). Therefore, Pakistani political reports did not identify anonymous sources with their official hierarchy or rank more significantly than Indian political reports.

We conducted a Pearson's chi-square test for the second research question. *Dawn* political reports ( $2.02 \pm 0.08$ ) gave reasons for anonymous sources seeking anonymity significantly more ( $N = 270$   $df = 2$   $\chi^2 = 7.80$   $p < 0.05$ ) than *Times of India* political reports ( $1.90 \pm 0.22$ ). Therefore, our study found that Pakistani political reports gave reasons for anonymous sources seeking anonymity significantly more than Indian political reports.

Additionally, we also found that *Dawn* political reports ( $3.25 \pm 1.84$ ) had a significantly higher number of anonymous sources ( $N = 270$   $df = 268$   $t = 3.7$   $p < 0.05$ ) that were not identified by any information about their role in the news that they were giving to journalists, for instance with phrases such as a "person involved in the decision-making process," than *Times of India* political reports ( $2.36 \pm 1.25$ ).

### Discussion

The results supported our hypothesis that anonymous source usage was significantly higher in Pakistan media than in Indian media. We attributed it to lack of political freedom in Pakistan than in India, as laid out by the Freedom House scores on political freedom ("India," 2016). Speaking without authorization to media or publishing unfavorable stories against the Pakistan army or powerful politicians result in assassination attempts. For example, noted Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir had accused the Inter-Services Intelligence or the ISI, which is a spying outfit linked to the Pakistan Army, of an attempt on his life ("Hamid Mir," 2014). Senior leaders of political parties discourage their junior colleagues to speak to media, oftentimes threatening them with expulsion or other forms of disciplinary action. For instance, Imran Khan, the chairman of the political party Tehreek-i-Insaaf, threatened to sack leaders from his party for speaking to media-persons about the problems the party was facing (Haider, 2015).

With regard to our first research question, we found that Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* did not give significantly more details about the hierarchy or position within the party of anonymous sources as compared with *Times of India* news reports. However, we found that the Indian

newspaper *Times of India* had a significantly greater number of anonymous sources about whom their rank in the party hierarchy was given in the political reports included in the study. A possible reason for this could be that press and political freedom (“India,” 2016) was more in India than in Pakistan (“Pakistan,” 2016) and that journalists in India may adhere more to ethics guidelines that are, however, not binding on Indian journalists. Also, a high Uncertainty Avoidance Index of 70 given to Pakistan (“The Hofstede,” 2015) may not have been a good predictor for Pakistan media to mention in political reports the hierarchy or official position of anonymous sources. According to Hofstede (“The Hofstede,” 2015) Pakistani society is not accepting of unorthodox ideas and Pakistani people are bound by rigid rules that are seldom flouted. This may be another reason why despite a higher Uncertainty Avoidance Index score (“The Hofstede,” 2015), Pakistan media do not have in political reports a significantly higher number of anonymous sources identified by their party hierarchy as compared with Indian media. More research, however, is needed on the effect of uncertainty avoidance on ways media identify anonymous sources in political reports.

The results to our second research question laid out that Pakistani political reports gave reasons for anonymous sources seeking anonymity significantly more than Indian political reports. Here the role of uncertainty avoidance on Pakistan media’s portrayal of anonymous sources may come into play. Pakistan media may have in their political reports given reasons for sources seeking anonymity to convince the audience about the fear such sources faced in being identified and also to boost media credibility in the eyes of the audience. Pjesivac and Rui (2014) found that news audience based out of the United States and China considered news based only on anonymous sources as less credible than stories where journalists identified their sources. This may be a pointer to enhanced journalistic credibility if anonymous sources are identified as much as possible in news reports.

Our results also found that political reports in *Dawn* had a significantly higher number of anonymous sources about whom nothing was said about their role in the news that they were giving, for instance with phrases like “a person involved in the decision-making process,” than in news reports in *Times of India*. Once again this can be attributed to lack of political freedom in Pakistan (“Pakistan,” 2016) as compared with India (“India,” 2016). Less political freedom in Pakistan would translate into journalists not identifying their anonymous sources, not even by their role in the decision making process for the event for which they were providing news to journalists. This research opens up scope for in-depth qualitative analysis of the role of uncertainty avoidance and political freedom in anonymous source usage by journalists. A qualitative analysis would involve in-depth interviews with journalists that was beyond the scope of the present study.

## Conclusions

The authors found that anonymous source usage in political news was significantly higher in Pakistani media. This was attributed to lack of political freedom in Pakistan. The authors also found that Indian media had a significantly greater number of anonymous sources about whom their rank in the party hierarchy was given in the political reports included in the study. This may have been due to more political freedom in India that translates into more media freedom. Pakistani political reports gave reasons for anonymous sources seeking anonymity significantly more than Indian political reports. This may have been due to greater desire for uncertainty avoidance in Pakistani society. This research has importance for both political journalism given the fact that journalists tend to use anonymous sources in political news reports.

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**Appendix**

BJP: a source said, sources said, an insider said, a senior party leader said, a BJP leader said.  
Cong: a source said, sources said, an insider said, a senior leader said, a Congress leader said.

PMLN: sources said, a source said, insider said, a senior leader said, a PMLN leader said, leader said.

PPP: sources said, a source said, insider said, a senior leader said, a PPP leader said, leader said.

Army: sources said, a source said, an insider said, an officer said, a senior officer said.

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