A NORDIC JOURNAL ON ASIA BY EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

# ASIA IN FOCUS

ISSUE V

SPRING 2018

ISSUE 5 · 2018

ASIA IN FOCUS

Asia in Focus is a peer-reviewed journal published online twice a year by NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. NIAS is a Nordic research and service institute focusing on Asia's modern transformations. Asia in Focus was initiated by NIAS to provide Master students and Ph.D. students affiliated to a Nordic institution a widely accessible and transnational forum to publish their findings. The focal point of the journal is modern Asian societies viewed from the standpoints of the social science and the humanities. The geographical focus is the Asian countries from Central Asia to Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand.



While the editorial committee is responsible for the final selection of content for Asia in Focus, the responsibility for the opinions expressed and the accuracy of the facts published in articles rest solely with the authors.

Publisher NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

Graphic Design Dennis Müller



Journal Website www.asiainfocus.dk

ISSN 2446-0001

Contact NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
Øster Farimagsgade 5
DK-1353 Copenhagen K
Denmark

asiainfocus@nias.ku.dk

# Contents

# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

2018 has arrived and we are happy to share that Asia in Focus continues to evolve! I took a look back over the previous four introductions to the regular Issues of Asia in Focus and at the statistics surrounding the submissions … there is no doubt that we are witnessing a growth in every aspect with each publication cycle: we are reaching an ever-growing number of early career researchers; the countries of origin and of residence of both the Editorial Team and the authors who submit papers are expanding; and the journal is becoming increasingly visible and accessible.

So far our team of reviewers, which includes members of our Editorial Committee and external expert researchers, has given detailed constructive guidance and feedback to nearly 100 early career academics – quite an achievement for a small journal like ours! As you will have read in the intro to Issue 4 (and if you have not read it, please do!), shaping academic careers is a privilege and a responsibility that our editorial team does not take lightly.

The team started out being entirely Copenhagen-based. As we transition into Issue 6, we have transgressed the borders of Copenhagen and Denmark and now have editors in Sweden, Norway and Finland who all have strong ties to leading academic environments in Europe and Asia. I truly believe that being endowed with such diversity in the team only strengthens the committee: it broadens our collective perspective about how the journal progresses, and expands the views on the potential of the submissions we receive.

With the first few issues, the submissions came primarily from Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Recently we are receiving more from Norway, as well as enquiries from early career researchers attending institutes of higher education in Asian and other European countries. NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies has for many years been a part of the European Alliance (see www.asiascholars.eu), and after some great talks with the Alliance, we decided to open the journal to submissions from early career scholars who are attending higher education institutes Europe-wide! We are excited to receive submissions from a broader cross section of authors and we are truly look forward to Asia in Focus becoming a leading European journal for early career scholars.

Finally, this year we are joining the Danish open source journal management and publishing system Tidsskrift.dk (see www.tidsskrift.dk). This is an exciting step for Asia in Focus as well as the contributing authors as it will increase the visibility of the journal greatly and that each article will have its own individual identifier (DOI). This development is also a further step towards being registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

I now leave you to enjoy the excellent contributions to Issue 5. We start with ***Therese Boje Mortensen*** necessarily putting international human rights conventions into a local context, and questioning the normative acceptance of 'institutions as a last resort' when it comes to children in rural India. Staying in India, ***Patrick Wenström*** then reminds us, importantly, of the value of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in the field of land cover change studies. ***Birgitte Egeskov Jensen*** then takes us to China for a crucial discussion of social citizenship and how it continues to be strongly determined by the *hukou* system which, she argues, further consolidates rural people's self-image as 'undeserving'. In the final article, we turn to literature – ***Jona Barabas*** uses concepts from queer theory and Confucian philosophy to succinctly examine the main character's approach to the relationships in his life.

**Enjoy the read, and do share the journal with your peers and networks both inside and outside of academia!**

All the best and a somewhat belated Happy New Year!

*Nicol Foulkes Savinetti*

Managing Editor of Asia in Focus

# Localising De-institutionalis-tion

## The Potentials of Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Context of Rajas-than, India

THERESE BOJE MORTENSEN

Article 20 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the vulnerability of children growing up outside a family environment, and sets the ground for the paradigm of 'institutions as a last resort'. However, 'care homes' or 'hostels' are still common forms of alternative care solutions for children from impoverished families in India. This article asks to what extent the clear impetus towards de-institutionalisation in human rights discourses, especially among international NGOs, has potential to change such practices. The study contributes to a body of scholarship on 'localising children's rights' by presenting findings from an ethnographic case study of an institution for HIV-infected/affected children in Rajasthan, India. The institution in question played a range of social functions other than childcare such as education, a means for parents to rescue their children from extreme poverty, and a supportive and de-stigmatised environment for the community of people living with HIV/AIDS. The article argues that social functions of existing institutions should be taken into account when developing rights-based de-institutionalisation strategies.

**Keywords:** De-institutionalisation, human rights, India, child rights, localisation

Growing up in childcare institutions such as orphanages most often implies rigid routines and a professional (rather than parental) relationship between children and carers. For decades, scholars have recognised that such institutional culture is potentially harmful for children's development (e.g. Chapin, 1926; McArthur, 2011; Greenberg & Williamson, 2010; Dunn, Jareg & Webb, 2003; Tolfree, 1995; Doherty, 1996; Mulheir, Parent, Simonin, Zelderloo, Bulic, Besozzi, Andersen, Freyhoff & van Remoortel, 2008), findings that are also reflected in international law on the rights of the child, which prioritises a 'family environment' as the most beneficial for children (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, preamble). In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), there is a global trend of moving away from institutional care and towards family-based care of children deprived of their biological family environment. Since the 1960's, family-based alternative care (e.g. foster care or adoption) has in Western Europe and the United States been much more common than the use of institutions (Mulheir, Parent, Simonin, Zelderloo, Bulic, Besozzi, Andersen, Freyhoff & van Remoortel, 2008, p. 10). More recently, many post-Soviet countries have also 'transitioned' away from institutional care (Greenberg & Williamson, 2010, p. 12). Such a transition is known as 'de-institutionalisation'. The state of India has tentatively begun a de-institutionalisation process with the updated Juvenile Justice Act (Government of India, 2016), which translates many of the norms from the CRC, ratified by India in 1992 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017), into the national legal system. But how do these international standards and national legal changes affect the long-time practice of orphanages run by NGOs? What are the social obstacles to de-institutionalisation in India? This article points to one particular obstacle, namely the social functions (other than childcare) that existing institutions play: they ensure an education that rural, impoverished families cannot provide; they are part of a network of socially motivated NGO-workers who address problems that the government is not addressing; and in the case of HIV-infected/affected children, they provide a de-stigmatised and supportive environment for patients. Pointing out these functions is not the equivalent of arguing against de-institutionalisation. Instead, in India's current slow move away from institutions, family-based alternative care options should acknowledge and try to replicate the functions that institutions play, importantly, by means other than institutionalisation.

De-institutionalisation has been connected with child rights in previous literature (e.g. Cantwell, 2015; Dunn, Jareg and Webb, 2003; McArthur, 2011); however, there remains a gap when it comes to analysing de-institutionalisation from the approach of 'localising child rights' (De Feyter, 2007), which is a branch of human rights studies that asks how international legal norms can be effective for problems of a local nature. This approach has been used to analyse other topics under the umbrella of human rights such as women's rights (e.g. Merry, 2006) and female genital mutilation (e.g. Sikka, 2015). According to Vandenhole (2012, p. 80), one of the central dimensions of this approach is whether the idea of 'rights' is culturally accepted in a given context. The present study will contribute to this dimension of child rights literature, by demonstrating how a phenomenon that is perceived as a human rights issue at the international level – the institutionalisation of childcare – is not considered a significant problem by local actors. Instead, institutionalisation is, at the community level, seen as a solution to other problems, such as poverty, lack of education, and the stigma of HIV/AIDS.

For terminological clarification, 'orphanage', 'institution', 'care home' and 'hostel' will be used synonymously to denote 'a group living arrangement for children in which care is provided by remunerated adults who would not be regarded as traditional carers within the wider society' (Dunn, Jareg & Webb, 2003, p. 1).



## Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Children who are not living in a family environment are considered a particularly vulnerable group in international human rights law and are protected by Article 20 of the CRC (Cantwell & Holzscheiter, 2007, pp. 10-11). The article states,

> 1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.
>
> 2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.
>
> 3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background' (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, art. 20).

In terms of application, this article is intended for situations in which the state and parents have already failed to, or are unable to, ensure a family environment (Cantwell and Holzscheiter, 2007, p. 9), namely to children who do not have the overnight care of at least one of their parents for 'whatever reason' (United Nations General Assembly, 2010, para. 29), including, inter alia, death of parents, abandonment by parents, permanent or temporary incapacity of parents (such as illness), and voluntary placement by parents (Cantwell & Holzscheiter, 2007, pp. 38-39). Article 20 requires state parties to ensure alternative care for the child and lists options for such care in Article 20, paragraph 3. According to the article, 'alternative care' ranges from kinship care, foster care and other forms of family-like care placements, to non-family-based care such as residential institutions. In the drafting process of the CRC in 1982, it was the delegation from India that introduced a list of alternative care options to Article 20 and proposed the inclusion of 'placement in community and State childcare institutions' (ibid., p. 30). The Indian delegation did not differentiate between family-based and other forms of alternative care, but in the final wording of Article 20, there is arguably an implicit ranking of what is most beneficial for the child (ibid., p. 13). The drafters of the CRC chose to place institutions at the bottom of the list, which hints to a promotion de-institutionalisation. However, accepting that institutions should be a last resort, still implies the inevitability of their existence. The existing institutions therefore need to be 'suitable', that is, they have to live up to some general criteria and be suited to the individual child's needs (Cantwell, 2015, pp. 260-62).

One of the situations in which institutions are deemed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to be inevitable, is in relation to children affected by HIV/AIDS. The Committee has thus acknowledged that, 'Although institutionalised care may have detrimental effects on child development, States parties may, nonetheless, determine that they have an interim role to play in caring for children orphaned because of HIV/AIDS when family-based care within their own communities is not a possibility' (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003, para. 35). The Committee does, however, underline that institutions should always be a last resort and non-permanent, even in the case of HIV-affected children (ibid., paras 34-35).

## Methods

This study is a case study of Aashray Care Home (Aashray) located in an urban, residential part of Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. Aashray is a care home for children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS. It is funded primarily by donations from private individuals and foundations. The home receives children through the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of Jaipur District, and is currently home to 37 children (25 boys and 12 girls). They live in rooms with 6-8 beds, go to school in the area, and spend the rest of their day eating meals, doing homework, playing, doing yoga, watching TV, cleaning, and going on the occasional outing financed most often by individual donors. They have the opportunity to visit relatives twice a year. Even though there is a core staff of caregivers, managers, cooks etc., the fixed roles are not immediately visible during everyday life at the care home, which rather gives the impression of a collaboration among a group of people – including the older children – in the running of the place.

My approach to this case study is similar to that of legal anthropologists such as Merry (2000) and Das (1993), who analyse how law meets everyday life. This type of approach is valuable when exploring how obstacles to global norms, which are created to improve the lives of people who inevitably live in a certain locality, are materialising at the local level. The bulk of the data consists of semi-structured interviews. These are complemented by participant observation carried out over six weeks, where I took an active part in the daily routines at Aashray such as in the preparation and consumption of meals, homework, laundry, and playing games. Such participation brought knowledge that would be difficult to get from formal interviews, for instance the social status of the informants, the atmosphere in the institution and the interactions between different informants.

Respondents were divided in six groups (see Table 1). The first three respondent groups (except manager level staff at the care home) were all either infected with HIV themselves, or affected by it through family members. As a result of the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS described by virtually all informants, the status of being HIV positive resulted in these people socially marginalised. The six informant groups can therefore be divided in three sub-groups: those infected with HIV/AIDS (children, parents, and most of the staff), those not infected but sympathetic to the former (staff, HIV professionals), and lastly, the authorities and experts who, in this context, saw HIV/AIDS as only one obstacle amongst many for de-insti-

| GROUP | Type of interviews | Number of interviews in group/ number of persons in group | Month and year | Interview codes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CHILDREN**: male and female residents of Aashray Care Home. | | | | |
| | Semi-structured individual interviews | 26/26 | March, 2017 | G1C1-G1C26 |
| **PARENTS:** parents and relatives of group 1, living mainly in rural areas of Rajasthan. | | | | |
| | Semi-structured individual and group interviews | 5/7 | March, 2017 | G2P1-G2P5 |
| **STAFF**: staff at the care home, ranging from middle-class, educated manager level staff to HIV/AIDS-infected care takers from rural areas. | | | | |
| | Semi-structured individual interviews | 8/8 | March, 2017 | G3S1-G3S8 |
| **AUTHORITIES:** two representatives from the authorities (an ex-member of the CWC of Jaipur District, and a Program Manager of the Rajasthan Child Rights Department). | | | | |
| | Semi-structured individual interviews | 2/2 | March, 2017 | G4A1-G4A2 |
| **EXPERTS:** two academically educated experts on child rights, one from the NGO Antakshari Foundation which focuses on child protection and development, and one from Foster Care India, an organisation that promotes de-institutionalisation. | | | | |
| | Semi-structured individual interviews | 2/2 | March, 2017 | G5E1-G5E2 |
| **HIV PROFESSIONALS:** HIV professionals ranging from nurses to outreach officers who work closely with people living with HIV/AIDS in Rajasthan. | | | | |
| | Unstructured individual and group interviews | 3/18 | March, 2017 | G6H1-G6H3 |

Table 1: Overview of Interviews and Interviewees

-tutionalisation. As is clear from the analysis below, the closeness to the disease determined the preference for the institution versus family-based care.

## Localisation of child rights in Aashray Care Home

One way to go about studying the relationship between international law and local realities is to apply an 'implementation gap approach'; that is, to assume that the law is 'right', and if there are mismatches between law and reality, the problem is implementation (Vandenhole, 2015, pp. 38-39). However, it became clear during the present ethnography that successful de-institutionalisation is not as simple as implementing a human rights obligation because institutions are not only harmful places where children's development is at risk, they are also places where children get educated and fed, and they also serve as a platform where the local NGO community can assist impoverished people. Instead, a 'localisation approach' is necessary, as it questions the law's relevance to local people and situations (Vandenhole, 2012, p. 80). This approach argues for a 'translation' between the local and the global in both directions (Merry, 2006). One way of taking the point of departure at the local level, which I focus on here, is to recognise the social functions of institutions.

One such function is education. Most parents and children saw access to proper education as the main reason for living at the institution (G2P2; G1C5; G1C17; G1C18). Many of the parents themselves were illiterate, while their children were studying in secondary school and spoke and wrote both Hindi and English, often in addition to speaking a local dialect. As one child said, 'in the village I cannot study' (G1C13). Similarly, a father said that he put his children in the care home because, 'I only want that they study and their life gets better' (G2P2). In addition, informal talks with the parents and staff made it clear that the village was considered a 'backward' place without study opportunities, while the urban care home provided these opportunities for their children. The care home furthermore helped the older children to become independent by providing skills courses, and renting out rooms to them during their studies or while they looked for a job; for instance, when the care home decided to move all the children to a new building outside Jaipur, two older boys were instead given money to rent a room near their school so they could finish 12th grade and become more independent (G1C3).

Another social function fulfilled by Aashray was financial support, as it had become a means for parents to rescue their children from extreme poverty. The institution was seen by some parents as a 'boarding school' to which they could send their children during the school year. This was reflected in the interviews by many children using the term 'hostel' when they talked about the institution. A 23 year-old man who had grown up at the institution (G1C2) described how he 'was already living at another hostel before'. Similarly, a 12 year-old boy living at Aashray (G1C6) said that his sister was living 'in another hostel'. 'Hostel' implies education and non-permanency in India, and even 'care home' – which was used by most adult respondents to denote the institution – has a much more positive ring to it than 'institution'.

For some informants, the institution had a disciplinarian function. Aashray's consultant nurse said that the children from poor families who did not go to care homes would end up doing labour work or 'get associated with crime' (G6H1), a statement that hints to a correlation between poverty and crime. This view had also seeped through to some of the children themselves, such as a 13-year-old boy who, when asked why he came to Aashray, said 'I couldn't go to school, I couldn't wake up in the morning, therefore they sent me to a hostel' (G1C23). This finding was confirmed by the founder of the NGO Foster Care India who said that, 'childcare institutions […] are thought of as babysitting places, as places where children can go to get a proper meal and education' (G5E2).

The fact that parents did not see it as a problem to send their children to live in an institution is also deeply rooted in local child rearing norms. When the extended family is not willing or able to take care of a child, institutional care is the predominant system of care in India (Foster Care India, 2014, p. 6). Parents and care home staff expressed exclusively positive statements about the care home. However, this could be because the parents saw me, the interviewer, as someone they needed to convince of the good conditions at the institution. Similarly, the care home staff had an interest in 'promoting' the care home since it was their livelihood, and for some, their life project – to which I, as a foreigner, was a potential donor. Nonetheless, the nurses and pharmacists from an HIV Care and Support Centre also expressed that children would get 'better care' in the care home than in a village, and a nurse said that there was 'nothing bad in a gap in seeing your parents' (G6H2), both of which imply that institutional care was not only a preference of the uneducated or impoverished, but rather a norm in the broader society. Most of the children also expressed in formal interviews that they preferred living in the care home. In spite of this, the day before Holi, a major holiday, some families came to pick up their children and it was clear that this was a joyous day for those children, who had talked with excitement about seeing their families several days in advance (Field notes, 10 March 2017).

## Stigma of HIV/AIDS

Aashray also played the important function of uniting the otherwise stigmatised community of people living with HIV/AIDS. Many of the care home staff themselves were HIV/AIDS patients, and they had found the 'family environment' they had been deprived of at home in the care home. For example, one care taker had had a daughter who passed away from HIV/AIDS (G3S5). Ousted from her own family, and now childless, the care home was a way for her to live in a comfortable environment while earning a living.

There was a direct causal relationship between HIV/AIDS discrimination and stigma and institutionalisation according to many informants. A mother of three children at the care home (G2P1) said that in the village, 'everyone throws you out' because of the 'untouchable disease'. Another mother expressed that her daughter could not play with other children because they would not touch her, and that this was the main reason that the daughter lived at the care home. If the daughter lived at home, 'then all the other children would say: Disease, stay away! So she would begin to cry, here she is happy, so I am also happy' (G2P2). A care giver at Aashray who herself was HIV-positive said that when she made food in her village, people would not eat it, but throw it away (G3S8).

According to nurses working with HIV/AIDS patients, it would be in the best interest of the child to live apart from such discriminatory practice in the villages. In the institution, the children would get 'better education, they get better medication, they get better environment' (G6H2). 'What would better care be?' one nurse asked rhetorically (G6H2). This view was prevalent among all the groups of informants that lived close to HIV and had experienced the stigma (parents, low-level care home staff and HIV professionals).

From the viewpoint of the child protection experts and authorities, the priorities were different. 'People think that children get luxurious care in institutions [...], but from a child rights perspective, it is very necessary to have a family,' said the representative of Antakshari Foundation (G5E1). Similarly, an ex-member of the CWC said, 'if [the child] has a family, then the child should be established in the family. Because there is no better institution than the family' (G4A1). We can thus see that the informants' priorities were different depending on how closely they lived to HIV/AIDS and poverty: the educated informants (authorities and experts) agreed with international norms on de-institutionalisation and underlined the importance of a family environment, and HIV/AIDS was simply one of many obstacles; the uneducated informants (care home staff and parents) and also the educated HIV professionals who worked closely with patients saw HIV/AIDS stigma as the main problem, and childcare institutions as the solution. The latter group were not aware of the supposed potential harmful social development, and if told of it, they chose to prioritise the immediate health and education of their children.

Aashray's consultant, a trained social worker, said that he found it interesting how international norms emphasised a family environment, because in his view, the people who wrote this did not know India. He questioned how they could assume that these specific children would not get the necessary emotional, mental and physical development in institutions, which they would have gotten in a family environment. In the case of HIV-infected children in rural Rajasthan, he argued, it was the exact opposite: once the children had been diagnosed with HIV, they were marginalised within the extended family with separate room, bed, eating utensils etc. They were made to do more work, they did not get to play with the other kids – all things that would harm their development. However, if they grew up in an institution like Aashray, they would be surrounded by people who knew that HIV does not transmit in children's everyday activities, and they would be treated as any other child (Field notes, 4 March 2017).

## Concluding remarks

This article has argued that the classic 'implementation gap approach' to children's rights studies needs to be complemented by a 'localisation approach' that emphasises contextualisation in order for human rights to be relevant in diverse contexts. While acknowledging the decades of undisputed psychological studies demonstrating the harmful developmental effects of institutional upbringing, this study has argued for the need for a contextualisation of the dominant paradigm among child rights advocates, which is 'institutions as a last resort'. The case study of Aashray demonstrates that for the most vulnerable children in countries without a comprehensive alternative care system, institutions become the only resort because an institutional upbringing is preferred to a life of poverty and stigmatisation. Such a preference is deeply rooted in local child-rearing norms, and for a de-institutionalisation process to be successful in the Indian context, there is a need for social acceptance of the alternative care options, which currently exist primarily under the Juvenile Justice Act. Therefore, while a 'global call' to end a practice such as institutionalisation sounds powerful, it is unrealistic to expect it to succeed as a global solution. Children's rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are useful as overall guidelines; for example, Article 20's acknowledgment that children living outside a family environment are vulnerable, can be a point of departure at both local and global levels. However, if not contextualised, de-institutionalisation cannot be effective. It is true that there is a need to be aware of the harmful effects of institutionalisation on children at the local levels, but at the same time as something 'global' needs to be translated down to the 'local', the social functions played by existing institutions need to be translated up and be a central part of de-institutionalisation strategies.

**Therese Boje Mortensen** holds a BA in South Asian Studies from Copenhagen University and an MA in Human Rights and Democratisation from the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation and Lund University.

**Email:** theresebojemortensen@outlook.dk

# References

Cantwell, N. (2015). The human rights of children in the context of formal alternative care. In W. Vandenhole, E. Desmet, D. Reynaert & S. Lembrechts (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies* (pp. 257-275). London; New York: Routledge.

Cantwell, N. and Holzscheiter A. (2007). Article 20: Children deprived of their family environment. In A. Alen, J. Vande Lanotte, E. Verhellen, F. Ang, E. Berghmans, M. Verheyde & B. Abramson (Eds.), *A Commentary on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Chapin, H.D. (1926). Family vs. institution. *Survey*, 55, 485-488.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, 1577 United Nations Treaty Series 3 (CRC).

Das, N.K. (1993). *Kinship, Politics and Law in Naga Society*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.

De Feyter, K. (2007). Localising Human Rights. In W. Benedek, K. De Feyter and F. Marella (Eds.), *Economic Globalisation and Human Rights* (pp. 67-92). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Doherty, G. (1996). *The Long-Term Effects of Non-Parental Childcare*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Dunn, A., Jareg, E. & Webb, D. (2003). *A Last Resort. The Growing Concern about Children in Residential Care*. London: International Save the Children Alliance.

Foster Care India. (2014). *National Consultation on: Promoting Non-Institutional Alternatice Care (NIAC) for Children in Rajasthan: A Report. Udaipur: Foster Care India*. Retrieved at: http://fostercareindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Foster-Care-India-Consultation-Report.pdf.

Government of India. (2016). The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. Ministry of Law and Justice, New Delhi.

Greenberg, A. (2007). *Child Protection and Children Affected by AIDS: A Companion Paper to the Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV and AIDS*. New York: The United Nations Children's Fund.

Greenberg, A. & Williamson, J. (2010). *Families, Not Orphanages*. Better Care Network Working Paper. Retrieved at: https://www.thinkchildsafe.org/thinkbeforevisiting/resources/Families_Not_Orphanages_J_Williamson.pdf. Retrieved on 31.01.2018.

McArthur, D. (2011). *10 Steps Forward to Deinstitutionalisation*. Nepal: Terre des hommes Foundation & Hope for Himalayan Kids.

Merry, S. E. (2000). Crossing Boundaries: Ethnography in the Twenty-First Century. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review,* 23, pp. 127-133. doi: 10.1525/pol.2000.23.2.127.

Merry, S. E. (2006). *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mulheir G., Parent, A.-S., Simonin, C., Zelderloo, L., Bulic, I., Besozzi, C., Andersen, A., Freyhoff, G. & van Remoortel, J. (2008). *Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the transition from institutional to community-based care*. European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Sikka, S. (2015). Rights and Relativity. In J. Drydyk & P. Ashwani (Eds.), *Human Rights. India and the West* (pp. 19-48). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tolfree, D. (1995). *Roofs and Roots. The Care of Separated Children in the Developing World.* UK: Save the Children Fund.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2003). General Comment No. 3. UN Doc CRC/GC/2003/3. 17 March 2003.

United Nations General Assembly (2010). Res 64/142. UN Doc A/Res/64/142. 24 February 2010.

Vandenhole, W. (2015). Children's rights from a legal perspective. Children's rights law. In W. Vandenhole, E. Desmet, D. Reynaert & S. Lembrechts (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies* (pp. 27-42). London; New York: Routledge.

Vandenhole, W. (2012). Localizing the Human Rights of Children. In M. Liebel, *Children's Rights from Below: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 80-93). Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian.

# Perspectives on the pastoral landscape:
## Combining remote sensing observations and pastoralist perceptions in southern Tamil Nadu, India

PATRICK WENNSTRÖM

This article explores how land cover change studies could be advanced through a methodology that integrates remote sensing (RS) observations and perceptions from the ground. This is done through a case study in southern Tamil Nadu, India where changes in the pastoral landscape are investigated from two perspectives: from space through satellite images and from the ground through interviews and participatory mapping. RS results provide valuable insights about large-scale changes in the landscape, which could not have been captured through interviews. Grasslands, an important source of livestock feed, have decreased while agricultural land and built-up land has increased between the years 1992 and 2014. The qualitative data generated a deeper understanding of land cover change dynamics and revealed the complexity of pastoralist livelihoods where shrinking pastures is perceived as one of many challenges. Combining the two data types and analysing the gaps between them indicates that pastoralists are referring to the loss of relatively small but significant grazing lands. Such changes are not within the domain of detectable changes, which indicates that policy intended to improve pastoralist conditions based entirely on RS would most likely fail. This risk could be minimized by integrating qualitative data to the RS analysis.

**Keywords:** Land cover change, pastoralism, India, mixed methods, remote sensing

A drastic decline of grasslands and common property grazing lands have been observed in parts of India (Chaudhry, Bohra, & Choudhary, 2011; Tsarouchi, Mijic, Moulds, & Buytaert, 2014). This has had serious consequences for Indian pastoralists whose traditional livelihoods are largely dependent on these natural resources (Ghotge & Kishore, 2016; Sharma, Köhler-Rollefson, & Morton, 2003). The social and political marginalisation of pastoralism have resulted in policies and laws that do not attend to pastoralists' needs and major difficulties with finding their place in modern economies (IUCN, 2017). Monitoring and preventing the loss of grazing lands is therefore critical for the survival of this age-old livelihood and for the well-being of pastoralists.

Remote sensing (RS) is arguably the most useful and well-known tool for studying land cover changes. However, significant inconsistencies may occur between RS observations and perceptions from the ground (Herrmann, Sall, & Sy, 2014). This is because RS and qualitative interviews tell different parts of the same story about land cover change (Jiang, 2003), and also because of the different epistemological traditions these methods come from (Nightingale, 2003). Subjectivity and human interpretation is an often-underrated component within RS. Although many geographers and other RS practitioners today acknowledge the importance of human factors in aerial image analysis (Gardin et al., 2011), they have historically often been neglected as the researcher's task has been seen as to "correctly" interpret the land cover (Nightingale, 2003). This is an approach that does not align with the worldview of most qualitative researchers who rather see objective knowledge creation as impossible and non-desirable (Aitken & Kwan, 2010).

In this article, I combine RS data with pastoralist perceptions of land cover change with the aim to contribute to the development of an improved methodology for studying landscape dynamics. Integrating and comparing quantitative and qualitative data about land cover change could generate a deeper understanding of the pastoral landscape, which is better suited to informing policy. I illustrate this through a mixed methods case study in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts of southern Tamil Nadu, a densely populated agricultural area where semi-nomadic sheep pastoralist have roamed for many generations.

## A qualitative approach to GIS

RS provides important sources of data for GIS analysis. Land cover change detection is critical for understanding the dynamics of social-natural processes that shape the surface of the earth. Numerous technological approaches and methods have been developed for performing change detection on remotely sensed data, however, no single approach has been found to be optimal and applicable to all cases (Lu, Mausel, Brondizio, & Moran, 2004). RS is a relatively new and evolving scientific field, which has seen much technological improvement in recent years, and further progress can be assumed in the near future. Most studies on land cover change have in common that they are quantitative and focused on technological solutions for improving the detection of land cover change (e.g. Bakr, Weindorf, Bahnassy, Marei, & El-Badawi, 2010; Güler, Yomralıoğlu, & Reis, 2007; Lu et al., 2004; Young et al., 2017). Conventional GIS have been criticised for being socially exclusive and for producing incomplete analyses and out of this critique a new field has developed, sometimes referred to as qualitative GIS, participatory GIS or community integrated GIS (Dunn, 2007). This field works towards a more socially integrated GIS where people are involved in the process of obtaining and analysing geographical data.

Combining RS with qualitative data has highlighted the 'situatedness' and incompleteness of RS data on its own (Nightingale, 2003). This partiality is by no means unique to RS data, however, discussions on situated knowledge and partiality might be even more relevant within this field since human perception and interpretation has only quite recently been acknowledged to affect RS results and remains an undervalued component (Gardin et al., 2011). Analysing the discrepancies between the results of the different methods can help us understand new dimensions of the research topic while at the same time highlighting the limitations of the chosen methodologies. Local knowledge is a valuable source for improving our understanding of land cover change dynamics, and qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to complement and validate each other (Mialhe et al., 2015). A particularly suitable social group to involve in studies on land cover change is pastoralists because of their familiarity with large geographical areas due to the spatial scale of transhumance pastoralism (Herrmann et al., 2014). In addition to being large in scale, pastoralists tend to possess rich and detailed information about their environment and its ecological conditions (Jiang, 2003).

## A look at pastoralism in India

One of the most critical livelihood threats faced by Indian pastoralists today is the dwindling pastoral lands. This development has been driven by factors like non-supportive government policies, expanding irrigated agricultural land, the enclosure of forests and protected areas, and the deterioration of pasture lands because of invasive species (Sharma et al., 2003). Several studies have confirmed that the shrinking and degradation of grasslands is a problem in the arid zones of northern India (e.g. Chaudhry et al., 2011; Jodha, 1985; Tsarouchi et al., 2014). Less attention has been given to the complex and densely populated agricultural landscapes of the south of the country. In fact, literature on pastoralism in southern India is remarkably scarce.

Indian pastoralists belong to a caste that specialises in animal husbandry, often within a society alongside people of other castes and occupations. This is in stark contrast to pastoral communities in areas more frequently associated with pastoral livelihoods, e.g. in Africa and the Middle East, where the pastoralists often inhabit vast remote territories practically by themselves (Sharma et al., 2003). Indian pastoral groups are not at the bottom of the social hierarchy and generally have more assets (i.e. livestock) than the poorest social groups. There are even rare examples of very socially mobile pastoral castes, for instance the Yadavs who are dominating politics in large areas of northern India (Jaffrelot, 2003). However, pastoral livelihoods undoubtedly face negative attitudes and misconceptions, which often lead to social and political exclusion (Ghotge &

Kishore, 2016).

Pastoralists are frequently blamed for degrading the environment through overgrazing which has resulted in hostile government attitudes and policies (Sharma et al., 2003). It is only recently that some states have decided to ease their restrictions on pastoralists and allow them to enter certain forests and protected areas that used to be their traditional grazing grounds (Ghotge & Kishore, 2016). Today the Government of Tamil Nadu officially recognises the vital role of animal husbandry for rural livelihoods and for the economy of the state (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2016). However, protecting existing grazing lands does not seem to be an incentive for this change; focus is rather on increasing the production capacity of existing cultivable lands for fodder (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2016). Nevertheless, improved government attitudes could be a result of a rather newfound international interest in pastoralism as a sustainable food production system which does not degrade the environment, but provides ecosystem services by maintaining soil quality, regulating water, and contributing to biodiversity conservation (McGahey, Davies, Hagelberg, & Ouedraogo, 2014). Furthermore, pastoralists play a key role in the sustainability of agricultural activities in India through the fertilization of soils that their livestock contributes to (Ramdas, Yakshi, & Deepika, 2001).

## Remote sensing methods and data

The RS methodology followed a four-step process that involved 1) pre-processing, 2) classification, 3) accuracy assessment, and 4) post-classification change detection. All RS steps were performed in the software program ArcGIS 10.2. Three Landsat images were used for the analysis; one Landsat 5 TM image from 1992, one Landsat 7 ETM+ image from 2000, and one Landsat 8 OLI/TIRS image from 2014. The Landsat program's near continuous record of the earth's surface since the early 1970s makes it particularly useful for monitoring land cover change (Tsarouchi et al., 2014; Young et al., 2017). The study area was delimited into four 12 x 12 kilometre study sites with a total area of 576 km$^2$ (Figure 1). These four study sites (Ambasamudram, Tirunelveli, Srivaikuntam and Peikulam) were identified with the help of local pastoralists as particularly important areas for grazing.

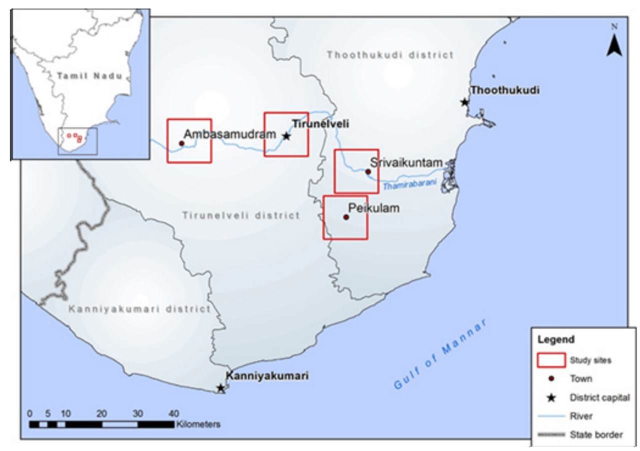


Figure 1: Map of the study area in southern Tamil Nadu (Wennström, 2017).

First, the satellite images were pre-processed through geometric correction and image enhancement (Young et al., 2017). Excessive information in the images were also removed through a principal component analysis (PCA) in order to facilitate interpretation and comparison (Abdi & Williams, 2010). A supervised classification was then performed which means that 'training samples' of predetermined land cover classes were manually classified. For this study, five classes were used; water, built-up land, agricultural land, scrubland and grassland. The training samples were then used by the classification algorithm to classify all pixels in the images into these five classes (Lillesand, Kiefer, & Chipman, 2004). Four types of accuracy were calculated; overall, user, producer, and kappa statistics. 260 reference points were used per classified image, which were compared to 126 ground truth points collected through fieldwork as well as high-resolution reference data. Finally, land cover changes between the years were calculated using a post-classification change detection technique where the images were compared on a pixel-to-pixel basis (Güler et al., 2007).

## Qualitative methods and data

Qualitative data were collected through participatory mapping (PM) with local pastoralists and separate personal semi-structured interviews. Various forms of mapping have long been established as part of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques in rural development as a way of understanding existing resources and social arrangements in particular locations (Chambers, 1994). For this study scale mapping was used which is a method that generates data that is easily integrated into a GIS because the participants draw landscape features directly on a printed map or an aerial image (Corbett et al., 2006). The venue for the PM workshop, a small temple in the village of Peikulam, was chosen in consultation with a key informant. Twelve herders between the ages of 32 and 55 were present at the workshop; they were selected through snowball sampling which is a useful method for reaching social networks and marginalised populations (Tracy, 2012). The reference maps were used both as a tool for stimulating discussion on environmental and livelihood changes, and for drawing migratory routes and identifying key locations for grazing and diminished pastures.

Separate personal interviews with pastoralists were conducted to further explore and analyse in what way the changing environment affects their livelihoods. A total of 17 pastoralists were interviewed for this study and the participants were found, approached, and interviewed in the field. For the purpose of this study it was important that the sample participants had several years of experience of herding in southern Tamil Nadu so that information about the environmental and social change could be generated. This sort of purposeful convenience sampling is suitable when information could be generated from anyone within the particular social network (Tracy, 2012). Finally, the interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed.

## Remote sensing observations

The classified images from the years 1992, 2000 and 2014 are shown in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows that the most noteworthy changes that have occurred between the years 1992 and 2014 are an increase in agricultural land (+7.3%) and a decrease in grassland (-7.1%). The remaining land cover classes had not changed significantly; built-up land (+0.9%) and water (+1%) had increased marginally while there had been a slight decrease in scrubland (-2.1%). Most of these changes appear to have occurred between the years 1992 and 2000. The results of the accuracy assessments are showed in Table 1. The two images from 1992 and 2014, which were used for the change detection analysis, scored above the commonly suggested benchmark of 85% for overall accuracy (Tsarouchi et al., 2014). The kappa statistics for the 1992 classified image was 0.83, which according to Landis and Koch (1977) should be considered ‘almost perfect’, while the classifications of the 2000 and 2014 images scored 0.73 and 0.77 respectively, which falls into the category ‘substantial strength of agreement’ (Landis & Koch, 1977).

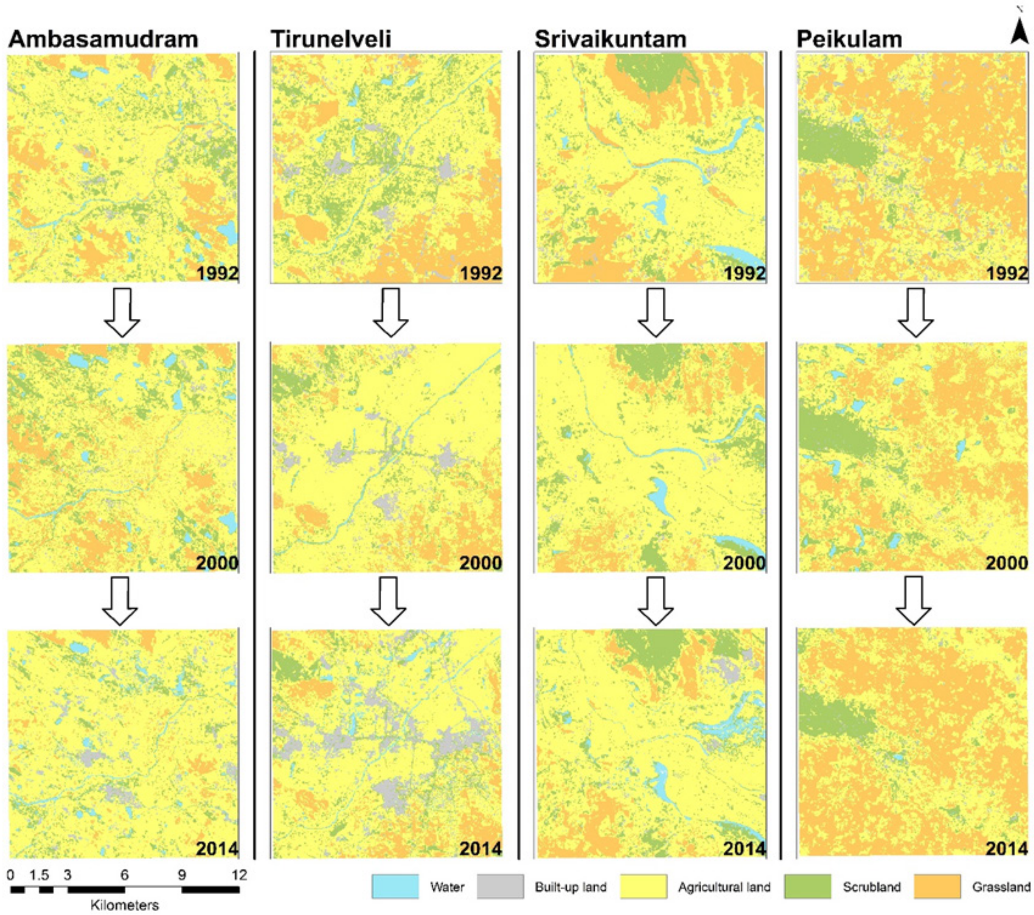

Figure 2: Classified images of the four study sites for the years 1992, 2000 and 2014 (Wennström, 2017).

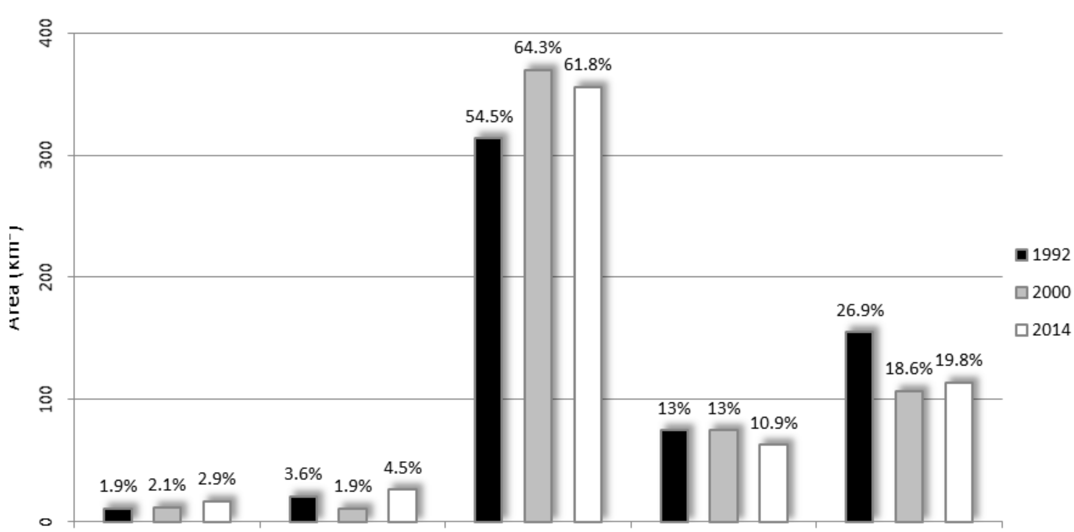

Figure 3: Area of land cover classes in the classified images from 1992, 2000 and 2014.

ASIA IN FOCUS

| 1992 Landsat 5 TM | Water | Built-up land | Agricultural land | Scrubland | Grassland | Classified total | User accuracy (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Water | **7** | 1 | | | | 8 | 87.5 |
| Built-up land | | **2** | 3 | | | 5 | 40.0 |
| Agricultural land | | 3 | **127** | 11 | 2 | 143 | 88.8 |
| Scrubland | | | 3 | **27** | | 30 | 90.0 |
| Grassland | | 1 | 3 | | **70** | 74 | 94.6 |
| Reference total | 7 | 6 | 137 | 38 | 72 | 260 | |
| Producer accuracy (%) | 100.0 | 33.3 | 92.7 | 71.0 | 97.2 | Overall accuracy: 89.6% | |
| 2000 Landsat 7 ETM+ | Water | Built-up land | Agricultural land | Scrubland | Grassland | Classified total | User accuracy (%) |
| Water | **11** | | 1 | 1 | | 13 | 84.6 |
| Built-up land | | **4** | 3 | | | 7 | 57.1 |
| Agricultural land | | 3 | **130** | 9 | 2 | 144 | 90.3 |
| Scrubland | | 3 | 11 | **24** | | 38 | 63.1 |
| Grassland | | | 9 | | **49** | 58 | 84.5 |
| Reference total | 11 | 10 | 154 | 34 | 51 | 260 | |
| Producer accuracy (%) | 100.0 | 40.0 | 84.4 | 70.6 | 96.1 | Overall accuracy: 83.8% | |
| 2014 Landsat 8 OLI/TIRS | Water | Built-up land | Agricultural land | Scrubland | Grassland | Classified total | User accuracy (%) |
| Water | **7** | | | 1 | | 8 | 87.5 |
| Built-up land | 1 | **10** | 2 | 3 | | 16 | 62.5 |
| Agricultural land | 2 | | **147** | 7 | 3 | 159 | 92.4 |
| Scrubland | | | 7 | **16** | 1 | 24 | 66.6 |
| Grassland | | | 7 | | **46** | 53 | 86.8 |
| Reference total | 10 | 10 | 163 | 27 | 50 | 260 | |
| Producer accuracy (%) | 70.0 | 100.0 | 90.0 | 59.2 | 92.0 | Overall accuracy: 86.9% | |

Table 1: Results of the accuracy assessment of the classified images from 1992, 2000 and 2014.

The post-classification change detection analysis (Figure 4) showed that by far the most significant change that has occurred between the years 1992 and 2014 was grassland that has become agricultural land, which stands for 66.78% of the land cover changes. Surprisingly and rather contradictorily, the second largest change that can be observed through RS was agricultural land that has become grassland which accounted for 27.56% of the changes. This could indicate that grassland and agricultural land have been mixed up in the classification. The accuracy assessment (Table 1) is to some extent supporting this assumption since some grassland has been incorrectly classified as agricultural land and vice versa. Although RS images are often seen as neutral and analysts aim to interpret changes objectively, the results of RS image analyses are inevitably affected by human performance variability and individual interpretations (Gardin et al., 2011). The selection of training samples, ground control points and land cover classes are examples of where analysts makes choices and interpretations which influence the results. This subjectivity needs to be highlighted and discussed also within a technical field such as RS. However, it does not reduce its usefulness for providing valuable information on large-scale changes in the landscape as RS generates information that cannot be revealed through qualitative interviews alone (Jiang, 2003). When combined with qualitative data, the somewhat shallow understanding of land cover change that RS provides can be deepened. Additionally, a seemingly contradictory result of simultaneously diminishing and expanding pastoral lands and cultivated areas does not necessarily need to be results from a "failed" classification. It could also indicate that land cover change dynamics are more complex than they might appear at first.

## Pastoralist perceptions

Interactions with pastoralists revealed six issues that were perceived as impediments to pastoralist livelihoods in southern Tamil Nadu. These are (in a random order) proliferation of invasive species, animal diseases, physical obstacles on the migratory routes, changing land use patterns, deterioration of village institutions, and stigmatisation of pastoralism. All are perceived as problems that affect land cover dynamics in the area, either by directly altering the landscape or through social processes which have more indirect effects on land use.

Pastoralists in southern Tamil Nadu perceive the main changes that have occurred to be a transformation of grasslands into agricultural land and, to a lesser extent, built-up land near villages and towns. Disappearing commons due to the privatization of land and deterioration of the village institutions that used to protect the commons are other perceived changes that have transformed the landscape for the worse for them. Village commons have been sold and/or converted to housing lots or reduced due to agricultural encroachments. Perceptions of environmental change also need be understood in a wider context where climatic fluctuations may impact local knowledge (Jiang, 2003). The field work for this study was done in early 2016, immediately after an exceptionally wet northeast monsoon which resulted in the 2015 South Indian floods (Burke, 2015). This might have subconsciously influenced participants' perceptions of land cover change, with them possibly overemphasizing issues related to floods and excessive rain. Indeed, the rains were mentioned rather frequently as a problem; during unusually wet years, animal diseases are reported to escalate, and non-irrigated lands are often cropped as well, which might have led to exaggerations of the issue of agricultural encroachment on grasslands.

Proliferation of the fast growing invasive tree Prosopis juliflora is also perceived as a significant change, which has severe consequences for pastoral livelihoods. This is because the tree is seen as a key cause for the aggravating problem with animal diseases as its fruits are believed to poison their sheep. The toxicity of Prosopis juliflora and its constituent species Lantena camera has some support in the academic literature and the latter is believed to be causing thousands of livestock deaths every year (Robbins, 2001; Sharma et al., 2003). Physical obstacles due to infrastructural development and fencing are also seen as critical changes that are increasing. Congested roads mean direct danger to the livestock and obstacles like fences are fragmenting the landscape, which forces pastoralists to choose alternate routes, often along roads. Another issue that is forcing the herders to change their migratory routes is the enduring problem of the stigmatisation of pastoralists. Some previously important grazing grounds are avoided because of local villagers' hostility towards herders. Negative stereotypes and harassment seem to have created a feeling of hopelessness regarding the future of their profession. The absolute majority of the herders interviewed for this study no longer viewed pastoralism as a viable livelihood option and were determined that their children should not follow in their footsteps. from the ground because of the different stories these methods tell about environmental change. Local knowledge about the environment is very limited on a landscape-scale since land cover changes often occur slowly and over large geographical areas which makes them difficult to understand from a ground perspective. The unique contribution of RS to studies on land cover change thus lies in its large (temporal and spatial) scale perspective (Jiang, 2003). A purely qualitative study might have exaggerated the extent of grassland loss since such changes might be perceived as more

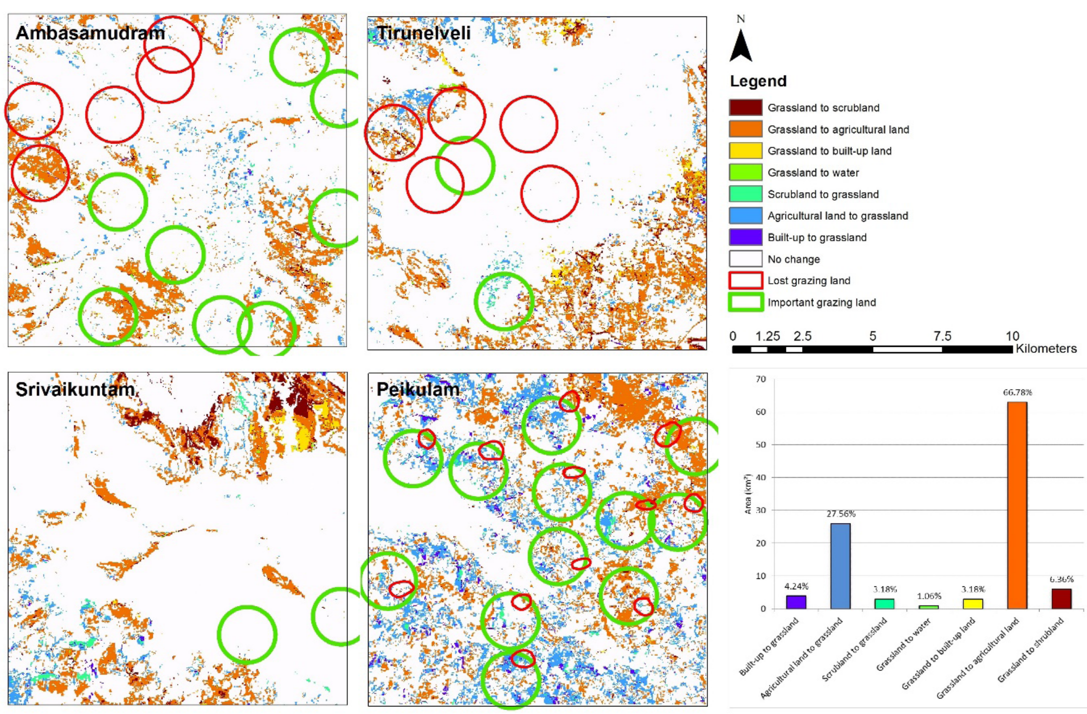


Figure 4: Remote sensing observations of land cover change within the four study sites between the years 1992 and 2014. Only changes that involves the class 'grassland' are shown. The red circles marks locations where pastoralists perceive grazing lands have disappeared and the green circles represents particularly important grazing lands (Wennström, 2017).

## Comparative analysis of observed and perceived changes

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative parts of this study illustrate the value of combining RS observations with perceptions extensive than they are according to RS observations. However, a conventional RS study on the pastoral landscape of southern Tamil Nadu would have missed important perspectives on landscape dynamics and obstacles faced by pastoralists. Mixing methods in this way produces data that complement and authenticate one another since information about the environment that cannot be observed from space can be provided through local knowledge which brings an additional dimension to land cover change studies (Mialhe et al., 2015). Both perspectives are valuable and important for understanding social-natural processes in the landscape (Herrmann et al., 2014).

Any discrepancies that might appear between the results can also provide useful clues about the changing landscape (Nightingale, 2003). Both the RS observations and the pastoralists' perceptions about the land cover indicated that grasslands have been transformed into agricultural land. However, there is no obvious correlation between the two information sources regarding the exact location that these changes have occurred (figure 4). One possible explanation for this discrepancy could be that the pastoralists talked about land cover changes that were in fact restricted to relatively small but important pastures. The disappearance of small patches of grasslands cannot be detected by the RS analysis of coarse resolution satellite imagery. Resource users may in fact perceive a certain land cover change as more extensive than it is because of the location's significance (Nightingale, 2003). Another possible explanation for the discrepancies between RS observations and pastoralist perceptions could be that the perceived decrease of pastoral lands is not mainly caused by conversion of grasslands into agricultural and built-up land. The interviews revealed that physical obstacles on the landscape, such as fences and roads, are making certain routes and grazing grounds inaccessible to the pastoralists. Such changes could not be detected through RS since the actual land cover has not changed. Nevertheless, to the pastoralists, their traditional pastures have been lost which might partly explain why they marked some areas as diminishing pastures during the PM workshop although no significant changes in land cover could be detected at the same location using RS.

## Conclusion

Combining RS observations and pastoralist perceptions has helped gain a wider perspective and a deeper understanding of land cover change dynamics than each method would have been capable of achieving on their own. The qualitative and quantitative methods worked not only to emphasize the different aspects of land cover change, but also to tell completely different stories about the pastoral landscape in southern Tamil Nadu. Thus, mixing methods has demonstrated how land cover change studies can be advanced through a methodology that integrates data from different epistemological traditions.

Large-scale changes in the pastoral landscape were captured through RS observations, which indicated that a decrease in grassland and increase in agricultural land and built-up land had occurred between 1992 and 2014. However, it also showed complex and obscure land cover change patterns that were difficult to interpret. The qualitative data gave further insights to this by providing perceptions from the ground. Pastoralists confirmed that agricultural expansion into grasslands were a major threat to their livelihood, however, to them this was just one out of a series of perceived livelihood impediments. Comparing the results highlighted the gap between the quantitative and qualitative data; the perceived drastic decline of grasslands was not detected by the RS analysis. Interviews indicated that physical obstacles such as fences and roads are fragmenting the landscape making important pastures inaccessible. Hence, the pastoralists are understood to be refering to the loss of rather small but significant locations and the perception of shrinking grasslands might be further reinforced by the fragmentation of the landscape. This result indicates that a policy to improve pastoralist conditions based on RS observation alone would most likely fail since most obstacles that were found through this study are not in the domain of detectable changes.

---

**Patrick Wennström** holds a MSc in Rural Development and Natural Resource Management from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. He is currently working as research assistant at SLU.

**Email:** patrick.wennstrom@slu.se

# References


Abdi, H., and Williams, L. J. (2010). Principal component analysis. Wiley interdisciplinary reviews: computational statistics, 2(4), 433-459.

Aitken, S. C., and Kwan, M.-P. (2010). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bakr, N., Weindorf, D. C., Bahnassy, M. H., Marei, S. M., & El-Badawi, M. M. (2010). Monitoring land cover changes in a newly reclaimed area of Egypt using multi-temporal Landsat data. *Applied Geography*, 30(4), 592-605. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2009.10.008

Burke, J. (2015, 3 December 2015). South India floods leave three million cut off from basic services. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/03/india-army-struggles-to-rescue-survivors-as-flood-death-toll-nears-270 [Accessed 20 August 2017]

Chambers, R. (1994). *Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development*. IDS working paper no. 2. Brighton: IDS.

Chaudhry, P., Bohra, N. K., & Choudhary, K. R. (2011). Conserving biodiversity of community forests and rangelands of a hot arid region of India. *Land Use Policy*, 28(3), 506-513. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2010.10.005

Corbett, R. et al. (2006). Overview: Mapping for Change: The emergence of a new practice. *Participatory Learning and Action,* 54, 13-19.

Dunn, C. E. (2007). Participatory GIS — a people's GIS? *Progress in Human Geography,* 31(5), 616-637. doi:10.1177/0309132507081493

Gardin, S., van Laere, S. M. J., van Coillie, F. M. B., Anseel, F., Duyck, W., de Wulf, R. R., & Verbeke, L. P. C. (2011). Remote sensing meets psychology: a concept for operator performance assessment. *Remote Sensing Letters*, 2(3), 251-257. doi:10.1080/01431161.2010.516280

Ghotge, N. S., & Kishore, K. (2016). *Pastoralism in India: the Warp and the Weft*. Discussion paper. Retrieved from http://www.anthra.org/publications/research-papers/pastoralism-india-warp-weft/ [Accessed 20 August 2017]

Government of Tamil Nadu. (2016). Animal husbandry. *Policy Note* 2015-16. Chennai: T.K.M. Chinnayyam.

Güler, M., Yomralıoğlu, T., & Reis, S. (2007). Using landsat data to determine land use/land cover changes in Samsun, Turkey. *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment*, 127(1), 155-167. doi:10.1007/s10661-006-9270-1

Herrmann, S. M., Sall, I., & Sy, O. (2014). People and pixels in the Sahel: a study linking coarse-resolution remote sensing observations to land users' perceptions of their changing environment in Senegal. *Ecology and Society,* 19(3). doi:10.5751/ES-06710-190329

IUCN. (2017). What is WISP? Retrieved from https://www.iucn.org/theme/ecosys-

tem-management/our-work/global-drylands-initiative/iucns-work-dry-lands/world-initiative-sustainable-pastoralism-wisp/what-wisp [Accessed 20 August 2017]
Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: the rise of the lower castes in North India*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
Jiang, H. (2003). Stories Remote Sensing Images Can Tell: Integrating Remote Sensing Analysis with Ethnographic Research in the Study of Cultural Landscapes. *Human Ecology*, 31(2), 215-232. doi:10.1023/a:1023980713048
Jodha, N. S. (1985). Population Growth and the Decline of Common Property Resources in Rajasthan, India. *Population and Development Review*, 11(2), 247-264. doi:10.2307/1973488
Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159-174. doi:10.2307/2529310
Lillesand, T. M., Kiefer, R. W., & Chipman, J. W. (2004). *Remote sensing and image interpretation*. New York: John Wiley & Sons .
Lu, D., Mausel, P., Brondizio, E., & Moran, E. (2004). Change detection techniques. *International Journal of Remote Sensing*, 25(12), 2365-2401.
McGahey, D., Davies, J., Hagelberg, N., & Ouedraogo, R. (2014). Pastoralism and the Green Economy–a natural nexus. Nairobi: IUCN and UNEP. x+ 58p.
Mialhe, F., Gunnell, Y., Ignacio, J. A. F., Delbart, N., Ogania, J. L., & Henry, S. (2015). Monitoring land-use change by combining participatory land-use maps with standard remote sensing techniques: Showcase from a remote forest catchment on Mindanao, Philippines. I*nternational Journal of Applied Earth Observation and Geoinformation*, 36, 69-82. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jag.2014.11.007
Nightingale, A. (2003). A feminist in the forest: Situated knowledges and mixing methods in natural resource management. ACME: *An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 2(1), 77-90.
Ramdas, S. R., Yakshi, & Deepika, G. (2001). Changing Livelihoods, Livestock and Local Knowledge Systems: Women Stake their Claim in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. *Bulletin* (Centre for Women's Development Studies), 8(2), 175-194. doi:10.1177/097152150100800202
Robbins, P. (2001). Tracking Invasive Land Covers in India, or Why Our Landscapes Have Never Been Modern. A*nnals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91(4), 637-659. doi:10.1111/0004-5608.00263
Sharma, V. P., Köhler-Rollefson, I., & Morton, J. (2003). *Pastoralism in India: a scoping study.* Ahmedabad: Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad.
Tracy, S. J. (2012). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
Tsarouchi, G. M., Mijic, A., Moulds, S., & Buytaert, W. (2014). Historical and future land-cover changes in the Upper Ganges basin of India. *International Journal of Remote Sensing*, 35(9), 3150-3176. doi:10.1080/01431161.2014.903352
Young, N. E., Anderson, R. S., Chignell, S. M., Vorster, A. G., Lawrence, R., & Evangelista, P. H. (2017). A survival guide to Landsat preprocessing. *Ecology,* 98(4), 920-932.

# The Hukou Divide – a Passé Construct?

BIRGITTE EGESKOV JENSEN

Previous research on the hukou divide has primarily focused on the tangible inequalities between urban and rural residents. In this paper, the reigning perception of the hukou divide is discussed from a social citizenship perspective, by relating recent social policy developments in China to the works of amongst others T.H. Marshall and W. van Oorschot. By examining the current state of the Chinese hukou system through multiple data sources and exploring recent policy developments, this paper shows that the hukou divide, despite having become irrelevant in some respects, continues to be an important determinant of social citizenship. The hukou system has created widespread institutional diversity of social security and sustained the stratification of social citizenship. Through the persistent depiction of rural people as lesser citizens, the hukou system consolidates rural people's self-image as a distinct undeserving group.

**Keywords:** China, hukou, welfare, segregation, exclusion, citizenship

It has often been argued that the decisive challenge for Chinese social policymaking is to abandon the hukou system which segregates the population's social rights according to where they are born (e.g. Solinger, 1999; 2003; 2006; Saich, 2008; Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Frazier, 2010a; 2010b; Shi, 2012; Gao, Yang, Li, 2013; Long & Li, 2016; Li, Liu, Xu & Zhang, 2016). With access to social welfare being determined by residency, one's hukou, which is one's official proof of residency, determines one's social rights. However, on a deeper level, it also defines citizens' roles in society by sustaining the rural-urban divide (Zeuthen, 2012; Gao et al., 2013).

The hukou system is not simply a manifestation of citizenship: it permeates all aspects of daily life, stratifies individuals and regions, and distributes resources and opportunities (Fei-Ling, 2005). The rural-urban divide has created social disparities, both within and between regions. Although some attempts have been made at rural-urban harmonization, Shi argues that "they appear unable to reverse the ongoing decentralization of social protection" (2012, p. 806). This has also been increasingly recognised by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and the system has been modified on several occasions, most significantly in a series of reforms that have been adopted since 2014 (Chen, 2017).

This paper contributes to the current discussion of the hukou system in three ways. Firstly, it assesses the development of inequality across the rural/urban divide, bringing in other dimensions beyond economic inequality. Secondly, it critically discusses the hukou divide from a social citizenship point of view, by relating recent social policy developments in China to the concept of social citizenship. Finally, it discusses the resilience of the system, drawing on van Oorschot's (2000) theory of 'deservingness'. It is argued that there is still a long way to go in terms of institutional reforms and that the hukou system may have made an impact on the deservingness heuristics of the Chinese population.

Social citizenship is a core concept throughout this paper. The subject of social citizenship and migration and their changing manifestations in today's China distinguishes between those who are full members of society and those who are not, as a result of the hukou system. Citizenship is often understood from a civil/legal perspective, thus emphasising one's ability to engage in the electoral system. However, in the case of China, meaningful participation within the political system is still negligible (Solinger, 2003; Hu & Saich, 2012; Saich, 2017). Instead, I follow amongst others, Marshall's concept of social citizenship focusing on individuals' 'social worth' and economic and social ability to fully participate in society, by focussing on the welfare-related rights and duties of social citizenship. The presence of the hukou system means that there is no such equal social worth at this time.

## A path-dependent trajectory

The hukou system, deeply embedded in Chinese socialist ideology and the planned economy, loosely translates into 'household registration record'. In its current version, the hukou system dates back to the Great Leap Forward in 1958-59, where a hukou was assigned to everyone. The hukou was used to standardize access to housing, food, land, education, medical care etc. The paternalistic Chinese government assumed responsibility for the welfare needs of the population.

When the system was first introduced, a rationing was put in place to guarantee the survival of non-agricultural hukou-holders, while millions of agricultural hukou-holders starved to death (Zeuthen, 2012). While urban citizens were taken care of by the government, rural citizens were to overcome hardship by "rely[ing] on the masses, rely[ing] on the collective, regeneration through production, mutual help and mutual relief" (Wong, 1998, p. 94). As such, the welfare system was relatively generous for urban hukou-holders, while it was meagre for rural citizens (Gao et al., 2012).

Despite the phenomenon of economic growth since the late 1970's, inequality has continued to rise. The World Bank has attributed this to the spatial inequality that exists between urban and rural areas (Atinc, 1997). To this day, China is made up of dual societies with distinct economies (Fei-Ling, 2005; Suda, 2017). The economic system is highly fragmented on several levels of society throughout China but is often simplified by a dual classification - a rural economy, which is shrouded in poverty and based on traditional agriculture. Nonetheless, poverty has decreased a great deal since the economic reforms. Moreover, urban economies in China experience rapid expansion, and increases in trade, foreign investment and contain some of the most advanced industries in the world.

In recent times, interest in the hukou system has mainly focused on the 'floating population' it creates: more than 200 million migrant workers, who are living in urban areas with a rural hukou, are to a varying degree excluded from urban welfare schemes (Kongshøj, 2015b, p. 71; Zhao, Jia & Zhao, 2017, p. 107). Studies have shown that rural-to-urban migrants are more prone to experience segregation or unsuccessful integration as a result of structural and policy barriers, particularly through the persistent institutional segregation of social security determined by the hukou system (Solinger, 2006; Shi, 2012; Chen, 2017). Below, I first assess the development of the rural-urban divide on several dimensions of inequality. Secondly, I consider recent policy developments, with a specific focus on hukou reforms. Finally, I assess the (remains of) the hukou system from a social citizenship perspective and discuss how such divisions may be reproduced as deservingness heuristics.

## Dimensions of inequality

The standard account in academia and media, that the hukou system has been abandoned, has been called into question in several studies (e.g. Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Zeuthen, 2012; Kongshøj, 2017). The rationale is that the reigning discourse is founded on a misconception of the current hukou system: even though the distinction between non-agricultural and agricultural occupations has been abolished since the 1990's, the hukou is still registered according to residency.

If we compare the development of per capita income of urban and rural households since 1978, we see that the urban-rural income ratio peaked in the period 2006-2009: at that time, average disposable income was 3.3 times higher in urban areas than in rural areas, compared to 2.6 in 1978. However, since then, inequality has steadily decreased to a ratio of 2.7 by 2015 (CSYD).

In 2015, 8.6% of the rural population received the minimum living allowance (MSLS), compared to only 2.4% of the urban population (UNDP China, 2016, p. 156). Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the MSLS is considerably lower in many rural areas: the average benefit paid was 37 yuan/person/month in 2007 compared to 102 yuan/person/month amongst urban counterparts (CDRF, 2012).

Several studies have established that educational attainment and allocation of educational resources are highly correlated with income levels (Yue, Sicular, Shi & Gustafsson, 2008). The data on rural-urban differences in educational attainments are highly fragmented, though several studies have established the existence of a rural-urban educational gap in terms of, among others, expenditure, quality, outcome, and job prospects (e.g. Wu, 2012; Li, 2012; UNDP China, 2016; OECD, 2017; Suda, 2017).

The 2000 and 2010 censuses (CSYD) do show that illiteracy rates have decreased in both rural and urban areas between 2000 and 2010. Moreover, when comparing the average illiteracy rates between rural and urban areas we find that the gap has diminished by 2.8 percentage points from 2000 to 2010 (CSYD). This indicates that the educational system has improved on a national scale, though there was still a small gap of 2% between rural and urban illiteracy rates in 2010.

China's efforts at achieving a universal welfare system is above all evident within the field of healthcare: almost 95% of the population were covered by a health insurance scheme in 2011 (Tang, Tao & Bekedam, 2012), however, a substantial share of the expenditure is still borne by citizens themselves. In 2011, the average reimbursement rate for inpatient care stood at 47%, with more than half the cost being covered by the patients or their families. Furthermore, compensation rates varies considerably across the country; in 2007-2010 it ranged from approximately 400-1852 yuan/person (Huang, 2015, p.451). Tang et al. (2012) note a decline in private expenditure after national policies began to replace the old disease-ridden public welfare system at the start of the millennium – an important step in the pursuit of universalism given the importance of tax financing in universal welfare schemes.

Despite improvements in the financing of the healthcare system, a sizable difference in per capita healthcare expenditure between rural and urban areas does persist. Though the ratio between expenditure in rural and urban areas have declined significantly from 2000 to 2014, a considerable gap remains. By 2014, expenditure was 2.5 times higher in urban areas (CSYD).

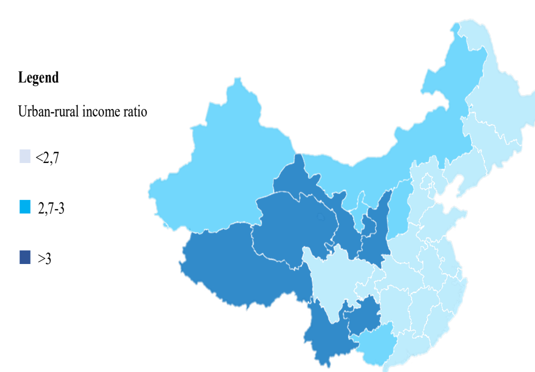


Figure 1: Urban-rural household income ratios, by province, 2015
*Source:* China Statistical Yearbook Database

Regional differences in the rural-urban income gap are compared in Figure 1. Firstly, it should be mentioned that the national average of urban-rural income ratio is 2.7 and spans from 1.8 in Tianjin to 3.4 in Gansu, which signifies great regional differences. Secondly, as shown in Figure 1, twelve of the 31 provinces have an urban-rural income gap equal to or above the national average and are almost all located in the western economic zone. One possible explanation for the higher urban-rural income gaps in this area could be the relative size of the rural areas in proportion to the urban areas and their varying stages of 'development'. Furthermore, these regions are the last to benefit from the market reforms and opening up since 1978.

It appears that there have been great advances in income levels, educational attainment and healthcare across China and that the rural-urban gap in these fields is slowly shrinking. Furthermore, it appears from Figure 1, that the rural-urban divide might have become less relevant in terms of economic principles, than other divides; regional divides, for instance, have become more prominent. It is therefore important to distinguish between the 'rural-urban divide' and the 'hukou divide'. As the distinction between rural and urban is slowly being washed out and coastal development has made some rural areas on the coast more affluent than some urban areas in the west, the rural-urban divide is becoming less significant, while the hukou divide continues to be the entrenchment of social strata as it facilitates social exclusion (Zeuthen, 2012; Gao et al., 2013).

## Recent policy developments

The 2000s witnessed a discursive turn in the Chinese government, where constructing a 'harmonious society' became an official goal. This led to social policy-making being framed as "putting people first" and "equalization of basic public services" (Ngok, 2013). Despite the nebulousness of these terms, it is evident that this reflects an aim to lessen the consequences of social risks such as poverty, unemployment and illness, as well as to reduce inequalities (Kongshøj, 2015a; Saich, 2017). This was accompanied by the formulation of a more coherent, comprehensive and inclusive policy framework in China; one that is focused on vulnerable groups in society such as rural and migrant populations (Saich, 2017; Carillo, Hood & Kadetz, 2017). This new realm of policies is supposed to reflect principles such as democracy, equality, freedom and the rule of law (Gow, 2017). However, we should keep in mind that the conceptualisation of these principles is "most contentious when compared with their common-sense meanings in western liberal political discourse" (Gow, 2017, p.102).

The aim of several policy initiatives was to promote and ensure the sustainable development of the rural economy by retaining and attracting a young rural labour force; initiatives included the New Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme (NRCMS), the promotion of agriculture and the improvement of rural infrastructure (Ahlers & Schubert, 2009; Chen, 2017). Furthermore, after two decades of pursuing coastal development, China sought to even out regional development by implementing the Western Development Programme in l999 in order to ensure continued progress (Hongyi, 2002).

Along with policies promoting rural development, there have been a number of policy initiatives designed to reduce discrimination against rural-to-urban migrants (Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Chen, 2017). The largest of these programmes is the 'New National Urbanisation Plan (2014-2020)', which was the first national policy strategy on urbanisation. Subsequently, the State Council presented the 'Suggestions for Advancing the Reform of the Household Registration System' in July 2014 and laid out plans to relax the hukou system. The suggestions specify the conditions upon which rural-to-urban migrants can apply for an urban hukou. The proposal distinguishes between small cities, where migrants can apply for an urban hukou with almost no restrictions, and megacities where access to urban hukous remain strictly controlled. Thus, in the foreseeable future, the new policy framework will do little for those residing in the largest cities in China.

The new policies enacted in 2014-15 guarantee a decent standard of living for China's rural population and form a solid step in integrating the growing rural-to-urban migrant community into urban welfare structures. It can only be assumed that the purpose of these policies is to further inclusive urbanisation and eventually remove the welfare disparity between residents with rural and urban origin. Nevertheless, this probably has a long way to go.

## Social citizenship and civic stratification

The founder of the sociology of citizenship, Marshall (1964), emphasises the exclusion of non-citizens as a prerequisite for inclusive citizenship, as legal rights and duties are bestowed upon all inhabitants within a state territory, creating a uniform collective.  For Marshall, social citizenship, in general, involves an equality of membership status and ability to participate in society. Roche (1992) builds on Marshall's work in his book 'Rethinking Citizenship'. He defines welfare in a rather broad sense to include things such as work, education, health and quality of life – and thereby, social citizenship as the right to attain these.

Others, such as Taylor-Gooby (2008) also emphasize the rights and duties components of social citizenship. As he frames it, "Social citizenship concerns the rights and duties associated with the provision of benefits and services designed to meet social needs and enhance capabilities, and also to guarantee the resources necessary to finance them" (Taylor-Gooby, 2008, pp. 5-6).

From the viewpoint of Marshall, individuals are equal if they are all governed by the same social rights and possess economic equality; however, a key point in the definition by Taylor-Gooby is that social citizenship also entails the possibility of enhancing one's capabilities. The distinction between resources and capabilities is an important one to make in this regard. Inspired by the thoughts of Sen (1985), capabilities is the feasibility that you can access – or have the freedom to pursue – valuable functionings, such as being educated and healthy, or having access to basic amenities.

Following the thoughts of this rather central paradigm within social citizenship, the solution to economic and political inequalities in China may be to create uniform social rights and secure that citizens are granted equal social worth. The dominant ideology adopted by the central leadership in the 2000s might suggest a movement towards a more inclusive welfare system based on a notion of equal citizenship for all those living within the People's Republic of China and could seem to offer the potential for a welfare system built on citizenship, as envisioned by Marshall amongst others.

However, despite the numerous policy programmes that have been enacted, we should not exaggerate the actual impact of the reforms on the hukou divide. The hukou system remains the primary institutional barrier for inclusive integration of rural-to-urban migrants into the somewhat more progressive urban welfare system. The notion that migrants do not need welfare support, due to them owning land in their home villages has become untenable (Hu & Saich, 2012). The population remains locked into vastly different socio-economic structures in terms of access to public goods and services and even though the system has become more permeable, social citizenship is still rarely granted to migrants in major cities (Saich, 2017; Woodman & Guo, 2017).

The system of resource allocation built into the Chinese welfare state and facilitated by the hukou system favours urban areas and creates vast inequalities between urban and rural areas. Despite the rhetoric of universalism in the discourse of the Chinese political leadership in recent years, the urban bias remains strong and the notion of citizenship forming the basis for welfare policy decisions remains far off (ibid.). Unequal entitlements along hukou differences have created tremendous social stratification within the Chinese welfare state. Coupled with the process of regionalisation of social protection, this has shifted the boundaries of social citizenship to localities and thus created a spatial form of social citizenship in regions and cities (Shi, 2012). Meanwhile, Woodman suggests that citizenship has taken an even more granulated form in China, as the rural/urban distinction is just one of a number of distinctions, each contributing to variations in welfare rights and the "relative value accorded to citizens" (2016, p. 343).

In other words, the Chinese population does not have access to uniform social rights – quite to the contrary, there has until now been a persistent reproduction of differentiation through the hukou system. This creates a barrier for inclusive social citizenship to evolve because of the inability to overcome the institutional fragmentation of social security within regions. In the words of Solinger "the hukou – very much as a badge of citizenship in a Western society would do – to a very large extent continues to determine one's life chances, including one's work opportunities, social rank, wage, welfare, and housing" (2003, p.7). This results in urban citizens enjoying inclusive social citizenship based on their access to welfare, while rural-to-urban migrants are "denied genuine membership" (Solinger, 1999, p.7).

The hukou system is a possible institutional explanation for negative perceptions and 'otherization' among the Chinese population because it results in dual social citizenship. Several studies have shown that public support for welfare policies is deeply affected by the institutional arrangement of the welfare regime (e.g. Titmuss, 1974; Pierson, 1994; Larsen, 2006; Slothuus, 2007). Deservingness theory describes how individuals consult a deservingness heuristic, which guides opinion formation, in order to evaluate whether certain individuals should or should not be entitled to certain social benefits (van Oorschot, 2000; 2005; Larsen, 2006). Van Oorschot identifies five 'deservingness criteria': control, need, identity, attitude and reciprocity (2000, p. 36); identity and reciprocity are important in the context of the hukou-divide. The Chinese urban population perceives those on the other side of the hukou divide as a different group whose deservingness is low, mainly because they are perceived as 'others' and because they are not perceived as having contributed to the common good (Kongshøj, 2017). The hukou system, by nature, may thus be recognized as facilitating deservingness perceptions that tend to maintain and reinforce the institutional division.

Not only does the hukou system impede economic equality, but being 'rural' is also highly stigmatized. Many rural subjects come to perceive themselves as 'undeserving' of care and internalize this stigma. Rather than perceiving themselves as 'sick citizens' they identify as "peasants unworthy of state care" (Long & Li, 2016, p.1695). Rural people are thus discouraged from furthering their capability development and social citizenship status, both in terms of health, and also in terms of educational attainment. Urban citizens have access to a broad range of welfare goods, jobs, subsidized housing, education, medical care and pensions. Rural citizens do to some degree, have access to these community resources, however, their opportunities are highly limited, as they do not have access to quality education or formal employment with pension benefits (Cai et al., 2012; Li et al., 2016). During their life course, rural citizens do not enjoy the same opportunities as urban citizens – they have fewer prospects for moving up the social ladder and accumulating wealth, which especially places rural elders at a greater risk of poverty in old age (Cai et al., 2012).

Needless to say, rural-to-urban migrants are often placed at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, as they carry out precarious, dangerous and unhealthy work. They are at high risk of becoming ill or disabled, have little knowledge of and experience with medical care, and have limited access to urban healthcare facilities, not to mention their exposure to the educational system. Fully aware of their marginal citizenship status in urban areas, migrants from rural areas are generally hesitant to identify themselves as urban citizens (Woodman, 2016; Chen, 2017; Woodman & Guo, 2017).

There are immense barriers to inclusive social citizenship because of the inability to overcome the institutional fragmentation of social security across the hukou divide, and because of the lack of trust in people on the other side of the hukou wall. The institutional logic of the hukou system promotes widespread institutional diversity of social security, which tends to create a divide in the Chinese population similar to that between national citizens and immigrants. Rural citizens are aware that they are receiving less than their urban counterparts are but justify such differences "by referring to urban residents' superiority" (Long & Li, 2016, p. 1696).

In short, even though the hukou divide has been modified as regards to small and medium-sized cities, it remains a divisive force as regards the big cities, and it is likely to be reinforced by perceptions of deservingness that are likely to make the hukou divide highly resilient.

## Concluding discussion

The hukou system continues to carry great importance for determining people's status in society, however, it has become misleading to refer to the hukou divide in China today, not least because of the varying levels of development across the country, which result in some rural areas on the coast becoming more prosperous than some urban areas in the western part of China and effectively dilute the rural/urban divide.

Nonetheless, the hukou system continues to be relevant for how social citizenship is granted in China. Firstly, it serves not only to register the population, but also to stratify the population. Secondly, it controls population movements, as migration is conditional under the system and will often lead to social exclusion, as rural-to-urban migrant workers are left without the same rights as those with an urban hukou and are treated as a distinct undeserving group. Lastly, by definition it divides the population by creating a dual social citizenship and imposing perceptions of deservingness that bolster the divisions.

The last aspect in particular is of great importance for this paper. The fragmented welfare system, which segregates China's population through inclusion and exclusion of certain groups from particular social rights, continues to define social citizenship. The pervasive institutional diversity of social security and sustained stratification of social citizenship have created a breeding ground for protectionism against outsiders, urban or rural, excluding 'others' from access to local social benefits, thus denying them genuine citizenship. Through the persistent depiction of rural people as lesser citizens, the hukou system is constraining rural hukou-holders in an idea of themselves as a distinctly undeserving group.

Recent policy developments have however shown faint indications of a rights-based approach in assessing access to public goods and services. With continued reform impetus and a sustained focus on inclusive and holistic welfare institutions, the hukou system just might shed its reputation as a force of segregation and embrace integration. Though everyone is a citizen somewhere, growing numbers of people are disconnected from their citizenship entitlements. Thus, for now, the hukou divide, as a construct that controls social citizenship, continues to live on.

---

**Birgitte Egeskov Jensen** is currently on a PhD stipend from Aalborg University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Her main research inter est is welfare state development in China.

**Email:** Bej@dps.aau.dk

# References

Ahlers, A.L. & Schubert, G. (2009). “Building a new socialist countryside”: Only a political slogan? *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 38*(4), 35–62.

Atinc, T.M. (1997). *Sharing rising incomes: disparities in China.* Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

Cai, F., Giles, J., O’Keefe, P & Wang, D. (2012). *The elderly and old age support in rural China*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

Carillo, B., Hood, J. & Kadetz, P. (Eds.) (2017). *Handbook of welfare in China.* Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Chan, K.W. & Buckingham W. (2008). Is China abolishing the hukou system?*. *The China Quarterly, 195*, 582–606.

Chen, J. (2017). *Rural-to-urban migrants: Access to welfare services and integration into urban life.* In B. Carillo, J. Hood & P. Kadetz, (Eds.), *Handbook of Welfare in China* (pp. 203-223). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Cheng, T. (1991). *Dialectics of control: The household registration (hukou) system in contemporary China*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations.

China Development Research Foundation (CDRF) (2012). *Constructing a social welfare system for all in China.* Oxfordshire: Routledge.

China Statistical Yearbook Database (CSYD). (2000-2016). *Annual Data* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/AnnualData/. [Accessed 08 July 2017]

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism.* Cambridge: Polity press.

Fei-Ling, W. (2005). Brewing tensions while maintaining stabilities: The dual role of the hukou system in contemporary China. *Asian Perspective, 29*(4), 85-124.

Frazier, M.W. (2010a). *Popular responses to Chinas emerging welfare state.* In P.H. Gries & S. Rosen (Eds.), *Chinese Politics: State, Society and the Market* (pp. 258-275). London: Routledge.

Frazier, M.W. (2010b). *Socialist insecurity: Pensions and the politics of uneven development in China.* New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gao, Q. & Yang, S. & Li, S. (2013). The Chinese welfare state in transition: 1988-2007. *Journal of Social Policy, 42,* 743-762.

Gow, M. (2017). The core socialist values of the Chinese dream: towards a Chinese integral state. *Critical Asian Studies, 49*(1), 92-116.

Hongyi, H.L. (2002). China’s western development program. *Modern China, 28*(4), 432-466.

Huang, X. (2015). Four worlds of welfare in China: Understanding the subnational variation in Chinese social health insurance. *The China Quarterly, 222*, 449-474.

Kongshøj, K. (2015a). The Chinese dream of a more progressive welfare state: Progress and challenges. *Fundan J Hum. Soc. Sci., 8*, 571-583.
Kongshøj, K. (2015b). 'Moderate universalism' in China and the Nordic countries: Reviewing the major challenges in unemployment protection. *Nordic Journal of Social Research, 6*, 68-85.
Kongshøj, K. (2017). The undeserving poor in China: The institutional logic of the hukou system and the minimum standard of living scheme. *Journal of Asian Public Policy, 10*(2), 1-15.
Lam, K-C & Liu, P-W (2014). Socio-Economic inequalities in happiness in China and U.S. *Soc Indic Res, 116,* 509-533.
Larsen, C. A. (2006). *The institutional logic of welfare attitudes: How welfare regimes influence public support.* Aldershot: Ashgate.
Li, B. (2017). *Housing welfare policies in urban China*. In B. Carillo, J. Hood & P. Kadetz, (Eds.), *Handbook of Welfare in China* (pp. 123-144). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Li, L.W. & Liu, J. & Xu, H. & Zhang, Z. (2016). Understanding rural-urban differences in depressive symptoms among older adults in China. *Journal of Ageing and Health, 28*(2), 341-362.
Li, W. (2012). Social exclusion and education inequality: towards an integrated analytical framework for the urban–rural divide in China. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 33*(3), 409-430.
Long, Y. & Li L.W. (2016). "How would we deserve better": Rural-urban dichotomy in health-seeking chronically ill elderly in China. *Qualitative health research, 26*(12), 1689-1704.
Marshall, T H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class: And other essays*. London: Cambridge University Press.
Marshall, T.H. (1964). *Class, citizenship and social development.* Westport, CO: Greenwood Press.
Ngok, K. (2013). *Shaping social policy in the reform era China*. In M. Izuhara (ed.), *Handbook on East Asian Social Policy* (pp. 105-129). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
OECD (2017). *Economic Surveys: China 2017.* Paris: OECD Publishing.
Pierson, P. (1994). *Dismantling the welfare state?: Reagan, Thatcher and the politics of retrenchment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Saich, T. (2008). *Providing public goods in transitional China.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
Saich, T. (2017). *The politics of welfare policy: Towards social citizenship?.* In B. Carillo, J. Hood & P. Kadetz, (Eds.), *Handbook of Welfare in China* (pp. 81-98). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Shi, S-J (2012). Towards inclusive social citizenship? Rethinking China's social security in the trend towards urban-rural harmonisation. *Journal of Social Policy, 41*(4), 789-810.

Slothuus, R. (2007). Framing deservingness to win support for welfare state retrenchment. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 30*(3), 323-344.
Solinger, D. (2003). *State transitions and citizenship shifts in China* (CSD Working Papers). Retrieved from eScholarship: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8vj015bz#author. [Accessed 12 February 2018]
Solinger, D. (2006). The creation of a new underclass in China and its implications. *Environment and Urbanization, 18*(1), 177–93.
Solinger, D.J. (1999). *Contesting citizenship in urban China: Peasant migrants, the state, and the logic of the market.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Suda, K. (2017). *Urban welfare and social justice: Individual perspectives of highly educated rural-to-urban migrants in the city of Guangzhou.* In B. Carillo, J. Hood & P. Kadetz, (Eds.), *Handbook of Welfare in China* (pp. 223-252). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Tang, S., Tao, J. & Bekedam, H. (2012). Controlling cost escalation of healthcare: Making universal health coverage sustainable in China. *BMC Public Health, 12*(1).
Taylor-Gooby, P. (2008). *Social citizenship under pressure.* Oxford: Oxford University Press
Titmuss, R. M. (1974). *Social policy: An introduction.* London: Allen and Unwin.
UNDP China (2016). *China national human development report 2016: Social innovation for inclusive human development.* Beijing: China Publishing Group Corporation.
Van Oorschot, W. (2000). 'Who should get what, and why?' On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. *Policy & politics, 28*(1), 33-48.
Van Oorschot, W. (2005). *Immigrants, Welfare and Deservingness: Opinions in European Welfare States* (CCWS Working Paper no. 34). Retrieved from Aalborg University Research Portal website: http://vbn.aau.dk/en/publications/immigrants-welfare-and-deservingness(f4cf4500-9c2c-11db-8ed6-000ea68e967b).html. [Accessed 02 August 2017]
Wong, L. (1998). *Marginalization and Social Welfare in China.* London: Routledge.
Woodman, S. & Guo, Z. (2017). Introduction: practising citizenship in contemporary China. *Citizenship Studies, 21*(7), 737-754.
Woodman, S. (2016). Local politics, local citizenship? Socialized government in contemporary China. *China Quarterly, 226*, 342-362.
World Bank (WB). (2017). *World Bank Development Indicators* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators. [Accessed 08 July 2017]
Wu, X. (2012). The household registration system and rural-urban educational inequality in contemporary China. *Chinese sociological Review, 44*(2), 31–51.
Yue, X., Sicular, T., Shi, L. & Gustafsson, B. (2008). *Explaining incomes and inequality in China.* In B.A. Gustafsson, L. Shi & T. Sicular, (Eds.), *Inequality and public policy in China.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
Zeuthen, J. (2012). Rule through difference on China's urban-rural boundary.

*Third World Quarterly, 33*(4), 685-700.
Zhao, Z., Jia, H. & Zhao, J. (2017). *Health inequalities, medical insurances and medical financial assistance*. In B. Carillo, J. Hood & P. Kadetz, (Eds.), *Handbook of Welfare in China* (pp. 98-123). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

# **“What do my emotions matter if mother is sad?”** Filial Piety and Heteronormative Obligations in *Beijing Story*

JONA BARABAS

A classic among queer works of literature written in Chinese, *Beijing Story* (original Chinese title: *Beijing Gushi* 北京故事) was one of the first Sinophone novels to openly portray homosexual relationships in modern time. The publication of the first English translation of *Beijing Story* in 2016 made the novel available to a worldwide audience. This paper sheds some light on the relationship between filial piety and heteronormativity that is portrayed in the novel – a relationship that often makes queer experiences in East Asian Sinophone spheres seemingly different from their Euro-American counterparts.
The analysis presented in this paper is based on a close reading of *Beijing Story*. In my analysis, I use concepts from queer theory and Confucian philosophy to examine the main character’s approach to the relationships in his life. I argue that while the main character’s attitude towards his own non-heterosexuality goes from complete rejection to relative self-acceptance over the course of the novel, his major life choices are ultimately determined based on perceived social obligations related to heteronormativity and filial piety.

**Keywords:** Beijing Story, China, queer, filial piety, literary analysis

Romance between people of the same gender exists in all parts of the world, and has existed since the dawn of human history. In the historical records of the region we now call China, homosexual relationships outside of the heterosexual marriage have been recorded in texts about court-dwellers and commoners alike throughout the dynasties, and male same-sex intimacy was relatively accepted during many historical time periods up until the 1900s (Dikötter, 1995, pp. 137-145; Hinsch, 1992, p. 16). In the modern era, however, individuals who engage in same-sex relationships in East Asian Sinophone communities often face great difficulty in simultaneously accommodating their own desire and their obligations towards their family. The strong influence of Confucian thinking, which emphasizes filial piety and continuation of the family line, makes it difficult for same-sex couples to be open about their relationships and leads many homosexual individuals to engage in heterosexual marriages despite their own personal preferences (Bie & Tang, 2016, p. 363; Zhu, 2017, p. 2).

Many of the issues faced by Chinese and other Sinophone queer individuals are brought to life in the novel *Beijing Story* – one of the first modern works of literature written in Chinese to openly portray same-sex relationships. Published as an e-novel by an anonymous writer in 1998, it gained popularity among both queer and heterosexual readers for its candid portrayal of the relationship between the rich businessman Chen Handong and his long-term on-and-off boyfriend Lan Yu. Borrowing the words of Petrus Liu, 'the rise of "cyber literature" […] fundamentally altered the ways that queer people in China articulate their subterranean desires and organize their lives. All of this makes the analysis of [Beijing Story] a critical task for understanding global queer cultures' (2016, p. 373).

Inspired by Liu's statement, this study is a contribution to the small body of existing research on *Beijing Story* (see Chang, 2010; Chiang, 2014; Eng, 2010; Liu, 2016; Myers, 2016), as well as a contribution to the greater body of research that has emerged at the intersection of homosexuality and kinship in East Asian studies over the last two decades (see for example Berry, 2001; Chou, 2001; Engebretsen, 2014, 2017; Ho, 2011; Rofel, 1999). The essay sheds light on the interpersonal relationships portrayed in the novel in order to explore the resilience of cultural traditions in queer subject formation. Thus, the aim of this study is not only to provide an analysis of the literary work at hand, but to also contribute to deeper knowledge and understanding of contemporary queer realities in Sinophone societies. As Chris Berry describes it in his article on gay identity in Asian film, 'these films [are] registering and expressing some of the ways in which being gay […] is imagined both by self-identified gay men and by others. In other words, these films do not necessarily tell us about the empirical realities of gay lives in East Asian communities, but they do tell us something of what it means to be gay in East Asian cultures' (2001, pp. 211-212). It is with a similar mindset that this study has been carried out.

In this essay, I make use of concepts from queer theory to describe sexuality and identity, and the concept of *xiao* from Confucian philosophy to describe family traditions particular to Sinophone culture. By juxtaposing my own findings with those of other scholars in the field of queer East Asian studies, I discuss the main character's balancing act between his emotions and obligations in light of empirical, real-life observations from the Sinophone queer sphere. I argue that while the main character's attitude towards his own non-heterosexuality goes from complete rejection to relative self-acceptance over the course of the novel, perceived social obligations related to heteronormativity and filial piety ultimately lead him to put aside his personal desires and resign himself to a life that fits into the mainstream model of heteronormativity. The aim of this essay is not to determine whether the events in *Beijing Story* are realistic or not; my intention is rather to link the fictional events to reality, and reveal the way in which Beijing Story can tell us something about the lives of queer individuals in contemporary Sinophone societies. The analysis is based on the original Chinese e-version of the novel. English translations of quotes from the novel are my own.

## Identity and self-acceptance

In *Queer Women in Urban China*, Engebretsen underscores the difference between homosexual acts and homosexual identity in her portrayal of a heterosexually married woman who is engaged in a same-sex relationship, but who clearly refuses identification with the lesbian community on the grounds that she is 'normal,' i.e. not a lesbian (2014, pp. 70-71). In a similar manner, Handong, the main character in *Beijing Story*, declares his taste for casual sex with both men and women already in the first chapter, but maintains that he is heterosexual for most of the narrative, despite his obvious same-sex attraction. His relationship with Lan Yu, a male migrant student whom he pays for a night's company (see Kong, 2012, and Rofel, 2010, for discussions on so called 'money boys,' or male sex-workers, in China), sets off a rollercoaster where Handong finds himself questioning the boundaries between sexuality, identity, physical intimacy and true emotions.

Even though Handong's feelings for Lan Yu grow stronger over time, the struggle over his own sexuality and 'normalcy' is something that haunts Handong for years. Early in the novel, when Handong has broken up with Lan Yu for the first time, he considers his own identity and the meaning of his feelings:

> I was more and more starting to feel that this thing with Lan Yu was getting absurd, downright abnormal. I even started to think of a ridiculous word: 'love.' I wouldn't degenerate so far as to fall in love with a guy, would I? I knew I was normal. I just liked to play around in somewhat extreme ways. (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 6)

When Handong's feelings toward Lan Yu grow in intensity, they trigger a sense of insecurity concerning his own identity. While he has a very relaxed attitude towards mere sex between men (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 1), the use of words such as 'absurd' (*huangtang*), 'abnormal' (*lipu)*, 'ridiculous' (*kexiao*), and '[to] degenerate' (*huangtangdao*) when he considers his potential feelings for Lan Yu clearly indicates a negative attitude towards love between people of the same sex, and that it is something he is unable to identify with at this stage in the narrative.

Apart from plain fear of breaking the heterosexual norm, Handong's unwillingness to put labels on his sexuality can also be related to the fact that the focus on 'queer identity politics' and 'coming out' (concepts largely associated with queer movements in 'the West') is seen by many as much too confrontational and politicized to be compatible with so called '"authentic" Chinese values' (Ho, 2011, p. 125; see also Chou, 2001). According to Ho, 'this Western-style politics of identity does not have a huge amount of influence over the formation of elusively modern forms of gay and lesbian identities in urban China' (2011, p. 125), and according to Petrus Liu, '[t]he resistance to identity politics is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of [Beijing Story]' (2016, p. 379). Indeed, in the case of *Beijing Story,* labels such as 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' are used sparingly, and sexuality is instead largely conveyed as a set of actions, rather than identities.

As the novel moves forward, Handong appears to, at least partly, have come to terms with the idea of being romantically engaged with another man when he describes how his relationship to Lan Yu is different from his previous homosexual experiences:

> I had realized that the kind of strictly 'sexual' relationship I could have with other guys was impossible to maintain with Lan Yu. When I was with him, I helplessly tumbled into a whirlwind of emotions, and when I saw him less often, my longing for him became stronger and stronger. (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 18)

Compared to when he describes his own feelings for Lan Yu as 'absurd' (huangtang) in the beginning of the novel (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 6), this quote suggests that Handong is increasingly beginning to estimate the value of his relationship based on the emotional connection between him and his partner, rather than the gender of his partner.

The process towards self-acceptance is, however, slowed down by recurring bouts of anxiety, self-questioning and a consistent inability to verbally articulate his same-sex desire even in private conversation with Lan Yu (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 15 & 18). As Petrus Liu argues, this 'internalized homophobia' is also part of the reason behind Handong's constant break-ups with Lan Yu (2016, p. 375). It is not until towards the end of the novel, when Handong ends up in jail and narrowly escapes the death penalty for major financial crimes committed within his company, that he appears to have gained a sense of self-acceptance about his sexuality: 'I didn't think about whether I was homosexual or heterosexual any longer. In the face of death, the issue faded into insignificance altogether' (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 27). Even so, the capacity for self-acceptance does not equate to the ability to verbally or physically display his own emotions to the outside world.

## Family matters

Branding heterosexuality as a standard way of living and loving results in assigning a minority status to any non-heterosexual individual, which in turn may cause these individuals to become targets of prejudice and discrimination (Meyer, 2003, p. 674). For example, according to Meyer, lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals are more likely to experience mental health problems than heterosexual people because of the 'hostile and stressful environment' they may experience as minority individuals in a heteronormative society (2003, p. 674). Moreover, according to Chou Wah-Shan, the situation for queer individuals within what he calls the 'traditional Chinese culture' differs mainly from that of those in 'the West' by the way in which the communities classify their members – with the separate individual or with the family as the core unit:

> While the basic tenet of Western [lesbian/bisexual/gay] discourses is to regard the [lesbian/bisexual/gay] subject as an individual with unalienable rights, the traditional Chinese culture simply refuses to classify people into homo or hetero because individuals [. . .] are first and foremost members of the family and wider society [. . .] In this construct, the family is perceived to be the most basic and profound social institution, and xiao (filial piety) is given central value. (Chou, 2001, pp. 33-34)

Thus, Chou argues that for queer individuals in China, the primary source of anxiety lies not in oppression from the government, religious groups, or work discrimination, but in the relationship with one's family (see also Berry, 2001, p. 219, and Ho, 2011, p. 10).

The concept of xiao (filial piety) is often named as one of the main contributors to anxiety in the queer Sinophone individual (Engebretsen, 2014; Kam, 2013; Rofel, 1999), and can be traced back to the document Xiaojing (Canon of Filial Piety). The Xiaojing is one of the major influential works on family relations within Confucian philosophy that stipulates the necessity of demonstrating gratitude to your parents for bringing you into the world, and stresses the importance of carrying on the family line (Goldin, 2011, p. 35). However, at a point in history when the idea of what constitutes a family is undergoing veritable changes, the question arises whether traditional Confucian family values are still relevant in the forming of respectable members of society. In Hu and Scott's study about the influence of traditional values on contemporary Chinese individuals, they found that '[p]atrilineal beliefs and traditional gender roles [are] being questioned' but that 'neither education nor urbanization is undermining [the adherence to] filial piety' (Hu & Scott, 2016, p. 1288). This mindset is a factor that may create problems for individuals whose lifestyle does not correspond to a traditional family life with children. It is also the major source of distress for Handong in dealing with his relationship to Lan Yu.

In *Beijing Story*, Handong's mother is the main representative of the traditional Confucian mindset, as she is the voice that constantly urges Handong to get married and build a family for himself (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 6, 15 & 20). The fact that Handong's own words also echo values related to filial piety when he discusses family values with Lan Yu ('Men have the responsibility to carry on the family bloodline!', Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 15) further indicates that his mother's major psychological influence on Handong has led him to internalize parts of the very mindset that denounces him the right to an independent choice of life partner.

Over the couple of years following their first meeting, Handong and Lan Yu develop an on-and-off relationship that forces Handong to balance his feelings for Lan Yu against his need to keep up an appearance of heterosexuality in front of his family. At one point in the novel, Handong invites Lan Yu to the New Year's celebration at Handong's family home: 'After insistent demands from my part, [Lan Yu] came home with me on New Year's Eve. It was a huge risk, but I really did empathize with him' (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 4). The use of the word 'risk' (*maoxian*) in this situation indicates two things: firstly, that the intimacy between Handong and Lan Yu is so great that Handong expects that his family members may become suspicious if they see him and Lan Yu together. Secondly, it indicates that if his family were to notice his close relation to Lan Yu, it would entail problems for Handong regarding his relationship to the family. The event brings to mind Engebretsen's discussion on 'tacit compartmentalization' as a strategy for queer individuals to balance 'surface compliance' and personal desires in their relationship to family members: 'compartmentalization is at the heart of tacit queer strategies, as a means to uphold social stability and family harmony. The problem arises when "being [queer]" becomes an exclusive identity that traverses these fields' (2014, p. 78). By breaking the 'compartmentalized' boundaries between his life with Lan Yu and the life with his family, Handong risks breaking the balance that allows his double life to function.

As pointed out by Chou Wah-Shan, in a society where filial piety is given key importance, hurting one's parents and making them 'lose face' is the last thing a child wants to do (2001, pp. 33-34. See also Engebretsen 2014, 2017). In Beijing Story, Handong's close relationship to his mother is his main source of emotional support and reassurance; thus, disappointing his mother results in personal suffering in a multitude of aspects. The first time Handong's mother confronts him about his relationship to Lan Yu, Handong successfully convinces her that she is mistaken; however, he experiences profound pain from seeing her disappointed in him:

> [Mother:] 'Seeing you study, do business, even become director of City Commerce, and be respected by others – it made [me] so happy. But then you go and commit such lowly acts. If people found out – how could you look them in the eye? Huh? If you have a pet, you can't bear to witness it get hurt, but letting your mother see other people look down on her son [and] cast him aside – isn't that worse for a mother than death itself? [...]' My mother cried, completely heartbroken. I felt my own tears well up too. It felt like someone had punched me. I was a grown man, but seeing my mother in such pain and wishing for her own death was more than I could endure. When I saw my mother's red, tearful eyes – Lan Yu, his love, and my own emotions – what did these things matter then! (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 27)

Handong's renouncing of his own emotions in the above quote shows that he not only suffers when he sees his mother in pain, but that he also puts his mother's feelings before his own and is ready to relinquish any of his personal desires in order to make her happy.

## What matters most

Over the course of the narrative, Handong's attitude towards his own sexuality changes from complete rejection of his emotions for Lan Yu to acceptance of his own ability to love another man. Nevertheless, Handong's fear of failing to perform his filial obligations manifests itself towards the end of the novel, when he has not only failed to carry on the family name through a short-lived marriage to a female business associate, but his mother has also become firmly aware of the true nature of his relationship with Lan Yu.

In one of the rare scholarly articles available on *Beijing Story*, Chang Wenxiao links the difficulty of being openly homosexual in contemporary China to the country's history of being an agricultural society, where marriage and reproduction were literally crucial to the family's survival (2010, p. 69). Thus, Chang indicates that the negative attitude towards homosexuality in Sinophone communities may arise primarily out of negativity towards homosexual couples' inability to produce children, rather than from other causes. In Bie and Tang's study about gay Chinese men's attitudes toward their own sexuality, respondents mention extreme feelings of guilt related to their own homosexuality, and that they see their primary filial duty as 'to get married, produce offspring and carry on the family name' regardless of their own chances of happiness in such an arrangement (Bie & Tang, 2016, p. 364). For many queer individuals, failure or reluctance to enter into marriage often brings about considerable feelings of guilt, as it indicates a failure to live up to parents' expectations (Engebretsen, 2014, p. 107; Kam, 2013, p. 77).

Similar feelings of guilt are also noticeable in *Beijing Story*, where because of his mother's discontent with his failure to marry and his relationship with Lan Yu, Handong starts to avoid his mother in fear of confronting her: 'I seldom went home. I was too afraid to face my mother. She rarely smiled [during those days]. I suppose she had already lost all hope in me' (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 26). Handong interprets his own failure at living up to his mother's expectations as an indirect act of hurting her. Thus, acting according to his mother's wishes, and thereby not hurting her, is also a way for Handong to minimize his own personal suffering. When Handong ends up in jail, his thoughts go primarily to his mother:

> During that time, the only people I could think of were my mother and Lan Yu. Especially my mother. […] My thoughts went to the single, most fundamental thing she had requested from me, and the fact that I'd been unable to give her just that. Now I had also made her witness her son going to jail. The shame was unbearable. (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., chapter 27)

Although at this stage in the novel, the most immediate source of suffering for his mother is having to watch her son go to jail, Handong also refers to himself being unable to satisfy his mother's 'most fundamental request.' While the precise meaning of the 'request' is not specified in the text, it may be interpreted as the ability to maintain a marriage to a woman and to provide his mother with grandchildren.

Handong's struggle for relative happiness through the strategy of 'tacit compartmentalization' mentioned above (Engebretsen, 2014, p. 78) comes to an abrupt end when Lan Yu is tragically killed in a traffic accident towards the end of the novel. With his only true love dead and gone, the ultimate proof of Handong's commitment to his mother is his decision to remarry and have a child at the end of the novel. In the epilogue, Handong has married again and lives with his mother, his new wife and daughter in Vancouver, Canada:

> Three years [after Lan Yu's death], I moved to Canada and bought a house in West Vancouver. I married again. I don't have the same courage as Lan Yu, to face my identity as a homosexual. Moreover, I feel like my heart was already closed shut long ago. I am incapable of really loving my young wife, but I do everything I can to be kind to her, and to take good care of her. (Beijing Tongzhi, n.d., epilogue)

In a discussion on the balancing act between accommodating one's own wishes and the wishes of one's parents as a queer subject in the Sinophone sphere, Engebretsen writes: 'It is not a given that happiness is a quality most ideally contained in and experienced by an individual. Rather, the dominant definition of happiness alludes to preexisting norms for socio-familial harmony and collective equilibrium. In this context, emerging possibilities for alternative lifeways must be negotiated carefully and contained within dominant limits for proper and improper behavior' (2014, p. 78). The epilogue shows that even though Handong acknowledges his same-sex desire, he is not willing to display it openly, but rather chooses to maintain a lifestyle that resembles heterosexuality. The fact that he prioritizes the fulfilment of his filial obligations over his own personal preferences further proves that what Handong values most is to be a good son and to maintain a good relationship with his mother, even if it means living in a loveless marriage to a wife he will never feel emotionally attached to.

## Conclusion

This essay is inspired by the notion of queer literary works as 'important cultural artifacts' that can deepen our knowledge and understanding of the 'queer global struggle' (Liu, 2016, p. 737). In this essay, I have examined the connection between same-sex relationships and filial piety in the novel *Beijing Story* by analyzing how the main character attempts to simultaneously accommodate traditional moral values and his personal desire in terms of romance. I have argued that while the main character's attitude towards his non-heterosexuality goes from complete rejection in the beginning of the novel to relative self-acceptance towards the end, his major life choices are ultimately determined based on perceived social obligations related to heteronormativity and filial piety.

The traditional family values and obligations associated with Confucian philosophy that prevent Handong from fulfilling his same-sex desire can be related to the situation of queer individuals in the contemporary Sinophone sphere. As Chou has argued, the tradition in Sinophone societies of viewing the family as the core unit as opposed to the individual, causes many non-heterosexual individuals to hide their true emotions in order to save the family's 'face' and to carry on the family line according to tradition (2001, pp. 33-34). Furthermore, Engebretsen's concept of 'tacit compartmentalization' (2014, p. 78) is also discernible in the novel, as Handong uses it as a strategy to separate his love life from his family life. Even though at the end of the novel, he has come to terms with his own sexuality, a wish to fulfil his filial duties towards his mother causes him to put aside his personal desire, and to resign himself to a life that fits into the mainstream model.

**Jona Barabas** is an MA student of Chinese Studies at Uppsala University. His primary research interests are identity, human rights and gender studies.

**Email:** j.barabas@outlook.com

# References

Beijing Tongzhi. (n.d.). *Beijing Gushi* [Beijing Story]. Retrieved December 9, 2017, from: shuku.net/novels/beijing/beijing.html.

Berry, C. (2001). Asian Values, Family Values. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *40* (3–4), 211–231. DOI: 10.1300/J082v40n03_11.

Bie, B., & Tang, L. (2016). Chinese gay men's coming out narratives: Connecting social relationship to co-cultural theory. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 9* (4), 351–367. DOI: 10.1080/17513057.2016.1142602.

Chang, W. (2010). Women zenyang du Beijing Gushi [How do we read Beijing Story]. *Dazhong Wenyi*, *12*, 69. Retrieved December 9, 2017, from: cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-DZLU201012060.htm.

Chiang, H. (2014). (De)Provincialisng China: Queer Historicism and Sinophone Postcolonial Critique. In H. Chiang & A. L. Heinrich (Eds.), *Queer Sinophone Cultures* (pp. 19–51). New York: Routledge.

Chou, W.-S. (2001). Homosexuality and the Cultural Politics of Tongzhi in Chinese Societies. *Journal of Homosexuality, 40* (3–4), 27–46. DOI: 10.1300/J082v40n03_03.

Dikötter, F. (1995). *Sex, culture and modernity in China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press.

Eng, D. L. (2010). The Queer Space of China: Expressive Desire in Stanley Kwan's Lan Yu. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 18* (2), 459–487. DOI: 10.1215/10679847-2010-010.

Engebretsen, E. L. (2014). *Queer women in urban China: an ethnography*. New York: Routledge.

Engebretsen, E. L. (2017). Under Pressure. In G. D. Santos & S. Harrell (Eds.), *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century* (pp. 163–181). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Goldin, P. R. (2011). *Confucianism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hinsch, B. (1992). *Passions of the cut sleeve: The male homosexual tradition in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ho, L. W. W. (2011). *Gay and lesbian subculture in urban China*. London: Routledge.

Hu, Y., & Scott, J. (2016). Family and Gender Values in China: Generational, Geographic, and Gender Differences. *Journal of Family Issues, 37* (9), 1267–1293. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X14528710.

Kam, L. Y. L. (2013). *Shanghai lalas: Female tongzhi communities and politics in urban China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press.

Kong, T. S. K. (2012). Reinventing the Self Under Socialism. *Critical Asian Studies, 44* (2), 283–308. DOI: 10.1080/14672715.2012.672829.

Liu, P. (2016). From Identity to Social Protest: The Cultural Politics of Beijing

Comrades. In B. Tong, *Beijing Comrades* (pp. 372–381). New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY.

Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129* (5), 674–697. DOI: 10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674.

Myers, S. E. (2016). Translator's Note. In B. Tong, *Beijing Comrades* (pp. vii–xviii). New York: The FemNY.

Rofel, L. (1999). Qualities of desire: imagining gay identities in China. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 5* (4), 451–474.

Rofel, L. (2010). The Traffic in Money Boys. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 18 (2),* 425–458. DOI: 10.1215/10679847-2010-009.

Zhu, J. (2017). "Unqueer" kinship? Critical reflections on "marriage fraud" in mainland China. *Sexualities*. DOI: 10.1177/1363460717719240.

# Asia in Focus
# A Nordic journal on Asia by early career researchers

## Aims and scope

Asia in Focus is a biannual journal where Master's and Ph.D. students affiliated to a European institution have the possibility to publish their findings in a widely accessible, transnational forum. The focal point of the journal is modern Asian societies, from Central Asia to Oceania but excluding Australia and New Zealand, from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities. We aim at a high academic level in a concise, focused and readable form. We publish academic essays, academic articles, and book reviews.

## Submissions

- Submissions are warmly received all year round to asiainfocus@nias.ku.dk
- Include in your submission confirmation that you have obtained the right to quote interviewees, publish pictures, maps and such in a public open access journal.
- For any other enquiries, please email us at asiainfocus@nias.ku.dk

## Preparing your paper

Before a paper can be published it must conform to the Asia in Focus style guide, which is summarized below. Please be sure to read and adhere to the rules of the comprehensive Asia in Focus Style Guide which can be found at www.asiainfocus.dk.

- The language of the journal is English.
- When submitting your article for publication, it must have been proofread by a native speaker of English.
- Text length: 3500 words (+/- 350 words), excluding photos, graphs and references.
- The paper should be prepared and submitted in MS-Word compatible software
- For references you should use APA style
- Do not include any endnotes or footnotes.
- Please state whether the submission should be considered an academic article or an essay.
- A concise abstract of no more than 200 words is required upon submission. Citing references in the abstract should be avoided.
- Provide a maximum of six keywords. The reader should get a strong impression of the main ideas discussed in your piece from this short list.
- Please include a short biography, including information about your affiliated institution, academic degree and your primary research interests.
- Please state whether or not we may publish your email address or other contact information.
- Think about the scope of the journal when you write your paper. Asia in Focus is multi-disciplinary with readers from different academic backgrounds. Thus, theoretical stances and arguments should be used carefully. The geographical/cultural focus of your article should always be introduced to the reader.

ASIA IN
FOCUS

WWW.ASIAINFOCUS.DK