



WORKING PAPER SERIES

AUGUST 2025

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 1

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The Issue of Transition in the Indian Social Context: Feudal Site of the Household

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August 20, 2025
FLAME Working Paper Volume 2, Issue 1

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of FLAME University.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment: This paper would not have been possible without the wizardry that Dr. Sunil Rajpal (Assistant Professor, FLAME University) possesses over the National Family Health Survey published by the Government of India. Dr. Marc Garcelon (University of Missouri, Kansas City), Dr. Anjan Chakrabarti (Calcutta University), and Dr. Anubrata Deka (FLAME University), who provided critical feedback, suggestions, and comments on previous drafts of this essay, continue to push me to polish it further. Any shortcoming is the sole responsibility of the author.

Funding: Not applicable

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Abstract

The debates revolving around the issue of transition of the Indian social totality can be broadly demarcated into two camps, where the first evaluates the issue of transition through the monochromatic lens of class, and the second camp attempts to discover the basis of transitions through the spectrometer of culture and ideology. This can be viewed as oscillating between the choice of ontologically privileging class or culture. The primary objective of this analysis is to utilize the class-analytic framework to illustrate that transitional conjunctures can be evaluated, articulated, and comprehended as a convoluted and protracted process of ceaseless and mutual interaction of class and culture. The class-analytic framework is empirically illustrated in transitional conjunctures emanating from the interaction of the feudal economic form (the feudal site of the household) and the capitalist economic form currently underway in the Indian social totality.

Keywords: Transition, Class, Culture, Feudal Site of the Household, Class-Analytic Framework, India.

1. Introduction

The debates involved in comprehending the transition of the Indian social totality have been characterized as encapsulating both change and no change (Chakrabarti, Dhar, & Dasgupta, 2015). The former argues that everything changed with the advent of liberalization (market reforms) introduced in the early 1990s, and the latter emphasizes that there was no change, as the imperative for accumulation had remained the same, only that it was diverted from state-led accumulation towards private entities. The theoretical positions and debates that this no change strand encapsulates are broad and deep, and a full-fledged revision is not the focal point of this analysis. Instead, this analysis focuses on those debates within the no change strand by demarcating it into two camps: the first evaluating the issue of transition through the monochromatic lens of class, and the second camp attempting to discover the basis of transitions through the spectrometer of culture and ideology. This demarcation entails a simplification, but this simplification¹ serves the purpose of positioning the issue of transition as a choice between class or culture. The primary objective of this analysis is to argue that this need not be the case. To do so, this analysis depends on the class-analytic framework developed by Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff (1987, 2006) that enables us to articulate, evaluate, and comprehend transitional conjunctures as a convoluted and protracted process of ceaseless and

¹The broad demarcation that is being referred to is a reference to the Indian Modes of Production Debate (IMPD) that ontologically privileged class and the Subaltern Studies group that ontologically privileged culture as the basis for the transition of the Indian social totality. The simplification, on the other hand, is because this essay will concentrate on a selected subspace within the IMPD and the Subaltern Studies group. The IMPD happened between 1969 and 1981, with the majority of the passionate discussion, rejoinders, statistical work, and counterpoints happening on the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly*. The debate revolved around the mode of production in Indian agriculture, with various positions argued for and against, such as proponents of capitalism, colonial and post-colonial modes, pre-capitalism, semi-feudalism, and, relatively recently, the dual mode. Some of the prominent scholars involved in this debate were Utsa Patnaik, Ashok Rudra, Amit Bhaduri, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Paresh Chattopadhyay, Nirmal Sen Gupta, Hamza Alavi, Jairus Banaji, Gail Omvedt, and many more. This analysis focuses primarily on Utsa Patnaik, Amit Bhaduri, and Ashok Rudra, who can be argued to be the chief proponents of Classical Marxism. This limited focus is necessitated as the purpose of this essay is not an overview of the various positions within the IMPD. For a detailed overview, the interested reader can turn to Alice Thorner's (1982a, 1982b, 1982c) three-part essay *Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on Classes and Modes of Production in India* in *Economic and Political Weekly* or M.V. Nadkarni's (1991) *The Mode of Production Debate: A Review Article* in the *Indian Economic Review*. In the end, the rise of postcolonial theory relates back to Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* and the cultural studies that were happening in Birmingham under the tutelage of Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall (Spivak, 2014). There is a range of postcolonial studies, such as Pan-Africanism and the Latin American postcolonial theory, and the Subaltern Studies group is a part of the range of postcolonial studies and not the whole. Within the post-colonial tradition, this analysis is concerned only with the Subaltern Studies group. The Subaltern Studies Group itself can be categorized into two stages. The first stage is concerned with the failure of capitalism to take the classical route, and the focus was on the colonial history of India and the historiography of anti-colonial resistance. The second stage is concerned with the route that capitalism takes due to the failure of capitalism to take the classical route. The focus here is on a critical reading of a very selected subspace within the Subaltern Studies group and its theorization of the issue of transition of the Indian social totality. The best source for a detailed analysis remains *Transition and Development in India* by Anjan Chakrabarti and Stephen E. Cullenberg (2003) and to the former of the authors this work is heavily indebted to.

mutual interaction of class and culture (Chakrabarti, 2016; Chakrabarti & Cullenberg, 2001, 2003, 2007; Chakrabarti et al., 2015; Resnick & Wolff, 1979). The implication of this class-analytic framework is empirically illustrated in transitional conjunctures emanating from the interaction of the feudal economic form (the household reconceptualized as such) and the capitalist economic form currently underway in the Indian social totality.

Class has been the central tenet in classical Marxism². The focus was on evaluating the dynamics and deterrents to the achievement of a “singular (*sui generis*) economic form” (Gibson-Graham, 1993, p. 15). The emphasis on the achievement of the singularity of the capitalist economic form is due to its unique regulatory logic situated in the dichotomous opposition of the capitalists versus the workers over the production of surplus. The assumption here, due to the adherence to Hegelian expressive totality, was that the objective economic category of property relations (class-in-itself) and the subjective aspect of consciousness of common interests (class-for-itself) can be collapsed into the unity of the monolithic collectivity of class (Cullenberg, 1999). The debates on the issue of transition prove crucial for if the dynamics and deterrents to the achievement of the singularity are figured out, that is transition to the capitalist form, the realization of a “higher form of society” (Marx, 1990, p. 739) driven by the unique regulatory logic of the capitalist economic form becomes an inevitability. In the postcolonial Indian context, the concern was with the British Raj’s historical failure to complete the process of primitive accumulation that had resulted in a purgatorial state where class-in-itself and class-for-itself had not collapsed into a unity. The debates revolved around aiding the achievement of that unity—the singularity of the capitalist form—through policy prescriptions and state intervention.

From within the fold of classical Marxism, criticisms began to be levelled against the economic determinism that made “people go about like robots” (Chibber, 2022, p. 118). It was imperative, as was argued, to distinguish between structure and political agency as identities of the actors determined by culture (other social roles/relationships) are contingent on how the economic structure generates (or not) transformative action³. Despite this emphasis on agential identities—‘history from below’ as opposed to ‘socialism from above’ (Wood, 1982)—the materiality of structure remained integral to critical inquiry. The identification of the importance of agential identities marked a critical

²This is in reference to the common view that argues that Karl Marx had argued that the economic aspect of the social reality determined the non-economic, especially the various cultural, ideological and political aspects. This view theorized the idea of a rational and ordered development of the society that depended on the state of the forces of production as developed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The theory came to be known as historical materialism and is sometimes referred to as the Second International or orthodox Marxism or ‘official Marxism’. Many within the classical Marxist tradition had incorporated Marx’s understanding of society as “complexly and mutually constitutive” (Olsen, 2009, p. 178) of economic and non-economic processes. However, it morphed into the formalized version of the deterministic classical Marxist standpoint under the influence of the Soviet, Comintern, and Asian Marxists during the 1920s and 1930s and followed by Maurice Dobb, V. Gordon Childe, and Oskar Lange etcetera in the 1940s and 1950s (Olsen, 2009).

juncture within the debates revolving around the issue of transition. As it marked the beginning of the 'cultural turn' that would begin to question the needed materiality of structure as integral to critical inquiry (Chibber 2017, 2022; Nash 2001). It is here that class—the materiality of structure—was dethroned, and the crown of ontological privilege was placed on culture, with structure conceptualized as the product of culture (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). In the postcolonial Indian context, it is the Subaltern Studies group that led the charge on evaluating the issue of transition from the bedrock of culture. The inspiration was Antonio Gramsci's (2012) emphasis on the cultural and ideological dimensions of hegemony. Inspired, yes, but not wholly incorporated, as Gramsci's negative conclusion that consciousness could not arise within the relations of domination and hegemony was questioned (Arnold, 1984). The logic for this line of questioning was simple. Domination and hegemony are relations of power, and if these relations were totalizing in nature—the basis of Gramsci's negative conclusion—a relationship would be nonexistent. However, these relations of power do exist, and the subaltern (subordinated) inhabits an autonomous domain (P. Chatterjee, 1993; Guha, 2001) within those relations of power (P. Chatterjee, 1993; Guha, 2001). Unlike the negative conclusion, it is in this autonomous domain that the consciousness of the subaltern is conceptualized and thus enabling the assignment of a historical role to subalternity.

The purpose of this analysis is to critically engage with the debates revolving around the issue of transition of the Indian social totality. The focus is on those debates that can be broadly demarcated into two camps, with one ontologically privileging class and the other ontologically privileging culture. This focus, despite its involving a certain flattening of the breadth and depth of theoretical positions and debates involved, assists in setting the context for illustrating the class-analytic framework. The class-analytic framework envisions the social totality as a disaggregated (other economic forms can exist) and decentered (none of the economic forms are assigned the telos of history) totality. The disaggregated social totality comprises economic forms—such as ancient, slave, feudal, capitalist, and communist—in various combinations within any social totality. The decentering of the social totality means that the telos of history is not assigned to any economic form. The implications are twofold. First, this disaggregation and decentering discards the capitalocentric view where the sole focus is on the achievement of the historically evanescent capitalist form that is opposed to all other non-capitalist economic forms (Gibson-Graham, 1993, 2006a, 2006b). An opposition that undergoes further simplification as the non-capitalist economic forms— "different-from-capital" (Charusheela, 2010, p. 441) —are clubbed together under the catchall category of 'feudal' (Charusheela, 2007). Simplifying the issue of transition as a big bang like process of emancipation from the 'feudal' (one unified and closed social totality) to the capitalist form (another unified and closed social totality).

³As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2013) notes that E. P. Thompson (1966) expresses his unease in using the term "Making" in his *Making of the English Working Class* and then proceeds to justifying the use of it on the grounds that "Making" refers to an active process, which is dependent on conditioning but also on agency. In the sense that the working class of England was a long time in the making where the agential identities were caught in the process of becoming itself.

In the class-analytic framework, transitions cannot be viewed as a big bang like process but rather as a complicated process of shifts between and amongst the various economic forms existing in varying combinations within any social totality. For example, the interaction between the feudal form (not 'feudal') and the capitalist form may result in the feudal form transitioning to the ancient (self-exploitative) form. An example is empirically illustrated in a later section.

Secondly, the Subaltern Studies group questioned the bypassing, suppressing, and culturizing of the different-from-capital when viewed from the mantle of the capitalist form. However, absence of any way of addressing the existence of exploitative relations in the different-from-capital the essence of social reality was posited in the power relations embedded in property relations consisting of relations of domination (elite) and subordination (submissive/subaltern) (Guha, 1997). Thus, building on a "distinctly non-Marxist epistemology" (Resnick & Wolff, 2006, p. 11) that upended the hegemony of the material in critical inquiry with exploitation telescoped into aspects of domination and subordination. The class-analytic framework, on the other hand, preserves the analytical purpose of Marx's analysis by taking class as an entry point of analysis. Furthermore, and this is crucial, it is emphasized that the "conditions of existence" (Resnick & Wolff, 1987, p. 116) for each of the economic forms made distinct by an underlying class process are the non-class processes of cultural, ideological, and political that are encapsulated in the broad category of 'culture'. The transition of a social totality is the result of the "ceaseless and mutual interaction" (Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, 1988, p. 488) of class processes and non-class processes, where the non-class processes are not a secondary question to be resolved by referring to a primary question of class. Thus, transitional conjunctures are not mired in an 'at the last instance' emphasis on class that focuses on the achievement of the singularity of the capitalist form or culture that discards the analytical purpose of Marx's political economy. Instead, it can be articulated, evaluated, and comprehended as a convoluted process where class and culture ceaselessly and mutually interact with one another.

The analysis is divided into three sections. In the first section, the debates on the issue of transition in the Indian social context are critically examined. Despite a certain flattening of the depth and breadth of debates involved, this analysis argues that they can be broadly demarcated as a choice of whether to accord with an ontological privilege to class or culture. The second section lays out the class-analytic framework developed by Resnick and Wolff (1987, 2006). The theoretical arguments of the framework are illustrated through the feudal form in the contemporaneous Indian context. The choice of the feudal form is purposeful as it has been the focal point of analyses within the various strands of transition debates, but more importantly, the feudal form here is not the historically 'feudal' restricted to a narrow historical period of medieval Europe, but rather the household reconceptualized as a feudal site of production (Fraad, Resnick, & Wolff, 1994). This is followed by an empirical illustration of the transitional conjunctures emanating from the interaction of the feudal site of the household and the capitalist site of production currently underway in the Indian social totality. The last section presents the concluding remarks.

2. The Issue of Transition in the Indian Social Context: Class or Culture

The transition-debate began with Paul Sweezy's 1950 criticism of Maurice Dobb's *Studies in Development of Capitalism* in the pages of *Science & Society*, with additional contributions added in the reprint of the debate by Verso (Hilton, 1978b). The point of contention was whether to attribute primacy to internal contradictions or external factors for kickstarting the complex, transitional, and protracted process of emancipation from feudalism that the English society had undergone⁴. In the initial stages, the transition debate was not framed as a question of either internal contradictions or external forces, but the result of an interaction of both (Dobb, 1978a). This stance was later abandoned in favor of emphasizing the internal contradictions in lieu of defending the general Marxist law of development that economic societies are moved by their own internal contradictions. The determinate laws of motion effectively guaranteed, at least theoretically, the necessary subjugation of the 'feudal' into the singularity of the capitalist form (Hilton, 1978a; Hobsbawm, 1984; Katz, 1993; Laibman, 1984). The material basis of deep history could explain the "iron necessity" (Marx, 1990, p. 91) of transitioning to the singularity of capitalist form and setting the stage for transition from the capitalist form that had long been prophesized.

In the European context, the transition to the capitalist form had been settled, and the focus turned to analyzing and evaluating the issue of transition from the capitalist form. Such was not the case in the Indian context. The focal point of transition debates in the Indian context, specifically within the Marxist fold, has remained on explicating the failed transition to the singularity of capitalist form. In the Indian colonial context, the failure to achieve the singularity was evident in the resilience of the 'feudal'. An explanation was sought and found in the restricted time frame of the transition-debate—"two hundred-odd years which separated Edward III and Elizabeth" (Dobb 1946, 20)—that could account for only the beginnings of the capitalist form but not its maturation that ended with the industrial revolution⁵. It was argued that restricting the time frame was a "sleight of hand" (I. Habib 1995, 17) that whitewashed the role of force and subjugation that enabled the maturation of capitalist form in England, but more importantly, it obstructed the historical development of the Indian

⁴The transition-debate was focused on the decline of the feudal process of production that had advanced by 14th century and the beginnings of the capitalist process of production in the beginning of the 16th century. Dobb (1946, 1978a, 1978b) argued that feudalism was bulging at the seams due to its internal contradictions, whereas Sweezy (Sweezy, 1978a, 1978b) emphasized the external factor of growing trade and markets in the emerging towns. For example, Dobb attributed the flight of the serfs from the feudal manors due to overexploitation as increased war and brigandage exerted pressure on the coffers of the feudal lords whereas, Sweezy (1978a, p. 40) explained the flight of the serfs because of emerging towns that offered "liberty, employment, and improved social status". This debate, however, persisted only to be recast between Immanuel Wallerstein and Robert Brenner. Influenced by Sweezy and Braudel, Wallerstein (2004) developed World-System Theory that emphasized the 'world-system' as the unit of analysis and the importance was accorded to trade and commerce. Robert Brenner (1976, 1978, 1982), on the other hand, had

colony of conquest (Alavi, 1980; Blaut, 1989; I. Habib, 1975, 1995; S. I. Habib, 1975; A. Mukherjee, 2008, 2010; Panikkar, Byres, & Patnaik, 2002; Patnaik & Patnaik, 2016, 2021). Though critical of the restricted time frame of the transition debates, they remained tethered to the general Marxist law of development. The tonality of the critique makes it clear. Despite being critical, the belief was that the Indian social totality would have unraveled as per the schema of history if it were not for the obstructive colonial interjection.

In the postcolonial Indian context, the focus remained on explicating and debating the failed transition to the singularity of capitalist form. A debate that was famously christened as the Indian Modes of Production Debate (from now referred to as IMPD). The beginning point of the IMPD was that the British Raj had shirked on its assigned regenerative role—not in its obstructive capacity—of completing the process of primitive accumulation⁶. This resulted in the purgatorial state where wage labor was only in appearance and not at the level of essence (Bhaduri, 1973, 1977, 1981, 1983; Chakrabarti & Cullenberg, 2003; Chattopadhyay, 1990; Patnaik, 1976, 1986, 1990; Prasad, 1973, 1979; Rudra, 1970, 1987, 1990a, 1990b; Thorner, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c). Meaning that the hiring in and hiring out of labor had not achieved the pure form of voluntary and impersonal exchange of labor-power. It was understood that relations of domination and subordination underlining the ownership criterion—the ‘feudal’ subjectivities (Charusheela, 2007)—were hindering the achievement of the pure form of voluntary and impersonal exchange but nonetheless these relations were designated as “of a subsidiary nature”⁷

critiqued Wallerstein’s World-System Theory as a ‘neo-Smithian’ model of capitalism that had purposely omitted any analysis of class struggle. Without getting into the details of whether it was neo-Smithian or not it is important to note that Adam Smith (2003) himself, in Chapter 4 of Book III, entitled ‘How the Commerce of Towns Contributed to the Improvement so the Country’, had emphasized the importance of commerce and manufacturing. The argument, like Sweezy’s, was that commerce and manufacturing in the towns introduced order and governance, and with that the liberty and security of individuals, quite opposite to the state of existence that was characterized by servile dependency on the feudal lord and the insecurities that existed due to continuous warfare with neighboring estates.

⁶The internal contradictions within the ‘feudal’ could explain the beginnings of the capitalist form with the cottage industry but it could not explicate the process of gradual maturation to the putting out system under the merchant capitalist, then to the early factory system based on family relationships and finally, the modern production system where labor has been commodified in the original example of the English economy (Carrier, 2005; Marglin, 1974).

⁷The “starting point of the process of capitalist production” (Marx, 1990, pp. 715–716) is forced into existence—as was in the quintessential example of England—with the realization of two foundational conditions. The first is that “a division between the product of labour and labour itself” (the objectification of labour as a commodity) is realized and secondly, the required separation of the “objective conditions of labour and subjective labour-power” (Marx, 1990, p. 715). Both of these conditions must be realized as it was crucial that “instead of being able to sell commodities in which his labour has been objectified, must rather be compelled to offer for sale as a commodity that very labour-power which exists only in his living body” (Marx, 1990, p. 272). In the Indian context, Indian agriculture during the colonial era was financing the industrialization of the ‘metropolitan’, resulting in the forced commercialization by landlord, trader, and usurer, which failed to develop capitalism in colonial countries by promoting the ‘pauperization’ and not proletarianization. (Patnaik, 1990) This pauperization resulted in the Indian agriculture being dominated by landlord capitalism, with caste subordination of workers.

(Rudra, 1990c, p. 267) as they were destined to be subsumed in the pure form of waged labor. Contrasting this with the earlier Marxist -Feminist literature—the ‘old’ social reproduction debates (Mezzadri, 2019)—that aimed to highlight the dependence of the classic domains of production and value-generation on processes of generation and regeneration of the worker and the commodity labor power that happened in the household. The issue was with its de facto categorization as non-value producing, made explicit in the ‘wagelessness’ of housework. The imperative then was the provisioning of wages for housework to overcome the categorization of housework as non-value producing. Implicit here, however, is the dependence on a capitalocentric view where ‘feudal’ subjectivities of the feminized other must be subsumed within the pure-form of waged labor. It is here that there persists a similarity between the Marxist-Feminist and the IMPD, the difference being that for the proponents of the latter, wage relations already existed, but the concern was the ‘feudal’ subjectivities that continued to play an intermediary role in the postcolonial Indian context. To achieve the pure form, Utsa Patnaik emphasized state-led productive investments that would result in the formation of mature historical agents (waged-labor) in the industrial centers to facilitate the transition of the non-historical agents (the peasantry) whereas Amit Bhaduri emphasized the political intervention of the state and the revolutionary politics of the Left for the obliteration of the ruling class (semi-feudal class) that was hindering the achievement of the pure form.

The issue was that these ‘feudal’ subjectivities were proving themselves resilient, so much so that a “surrogate synthesis⁸” (Chakrabarti & Cullenberg, 2003, p. 152) had been achieved to realize the drive for accumulation. For the Subaltern Studies group, this surrogate synthesis marked the arrival of the passive revolution of capital in postcolonial India. Given that capital had synthesized the ‘feudal’ subjectivities persisting in the spaces different-from-capital and devoid of any way to analyze

⁷ Ashok Rudra argues that there are two well-defined classes in Indian agriculture: the class of big landowners and the class of agricultural laborers. The reasoning for this classification of the big landowners and agricultural laborers as dichotomously opposed classes because the big landowners hired in labor while the agricultural laborers were hiring out their labor. It is not assumed that there is not a group of middle peasants that do not belong to either of the two classes, but the contradictions presented by these groups of middle peasants are of a subsidiary nature. This has been a recurring issue in the conceptualization of the agrarian sector in India, which had no representative type of holding but rather a series of qualitatively distinct types of organizing production activity (Patnaik, 1976). For example, the receipt of surplus by the landlord could be in rent payment (big landowners), the appropriation of others’ labor as the primary source (rich peasants), a mixture of hiring out family labor for wages or leasing land (poor peasant family) and those that cannot subsist on rent and depend primarily on hiring themselves out (full-time labor families). Patnaik’s adherence to classical Marxism leads her to develop a ‘labor exploitation criterion’ (Patnaik, 1987) in which the hiring out and hiring in of labor are tallied such that a positive (negative) value reveals the social existence of the individual as an exploiter (exploited), effectively reverting to the necessitated subsumption of the different-from-capital in the image of the capitalist form. In the class-analytic framework, on the other hand, these qualitatively distinct types of organizing production activities can be comprehended through the class processes that exist within the agrarian sector. The landlord (big landowner) is not part of the fundamental class process if s/he is a big landowner, as surplus is accrued in the form of rent payments, but is part of the subsumed class process. The landlord (rich peasant) is part of the fundamental class process as an appropriator, and the landlord (full-time labor families) as the performers of surplus. Or for that matter, the landlord (poor peasant family) can be involved in a communistic/collective class process or feudal class process depending on the dynamics of performance and appropriation of surplus on the leased land where the landlord (big landowner)

these spaces from a Marxist epistemological stance, the dependence was on a distinctly non-Marxist epistemology. This entailed the positing of social reality in the power dynamics embedded in property relations, consisting of relations of domination (elite) and subordination (submissive/subaltern). Thereby, upending the hegemony of the material in critical inquiry with exploitation now telescoped into aspects of domination and subordination, with an implicit understanding that relations of power are not merely cultural (Butler, 1997; Chakrabarti & Cullenberg, 2003). Within these relations of domination and subordination, the subaltern (the subordinated) inhabits an 'autonomous domain' and thus enables the conceptualization of the subaltern's consciousness. The subaltern, draped in traditional garb, could finally erupt into a radically transformative challenge to the structure of power embedded in property relations and thus become the foundational basis for the transition of the Indian social totality. The conceptualization of this autonomous domain, however, is situated in the failure of the persuasive reach of the hegemon (for e.g. the landlord) to inculcate collaboration of the subaltern (for e.g. the peasantry). The dependence here is on the simple structure of hegemony, where the existence of the autonomous domain is the failure of the persuasive element to produce a "mirror image" (Chaudhury, 1994, p. 48) of collaboration in the subaltern's consciousness. Implicitly leaving out the possibility of adaptation and synthesization of the persuasive principles in a new avatar to inculcate collaboration among the subaltern. For instance, the "synthetic hegemonic power" of religious identity can produce a mirror-image of collaboration among the subaltern (Chaudhury, 1994, p. 44).

The existence of the autonomous domain was taken as a given. The issue that concerned the Subaltern Studies group was the heterogeneously subjective nature of the relations of domination and subordination. This heterogeneity needed a structure, that is, a universal ideal (Gramsci, 2012; Hall, 2016) that could provide a much-needed structure for the rebel subaltern to mount his/her/theirs radically transformative challenge. After an extensive analysis of the political revolts by rebel peasants, Ramachandra Guha (1997, 1999, 2004) is left lamenting the lack of maturity of the peasantry – a result of the heterogeneity of subalternity—and succumbs to placing the consciousness of the peasant as backward to that of the working-class consciousness, the monolithic collectivity of class. Questions began to be asked if it was necessary for the sovereign subject of history to possess a collective consciousness situated in the invariant structural form of the universal ideal? It was clear that subjectivities will be expressed in a variety of forms and instead of an invariant universal ideal, the need

is the lessee, while simultaneously positioned as the performers of surplus for the landlord (rich peasant) who is lessor. The ownership criterion, designated by the term landlord, remains the same but the social positioning of the landlord(s) is variegated.

⁸ Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2003, p. 137) argue that this surrogate synthesis is a "deformed case" arising out of the incomplete process of accumulation necessary for the creation of waged labor that results in the inability of capitalist form to supersede the spaces different-from-capital ('feudal' subjectivities) and become the historical basis for the passive revolution of capital.

was to discover the localized variations of subjectivities—"meaning constellations" (Chibber, 2022, p. 24)—in which the subaltern exists (Chakrabarty, 1992, 2000; P. Chatterjee, 1989, 1993, 2017; Prakash, 1995; Spivak, 1988, 2000, 2012). The search for meaning in constellations presents an issue of its own. For example, in the beginning, the focus was on rebel peasants as the poster child of subalternity. What this entailed was the subsumption of the other localized variations of subjectivities, such as the 'question of woman' that had, until a certain point, received nothing more than lip service on issues related to subalternity (Kothari 1994; Omvedt 1977, 1978, 2011). This resulted in the recognition of the question of women as different-from-peasant but nonetheless the problem persists. The question of women, much like that of the peasant, cannot be seen as incorporating unfractured subjectivities that allow them to speak for themselves, as subjectivities are necessarily fractured. The other in the instance of the 'question of woman' is the Third-World women (Mohanty, 1984; Whelehan, 1995) or the Dalit/Adivasi women as the other to the Upper-Caste woman (Deshpande, 2002, 2011; Menon, 2015, 2019; Rege, 1998). What then is to be the basis of subjectivity through which the subaltern does speak? The hope was that studying and evaluating the localized variations of protests would leave behind fragmentary imprints of a possible alternative universal ideal.

The search for fragmentary imprints of a possible universal ideal was proving to be a frustrating endeavor⁹. Making it worse was the rebel subaltern's incapability to overcome the elite's dominance and the elite's incapability to stamp out the subaltern. To break free of this spiraling embrace of resistance and dominance, emphasis turned towards the state as representative of the "spirit and the site of the surrogate synthesis (nationhood)" (Chakrabarti & Cullenberg, 2003, p. 142) and the seat of synthetic hegemonic power of religious identity. A similar change of track is also evident in the proponents of the IMPD. Given that the 'feudal' subjectivities were proving to be frustratingly resilient to subsumption into the pure form, it was famously declared that Indian agriculture was capitalist (landlord capitalism to be more precise), and analytical fervor turned towards the facilitative role of the state in fostering accumulation in the post-liberalization phase.

⁹The problem with this argument, as noted by Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2003, pp. 123-130) is that an analysis of the meaning constellations is undertaken in the hope that "pure consciousness" can be separated from "impure consciousness" of the subaltern. This is, in essence, reverting to the dualistic consciousness evident in the argument that pure consciousness is realized when class-in-itself becomes class-for-itself by subverting/subsuming the impure consciousness present at the level of agential identities. In the Subaltern Studies Group, the discursive existence of the dualistic consciousness reproduces this dichotomy in the search for pure consciousness in the meaning constellations that will subvert/subsume the impure consciousness. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that in the class-analytic framework, the subject is a decentered subject (Amariglio, Callari, & Cullenberg, 1991; Amariglio & Ruccio, 1994). The implication of the decentered subject can best be illustrated with reference to the 'question of women' and the type of sex work. As Marjolein van der Veen (2000) argues that there exist substantial differences in class processes between the worker who is paid wages in the brothel (capitalistic class process), a collective of workers selling sex in the apartment and pooling in their incomes (communitistic class process) or coerced into prostitution by pimps and traffickers (feudal class process/slave class process). It can be stretched further to the realm of OnlyFans, which can be articulated as an ancient class process where surplus is produced and appropriated by the sex-worker herself. Any eradicationist vision of sex-work then must take into consideration the decentered subject who, as illustrated before, might have more to lose from the proposed eradication.

Though interesting, the concern here is not with this change of track in critical inquiry but rather in situating the debates in evaluating, analyzing, and comprehending the issue of transition of the Indian social totality as a choice between class or culture. The class-analytic framework, to which we turn in the following section, enables us to articulate, evaluate, and comprehend transitional conjunctures as a convoluted process of ceaseless and mutual interaction between class and culture (i.e., class processes and non-class processes).

3. The Class-analytic Framework and the Issue of Transition

There are “two distinct passions” (Norton, 2001, p. 24) animating Karl Marx’s work. The first of which was an emphasis on the achievement of the singularity of the capitalist form as imbibed by the classical Marxists. The second was elaborating, identifying, and insisting upon the complex nonbinary concepts of class that he had “labored to clear the lands” (Norton, 2001, p. 23). It is the class-analytic framework that finally settled the issue that Marx had labored to do but not quite achieve by conceptualizing the social totality as disaggregated (as other economic forms can exist) and decentered (none of the economic forms is assigned the telos of history). The disaggregation entails the conceptualization of the social totality as comprising of variety of economic forms in different combinations—such as ancient, slave, feudal, and communist—in addition to the capitalist form. Decentering, on the other hand, rids the assignment of telos of history to any economic form. The implication here is that any social totality, comprising of variety of economic forms and in various combinations, need not tend towards the achievement of the singularity of the capitalist economic form. Each of the economic forms is made distinct by a class process that involves the performance/production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labor. To deduce the distinctiveness of the economic forms, a differentiation is drawn between the fundamental class process and the subsumed class process¹⁰. The fundamental class process refers to the conceptual division of individuals into paired groupings occupying the positions of producers/performers of surplus and appropriators of surplus. A schematic of the different fundamental class processes that can exist, in varying combinations, within any social totality is as follows: (1) ancient or independent class process in which the performer of surplus labor appropriates the surplus labor completely and individually, (2) slave, feudal and capitalist class processes are those in which the performers of surplus labor are excluded from any appropriation, and (3) communistic or collective class process in which none are completely excluded from appropriation or can exclude others (Chakrabarti, 2024; Chakrabarti & Cullenberg, 2001, 2003, 2007; Chakrabarti et al., 2015).

¹⁰The subsumed class process involves neither performance nor extraction of surplus labor but perform certain functions and sustain themselves on a percentage of the surplus labor distributed to them by one or another fundamental extracting class. For this analysis we will focus only on the fundamental class process.

Contrast this to the IMPD's capitalocentric view focused on the achievement of the historically evanescent capitalist form in opposition to the economic forms different-from-capital that are clubbed together under the catchall category of 'feudal'. In a disaggregated and decentered social totality, this capitalocentric view is discarded as, firstly, the 'feudal' is disaggregated into various economic forms such as ancient, slave, feudal, or communist, and secondly, ontological privilege is not assigned to the singularity of the capitalist form. Take, for example, the reconceptualization of the household as the feudal site of production¹¹ (Fraad et al., 1994). This re-conceptualization of the household is achieved by loosening the connection between history and theory, where the feudal form is freed from being a category constricted to a narrow historical period of medieval Europe (Spivak, 1994). The fundamental class process within the feudal site of the household consists of the producer of surplus (wife) who undertakes the transformation of raw materials with the produced means of production to generate use values through the preparation of meals, transforming dirt and disorder into order and cleanliness, and shopping for household supplies, etcetera. Within the feudal site of the household, there exists the production of surplus labor—the amount of labor performed beyond necessary labor—and appropriation of this surplus labor is undertaken by the husband (Cameron, 1996; Chaudhury & Chakrabarti, 2000; Fraad, 2003, 2015; Fraad et al., 1994; Gibson, 1992; Gibson-Graham, 1993, 2006a, 2006b; Gibson-Graham, Resnick, & Wolff, 2001; Resnick & Wolff, 2008). This does not mean that every household is characterized by a fundamental class process of the feudal form. It is possible that a household has a communistic/collective class process in which no one is completely excluded from appropriation or can exclude others. A possible example could be those urban households that live in the aestheticized urban space on the outskirts of the 'old city' catering to the global economy (Bhattacharya & Sanyal, 2011) where the possible rise of stay-at-home dads (Livingston, Parker, & Klibanoff, 2014) could result in the formation of households where no one is excluded or can exclude others from appropriation. The other is the ancient/independent households in which the performer of surplus labor appropriates the surplus labor completely and individually. An example of which is the single-parent-female-household. In effect, neither the different-from-capital is bypassed, suppressed, or culturalized, nor are the spaces different-from-capital conceptualized as an outside to the covertness of capitalist surplus extraction where the different-from-capital makes "no bones about exploitation" (Charusheela, 2010, p. 442). As opposed to the Subaltern Studies groups' dependence on a non-Marxist epistemology of relations of power embedded in the property relations, the spaces different-from-capital are made distinct through the entry point concept of class process.

This is a selective illustration of the class process—production/performance and appropriation of surplus—that enables the reconceptualization of a household as a feudal site of production. This selectivity of illustration, however, is justified in the fact that the feudal site of the household remains widely prevalent within the Indian social totality [see figure 1], and it is this

¹¹Throughout this analysis, the feudal site of the household refers to a household where we are concerned primarily with the performance/production of surplus labor by the wife and the appropriation of that surplus labor by the husband.

prevalence that makes it imperative to investigate the transitional conjunctures emanating from the struggles that are happening about and within households. It is common knowledge that one aspect of the struggles about the household is the factor of legal age of the woman at marriage. In India, the social evil of child marriage was prevalent, and still is, but figure 1 illustrates that it has been countered to an extent¹², through legal measures¹³ and access to education, health, and resources of empowerment (Jejeebhoy, 2019; UNICEF, 2021, 2022, 2023). This struggle about the household has far-reaching implications on maternal health, health-related issues of children, sexual and domestic violence, the extent of political engagement, and global development (Carpena & Jensenius, 2021; Godha, Gage, Hotchkiss, & Cappa, 2016; Goli, Rammohan, & Singh, 2015; Paul, 2020; Singh, Shekhar, & Shri, 2023; Verma & Choudhury, 2024; Wodon et al., 2017). More importantly, from the purview of this analysis, the struggle about the household has extended beyond the current legal limit of a minimum of 18 years to a clearly observable downward trajectory in the age group 20-24. The implication here is that women are choosing—facilitated by factors such as literacy rates and improved socio-economic advancement—to enter the feudal household at a relatively later stage in their life cycle. Beyond the age group of 20-24, the number of women entering the feudal household has remained consistent and well above the other regions of the world, as shown in Figure 2.

What about the struggles within the feudal households? A stimulant here, though not limited to it, is the interaction between the feudal household and the capitalist site of production. When thinking of this interaction, the emphasis has been on unequal exchange between household labor and capital that is reproduced and appropriated through extensification, intensification, or by strategic intrusion into the household via the market. This analysis extends the shift in emphasis from unequal exchange of household labor heralded by Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff (1994) to the struggles that are happening within the household¹⁴ over the production and appropriation of surplus labor. An entry point to evaluating the implications of the interaction on the struggles within the feudal household is the female labor force participation rates (FLFP) in fostering transitional conjunctures (class transformations) from within the feudal household to an ancient/independent household—the performer of surplus labor appropriates the surplus labor completely and individually—of the single-parent-female-household. By scraping through the National Family and Health Survey Phase V (NFHS-V), a modest number of 421 single-parent-female-households out of a total of 471,478 surveyed households is obtained. In the rural area, we find 301 single-parent-female-households out of the total

¹²There has been an observable decline as the National Family Health Survey 2019-2021 (NFHS-5) found that 23% per cent of the women between the ages of 20 to 24 were married before 18 years of age in comparison to 47% in NFHS-3 (2005-2006). Yet still, there remains a lot of ground to be covered to rid of this social and economic evil.

¹³From colonial times, there has been an emphasis on ending the social evil of child marriage in India, with the Sarda Act of 1929 setting the legal age at marriage for women at 14 years. This was later amended in 1949 and 1978 to increase the legal age at marriage for women increased to 18 years. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, maintained the same minimum age to marry. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, however, proposes to increase the minimum age for marriage for women to 21 years.

359,589 surveyed households, and 119 single-parent-female-households in the urban area out of the total 115,734 surveyed households in the urban area. The limited extent of such transitions (class transformations) can be attributed to the exception that India is, where the level of FLFP has shown a negative association with long periods of high rates of growth, low fertility, and rising education levels (Deshpande & Singh, 2021). Nonetheless, the FLFP does play an important role as the prevalence of single-parent-female-households with a 'working' status is higher (0.18%) than those with a 'not working' status (0.07%). An interesting result is that the prevalence of single-parent-female-households with a 'working' status in the urban areas is 0.09%. Even though this is higher than the prevalence with a 'not working' status (0.03%), it is much lower than the prevalence of 0.22% of single-parent-female-households with a 'working' status in the rural areas. Is there anything of note that can be highlighted here? Certainly is!

In the Indian context, it has been observed that increased economic growth resulting in higher total household incomes has adversely impacted married females' participation in the labor force (Afridi, Dinkelman, & Mahajan, 2018; E. Chatterjee, Desai, & Vanneman, 2018; Dhanaraj & Mahambare, 2019; Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Mehrotra & Parida, 2017). There is a *mélange* of conservative sentiments and traditional values stigmatizing women's work and the concerns for the personal safety of women in workplaces (Borker, 2021; Chakraborty & Lohawala, 2021; Chakraborty, Mukherjee, Rachapalli, & Saha, 2018; C. Mukherjee, Rustagi, & Krishnaji, 2001; Siddique, 2022). This has resulted in a situation where the feudal household, despite the inherent dimensions of exploitation, turns out to be the prudent choice. The lesser of the two evils. This is made evident in Figure 3, where we observe that the prevalence of single-parent-female-households in the rural areas decreases progressively as we go higher up the wealth quintiles. There is the possibility that women who opt to break from the mold of the feudal household are economically marginalized, but the more likely explanation is that married women from the higher wealth quintiles are opting to stay out of the labor force and thus adversely impacting the possibility of transitional conjunctures emanating from within the feudal households. A prudent choice in terms of ameliorating fears of becoming a social pariah, but nonetheless a difficult choice as this inadvertently constricts the avenues for overcoming the exploitative feudal site of the household. Take, for example, the finding that even if married women were interested in paid work, their participation rates are low due to the non-availability of paid work compatible with the gendered dimensions of unequal sharing of domestic chores and reproductive labor (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2024). The non-availability of compatible paid work makes domestic violence an effective tool for labor disciplining within the household. The increased incidence of violence meted out within the 'char-dewari' (four walls) of the house is primarily due to perceived shortcomings in the completion of

¹⁴The single-parent-female-household has been calculated as the per the following formula: the numerator consists of those households that has a single female aged between 15-49 years and has at least 1 child or was pregnant at the time of the survey. Out of this only those were taken into consideration that identified as Not Staying with Husband, Divorced/Separated, Not Living Together and Don't Know. The denominator 'N' here are the households with at least one ever married female member.

domestic chores, such as meals not served on time, or that the meal was too spicy or that the 'dal' (lentil soup) was too watered down (Visaria, 2000). Compatibility is a concern, but another factor that forces the hand of the married woman to make the prudent but difficult choice is the kind of work available in the rural areas. Interestingly for the women who come from the marginalized section of society, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), that can partake in the limited and degrading work opportunities available in the rural areas as it fits the status of the feudal household that they are surplus producers in (Eswaran, Ramaswami, & Wadhwa, 2013). What this has resulted in is that the marginalized women belonging to the SC and ST categories (and the OBC category) have a higher prevalence of single-parent-female-households with a 'working' status, 0.12%, 0.17% (and 0.30%) respectively. Whereas, in the General category, the prevalence of single-female-parent-household with a 'working' status is a meagre 0.09%. This increased participation in the labor force can, to an extent, explain the higher number of single-parent-female-households from the lower wealth quintiles in the rural areas.

A valid question here is whether the entry point concept of class process means succumbing to the economic determinism that makes people go about like robots? As previously stated, the class-analytic framework stipulates that the conditions of existence for each of the economic forms are the non-class processes of cultural, ideological, and political type. Within the feudal site of the household, it is observed that the ties of religion, fealty, loyalty, obligation, and tradition that had bonded the serf to the lord are recomposed to marital oaths, ideology, religion, and power to bind the wives to the husband (Kayatekin, 2001; Kayatekin & Charusheela, 2004). This recomposition, however, should not be construed as a one-to-one mapping from the historically feudal to the household reconceptualized as such, but rather as the result of a smorgasbord of cultural, ideological, and political processes. Take, for example, the politico-legal advancements in India that have granted equal legal rights to women as daughters to inherit paternal ancestral property¹⁵. Despite these advancements, it is found that improvement in women's accessibility to ancestral property has been limited and even if it has they are significantly more likely to inherit ancestral property, particularly land, as a widow than as a daughter (Agarwal, 1998; Agarwal, Anthwal, & Mahesh, 2021; Lahoti & Swaminathan, 2016). One factor here is the pronatalist structure of the Indian society, where performance of 'labor of love' (Fraad, 2000) is extolled and only upon the completion of this performative role—widowhood being a marker for completion—that a woman is deemed to have earned her dues.

A classic example is the opening scene of the movie 'Mother India' (Khan, 1957) the female protagonist is introduced as the mother of the village and this status is derived from her having completed her performative role as a wife, lover and a mother conveyed to the viewer through a memorial reconstruction that comprises a major part of the movie. It should not be a surprise, then, that socio-cultural norms enforce a steep social cost on families that ill-treat the widows in the family (Kadoya

¹⁵ Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005.

& Yin, 2015). On the other hand there are no substantial social costs for cutting out a female sibling for expressing her legal right for a share of ancestral assets (Agarwal, 1988, 1997) and in specific instances such demands have stumped out by accusations of witchcraft followed by violence (Kishwar, 1987; Minturn & Hitchcock, 1966; Rao, 2011). The dictates of patrilocality and the identifying marker of 'paraya dhan' limits the socio-cultural capital available to the female sibling and this limitation fosters the bonding factor—a form of labor disciplining—as the primary mechanism to signal fallback position and tangible exit option for married woman remains absent (Agarwal, 1997; Agarwal et al., 2021). An interesting phenomenon here is the impact of one-person households (Dommaraju, 2015), constitutive of male members from rural households that have migrated to urban areas in search of temporary employment opportunities. The feudal set up in the village is centered on the wife's production of surplus labor, but it is the mother-in-law who appropriates the surplus as the 'proxy men', reminiscent of the manorial officials whom the feudal lords vested their powers in. The widowed mother-in-law remains the manorial official as her accessibility to land of joint ownership with the son is geared towards meeting her needs and not the direct ownership or usage of land. As a manorial official, nonetheless, the mother-in-law does enjoy power over the serf that can worsen the gendered dimensions of domestic violence and increase control over the daughter-in-law (Anukriti, Herrera-Almanza, Pathak, & Karra, 2020; Fernandez, 1997; Gangoli & Rew, 2011; Kandiyoti, 1988; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005; Sudha & Rajan, 1999) or result in reduced maternal anemia and increased employment of the married woman if residing only with mother-in-law and not the parents-in-law (Sarkar, Sahoo, & Klasen, 2019; Varghese & Roy, 2019). What is clear is that the lack of property among married women proves to be a strong bonding factor for the continued resilience of the feudal household. Agarwal and Panda (2007; 2005) prefer improving women's accessibility as the preferred policy tool, as it signals the tangible exit option for married women without the perverse outcomes associated with women's labor force participation. Primarily in the sense that a propertied woman married to a propertyless man is not subject to greater domestic violence. What interests us here is the policy proposal for improving accessibility through community cooperation and joint farming in a radically new form of collective ownership centered on poor women and facilitated by the state. (Agarwal, 2003, 2010) In effect, what this policy proposal is arguing for is the institutionalization of collective/communistic sites of production (the radical new form of collective ownership). The implications are twofold. The first is that the achievement of the communistic/collective site of production bypasses the need to achieve the singularity of the capitalist form, but rather as different from capital that can be brought into existence through state policy. Secondly, this policy proposal forwards a different avenue through which class transformations (transitional conjunctures) within the feudal household can be fostered. Instead of focusing on correcting the lagged transitional issue of increasing female labor force participation in India, the interaction would be between the feudal site of the household and the communistic/collective sites of production. State created but maybe, women run, and women managed?

4. Conclusion

The conclusion is kept brief to the point that one might wonder whether brevity here can be attributed to the fogging of the brain that comes with highlighting one string of thought in the exacerbating world of overdeterminism? Though it could be true, the primary reason behind this brevity is the paucity of space. The emphasis of this essay has been on illustrating the convoluted and protracted process of transitional conjunctures that are currently underway in the contemporaneous Indian social context. The focal point of this analysis is transitions (class transformations) emanating from within the feudal site of the household. The next step would be a detailed analysis of the feudal site of the household in the Indian social context.

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The Influence of Branded Retail Chains on Local Shops in India: An Exploratory Study on Garment Industry

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August 20, 2025
FLAME Working Paper Volume 2, Issue 1

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Acknowledgement: The authors extend sincere thanks to FLAME University, Pune for giving the opportunity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: Not Applicable

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Abstract

Extensive, global retail giants specialising in apparel engage in intense competition within a rapidly evolving market landscape. Through substantial investments in marketing, research, and development, they maintain a stronghold on the market and diligently employ various strategies to fend off competitors from encroaching on their territory. In contrast to large retail clothing chains, small retail clothing shops are physical entities run by middle-class or upper-middle-class people. Given that these retail stores are situated in small communities, the owner must exert significant effort towards customer retention. Despite the valiant efforts of these retail outlets, the expansion of large, branded chains is accelerating at an exponential rate. In this view, our study is focused on determining the impact of branded garment retail chains on local Indian retail shops. We conducted exploratory factor analysis to identify any significant shifts in the local retail environment after the emergence of branded retail chains. The findings of our investigation indicate that merchants in small towns, especially those in the apparel sector, face considerable obstacles stemming from the overwhelming influence of larger retail chains. This study emphasises the importance of a targeted approach for small retail outlets to provide distinctive products and services, cultivate customer loyalty, and invest in innovative projects to thrive in a competitive environment.

Keywords: Retail Chain, Garments, Branded Outlets, Competition, Product, Customer Retention.

1. Introduction

Mega retail clothing chains are big-box stores that primarily sell apparel along with a range of accessories like jeans, sweatshirts, socks, T-shirts, and shoes. These organisations generally formulate a strategy that entails establishing their operations in a highly visible prime location, ensuring accessibility and convenience for their customers (Cotton & Cachon, 2007). These companies negotiate adeptly with suppliers to secure optimal agreements and yield substantial profits. Furthermore, they allocate funds to marketing activities, branding, and public relations endeavours to enhance their brand visibility. Their principal objective is to provide exceptional customer service, a superior product interior, the finest salesperson, and a seamless shopping experience. Ultimately, large clothing retail chains are vital to the industry as they offer consumers worldwide seamless shopping experiences, competitive pricing, and an extensive array of garment options.

To remain competitive and ahead of the innovation trajectory, these large corporations allocate substantial resources to marketing, research, and development. They meticulously monitor consumer trends, preferences, and buying behaviours to adapt their products and sustain their appeal. On the other side, retail clothing stores are physical entities often founded by ordinary middle-class or upper-middle-class individuals rather than enormous multinational organisations (MacCarthy & Jayarathne, 2013). In contrast to large clothing chains, small retail outlets offer a diverse yet carefully curated selection of products; however, their sales personnel often lack adequate professional training (Bajaj et al., 2010; Vijay, 2013).

Although possessing a smaller location than a huge retail chain, their overall revenue is lower. They possess a highly specialised clientele and exhibit a significant rate of customer retention. Given that many retail establishments are situated in small villages, the proprietor endeavours to maintain a cordial rapport with the community to deter customers from shopping elsewhere. Retail clothing establishments consistently adjust to emerging fashion trends. They guarantee that the clothing they offer is fashionable and attractive to clients.

Consumers have transitioned from conventional retail outlets to large clothing retail chains, a trend particularly evident in the garment retail sector. Initially, the change in the early post-liberalization years was gradual, but it accelerated in the 2000s. In the realm of apparel acquisition, consumers presently possess two primary alternatives in both first- and second-tier cities. The initial option is to explore major clothing retail chains that provide an extensive array of fashionable products, such as Zara, H&M, and Zudio. The alternative option is to engage in street shopping, where apparel

can be acquired at significantly reduced prices. It's crucial to keep in mind that many consumers today would prefer not to purchase at conventional retail establishments (Saravanan, 2019; Harri & Levanen, 2024).

In this regard, this article investigates the impact on local Indian retail stores if branded retail chains establish a foothold. The study used factor analysis to discern significant changes in the local retail landscape following the establishment of branded retail chains. The output emphasises that small-town merchants, particularly in the apparel industry, encounter significant challenges due to the dominant presence of larger chains. Retail enterprises depend significantly on elements such as client fidelity, brand prestige, product variety, and pricing tactics to ascertain their success. To differentiate in a competitive landscape, this advocates for a focused endeavour to deliver unique products and services, foster customer loyalty, and invest in innovative initiatives.

2. Literature Review

Giri & Rai (2013) studied the supply chain of the Indian garment sector. It asserts that India's garment industry is the largest in the nation, characterised by extensive diversity and complexity. The study done by Devaraja (2011) elucidated two methodologies for garment production and distribution. Initially, it is producer-driven, indicating that major corporations establish fashion and material trends through the design of an extensive array of apparel. This is indeed related to production, similar to computers and autos. Many of these enterprises have remarkable technology competencies to facilitate production. The second stage is buyer-driven, indicating that at this juncture, significant retailers and brand proprietors determine the locations for textile and material production. Many consider that labourers in other countries receive lower wages while upholding equivalent product quality. This transpires often, especially within the textile and electronics sectors. The study by Nadvi et al. (2004) on the Vietnam garment sector indicates that the country has undergone significant expansion in recent years, mainly in exports rather than imports, which is advantageous for the national economy. Analogous to India, the impetus for this is significant alterations in legislation and regulations. The paper examines the effects of entering global value chains on state-owned and private enterprises, as well as workers in the garment and textile sectors, noting that the benefits may vary among them.

Khan et al., (2024) examined the export of ready-made garments from India, indicating that Indian exporters have surpassed their competitors; about 2005, 70% of India's exports were directed to the United States and the European Union. Our analysis of global fashion indicates that the Indian garment and textile sector has produced both beneficial and detrimental impacts. The studies discussed above asserts that globalisation has introduced a diverse array of styles to India, and the

integration of multinational brands with local communities is termed globalisation. India is a dynamic nation, leading to the emergence and dissolution of new fashion trends throughout various regions. An increasing number of retail centres, luxury apparel brands, fashion institutions, shops, exhibitions, and residences are emerging. India is employing synthetic textiles and modern manufacturing techniques to introduce its apparel to global markets. The ready-to-wear clothes business is growing due to its affordability and superior quality. Fashion is becoming ethical, environmentally sustainable, and made using innovative technologies. The practice of wearing garments solely once before disposal has both advantageous and adverse consequences on Indian society and the fashion industry.

Johney and Thomas (2024) argue that the growth of small garment firms in India is not the result of supportive government policies, but rather a consequence of initiatives led by capitalist entrepreneurs operating independently of state intervention. Uma Maheswari et al. (2024) observe that the Indian garment industry has adopted a range of strategic approaches that have contributed to increased employment and sales growth. However, these developments may exert adverse effects on small-scale retail outlets. Nathan et al. (2024) examine wage-related challenges in the Indian garment industry, highlighting how rising labour costs and increased workloads affect labour outcomes, which in turn influence garment pricing dynamics.

The study by (Felix & Nalini, 2022) aims to ascertain the criteria customers utilise while selecting between branded and unbranded apparel. This study aims to examine the traits of individuals who opt to buy branded clothing and the factors influencing their choices. To do this, the researchers employed a questionnaire to administer a survey and gather primary data from 200 clients residing in various regions of Chennai. The poll results indicate that consumers are increasingly selecting clothes based primarily on brand preference. As branded apparel assists individuals in conveying a fashionable persona and signifies their social status, there is an increasing attraction towards it. Moreover, individuals select branded clothes due to its outstanding quality, extensive range of styles, and enhanced durability. This study emphasises the significance of evolving consumer tastes in the fashion sector and the critical role brands play in shaping individual purchasing decisions.

Ear (2013) found that while Cambodia's economy has expanded quickly in the last ten years, diversifying it has proven to be challenging. China and several countries, notably Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea, have made substantial financial investments in Cambodia during this period. A substantial share of this investment has been allocated to the clothing industry, the most prominent sector of the Cambodian economy. The success of this investment in garment manufacture is attributed to the tight collaboration between the government and enterprises, which has facilitated industry expansion and efficient operations. The collaboration between the government and enterprises has enabled Cambodia's garment sector to thrive, notwithstanding the sporadic laxity in law enforcement within the country.

The literature on the garments and apparel business has examined the role of branding and the industry's performance over time. The Asian clothing sector exhibits a unique interconnection within the marketplaces of its whole region. With the expansion of large international retail chains, it is pertinent to examine their impact on small retail stores in India. Consequently, this research aims to bridge the gap by analysing the dynamic differences between branded retail chains and conventional garment stores in India.

3. Methodology

This paper examines the impact on local Indian retail stores if branded retail chains were to establish a presence. The study used a mixed technique to identify significant changes in the local retail landscape following the establishment of branded retail chains. Initially, we conducted interviews with stakeholders using open-ended questions to ascertain their experiences and perceptions regarding the perceived impact. Secondly, we employed a series of 15 to 20 questions, each issue comprising four sub-questions designed to examine various facets on a Likert scale for factor analysis. Our sample comprises 100 responses that belong to the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. The sample comprises respondents from both Ahmedabad and Chandrapur districts, including some from very remote locations. Nevertheless, e-commerce services from major retail chains are still accessible in these areas. The questions are intentionally phrased to elicit detailed responses, employing a linear scale format to facilitate comprehensive analysis. Using factor analysis techniques, the collected data is examined to identify underlying patterns and correlations that shed light on any discernible impacts that the advent of branded retail may have had on local retail establishments.

4. Data and Analysis

Regarding the interviews, our open-ended enquiries in both formal and informal setups (Direct and telephonic) encompass all facets of the interconnection between branded chains and conventional apparel retailers.

Respondent 1:

Operates a retail establishment specialising in the sale of garments, including nightwear and court shirts, which are commonly utilised. The respondent commenced this business two years ago, and his current annual turnover is approximately 18 lakhs. According to him, the retail sector has been affected, as the large branded retail chain typically purchases garments in bulk, with considerations of quality and price being significant. In 2010, the local market was robust; he stated that a business

valued at 100 rupees in 2010 has diminished to 60 rupees in 2024. The consumer mindset has evolved; they now seek discounts, which are provided by large retail chains. The customer perspective has evolved; formerly, purchases were mostly based on quality, but now consumers want brands that offer affordability alongside excellence.

Based on respondent 1, we observed that they are lagging behind the major retail chains in several respects; primarily, their marketing expenditures are substantial. In certain areas, local retailers excel as well. According to him, buyers frequently express that their quality surpasses that of Zudio, Nike, and Adidas. They are implementing innovative strategies to compete with large branded retail chains, such as providing a diverse selection for customers, offering discounts, and instituting a one-week exchange and return policy.

The respondent provides superior quality products, with 90% of his offerings surpassing theirs in quality. His price is approximately 10-20% greater than theirs due to the product's quality. The primary rationale for the disparity between local merchants and branded stores is that the latter procure things in quantity, while local retailers can only purchase 2-5% of that volume, resulting in greater discounts for the former. The Respondent asserts superiority in variety and style, indicating that the styles available at their location will also be accessible here, whilst the styles available here will not be found there. In terms of variety, the Respondent provides a greater selection than the giant branded retail chain.

Respondent 2:

The respondent operates a retail garment shop that sells fancy frocks, standard frocks, leggings, and other apparel. The age range for which he sells the products is from 0 to 4 years. The respondent's annual turnover last year was approximately 25 lakhs. He stated that there has been a significant influence on the retail industry; the primary advantage cited by the respondent is that they purchase things in bulk, whereas we acquire them in much smaller quantities. The revenue of local retailers has significantly diminished; 10-15 years ago, the turnover was 1 crore, but it is currently 50 lakhs. According to the reply, every business has experienced a 50% decline, necessitating the continual introduction of new products to compete with branded retail chains. The respondent informed me of the pricing disparity, with their product priced at 1300 and the brand's product in 2000. The primary disadvantage they face is that branded chains may provide greater discounts because of their ability to purchase things in bulk, a capability that retailers lack. Despite offering superior quality products, consumers still favour branded clothing. In terms of diversity, they provide greater variation. The respondent asserts that consumers typically do not consider quality; they rather concentrate on aesthetics.

Respondent 3:

This respondent operates a retail clothing shop specialising in Bandani sarees, predominantly featuring handcrafted designs. The respondent has a yearly revenue of between 80 lakhs to 1 crore. The respondent indicated that local retailers have experienced a negative impact, with their business declining by around 50% over the past 10 to 15 years. The responder indicated that consumers visiting a branded retail chain may find a comprehensive range of products in a single location, whereas those frequenting a local market with numerous retail stores must visit multiple establishments. The responder indicated that he now must frequently alter designs, requiring him to seek new options each month, in contrast to 10-15 years before, when he would change designs every four to six months. The primary deficiency of the respondent lies in the limited variety available under one roof. Furthermore, in today's fast-paced society, consumers increasingly desire to obtain all products efficiently and expediently in a single shopping experience.

We discussed with him the areas for improvement, and he indicated that he needs to enhance his innovation due to e-commerce demands. We evaluated several areas and found that the quality at the respondent's store is superior; however, the prices of the respondent's products are 20% higher than those of branded retail chains. Additionally, the respondent offers a greater selection of products.

Respondent 4:

The respondent owns a retail establishment in a small area of Maharashtra, offering a comprehensive range of merchandise for every family member and in various sizes. The respondent's turnover last year was 11 crores. The respondent indicated that following the emergence of branded retail chains, consumer attitudes have shifted. In 2010, customers approached us with trust and did not engage in negotiation; however, after the arrival of large branded retail chains, consumers prioritised fashion over quality, primarily seeking fast fashion products. The answer indicated that customers are now more discerning and tend to pose additional enquiries. For instance, if a Zudio jacket is priced at 999 and our jacket at 1499, buyers may query the price disparity, which can occasionally result in the loss of sales. We enquired about the financial impact, to which the responder stated that he joined his father's business after COVID, and there has been development due to the implementation of technology. The responder indicated that a key factor in his success is the diversification of products sold; before to 2020, his father exclusively sold men's clothing, however now they offer a wide range including ethnic wear, children's apparel, and women's clothing.

The respondent indicated that the introduction of a mega retail chain has affected Chandrapur district overall; however, their village remains largely unaffected due to the absence of competitors, with only two retail stores present. Additionally, the respondent noted that, when

comparing the pre- and post-entry scenarios, expenses have increased fivefold, while business growth has been minimal. Respondents indicated many strategies to attract customers: first, implementing advantageous schemes that persist throughout the year; second, fostering strong relationships with consumers; third, offering substantial discounts; and last, providing a return/exchange policy.

Our questionnaire has been created based on the insights gathered from the respondents' discussions to facilitate quantitative analysis. Our aspects include competition, finance, product quality, business plan, and operations.

4.1. Questionnaire

C1-Do you think that marketing tactics by branded retail outlets has impacted your business

C2-How important do you consider brand image and reputation in attracting customers to your retail outlet, compared to branded garment chains? (1 being not important, 5 being extremely important)

C3-On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you feel branded garment chains have affected the number of customers visiting your store?

C4-To what extent do you believe branded garment chains have influenced customer loyalty to your store? (1 being not at all, 5 being greatly influenced)

F1-How would you rate the impact of branded garment chains on your store's overall profitability? (1 being positive impact, 5 being negative impact)

F2-After the entry of branded retail chains, have you been forced to rethink your pricing strategy (1 being don't have to think at all and 5 being having to think a lot and have to change it)

F3-Do you think branded retail chains can offer at lower prices due to economies of scale (1 being no, they can't, and 5 being yes, they can offer at less price)

F4-How would you rate the impact of branded garment chains on your store's Revenue (1 being positive impact, 5 being negative impact)

P1-On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall quality of garments offered by branded garment chains compared to those in your store (1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied)

P2-How do you perceive the craftsmanship of products in branded garment chains compared to those in your retail outlet? (1 being inferior, 5 being superior)

P3-How satisfied are your customers with the quality of garments purchased from your store? (1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being very satisfied)

P4-Rate the level of competition posed by branded garment chains, specifically in terms of product quality. (1 being minimal competition, 5 being intense competition)

OB1-On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the variety of products offered by branded garment chains compared to your own brand? (1 being the same as yours and 5 being much more than you)

OB2-On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the level of support provided by branded garment chains to their customer compared to your own shop? (1 being the same support as you and 5 being they provide more support than you)

OB3-On a scale of 1-5, rate the impact of the variety of products after the entry of branded garment chains

OB4-Have you improved your in-store experience after the entry of a branded retail chain, rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 is did not improve and 5 is as you improved)

OB5-Rate the overall impact of branded garment chains on your business on a scale of 1-5.

4.2. Overview of the basic data

Figure 1 shows an age breakdown of 100 survey respondents and is illustrated in a pie chart. The 18-24 age group is the largest, with nearly half (46%) of the total number of people. Next in line are the 25-34 members, who account for 26%. The 35-44-year-olds (17%) and 45-54-year-olds (10%) are relatively evenly distributed. Lastly, the survey's smallest group, individuals aged 55 and older, comprises only 10% of the sample.

The histogram in Figure 2 reflects a retailer in the locality who indicated the best competitor brands of the major garment brands. Based on the responses, it is powerful that Lifestyle and Pantaloons are the most competitive, with them mentioning 56 (69.1%) and 55 (67.9%) retailers individually. H&M, Zodiac, and Max, for example, - this group of boutiques was also mentioned, but not in the same amount.

4.3. Factor Analysis

Strong correlations between the variables were shown by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, which produced a very favorable rating of .898, qualifying them for exploratory factor analysis (EFA). In a similar vein, Bartlett's test produced a remarkably low p-value of .000, confirming the existence of strong correlations between variables and pointing to significant departures from an identity matrix. As a result, these findings refute the assumption that there is no correlation and point to significant relationships between dataset aspects, which are helpful for producing insightful conclusions through EFA using SPSS.

The majority of variables have communalities greater than 0.8, indicating that the components we identified account for a sizable portion of their variance.

In component 1, the values that are more than 0.4 are C1, C3, C4, F1, F2, F3, F4, P1, P4, OB3, OB4, and OB5. In component 2, the values that are more than 0.4 are C2, F3, P1, P2, P3, and OB1. In component 3, the values that are more than 0.4 are C2, P3, and OB2.

4.4. Themes

Theme 1: Navigating Competitive Pressure: Adapting Strategies in the Retail Landscape.

(Refer to Table 5)

Theme 2: Competing in Quality and Customer Experience (Refer to Table 6)

Theme 3: Customer-Centric Competition: Prioritizing Satisfaction and Support (Refer to Table 7)

5. Discussion

Theme 1 emphasises the challenges and modifications that retail establishments must implement in response to the increasing influence and visibility of branded clothing chains. It delves into a variety of subjects, such as the overall business impact, pricing strategies, product quality, customer satisfaction, and marketing techniques. The theme encapsulates the dynamic nature of the retail sector and the imperative for companies to adapt continuously in order to remain competitive.

Theme 2 is focused on the highly competitive retail industry and its components, including consumer satisfaction and product excellence. It underscores the significance of brand image, product quality, and customer satisfaction in attracting new business and maintaining existing ones. The theme also addresses the impact of branded apparel chains on customer service and product variety, which necessitates retailers to enhance their services and offerings in order to remain competitive.

In **Theme 3**, the significance of customer support and contentment in the fiercely competitive retail sector is amplified. It underscores the importance of factors such as product quality, customer service, and brand image in attracting new business and retaining existing customers, particularly when competing with branded apparel chains. The theme emphasises that retail establishments must prioritise the enhancement of the in-store experience and the provision of exceptional customer service in order to remain competitive in the market.

The results and analysis must be thoroughly examined when reviewing the effects of large retail chains on neighbourhood retail stores. This encompasses the consideration of the repercussions for various stakeholders, including customers, neighbourhood businesses, and the market's dynamics as a whole.

Competitive Pressure: In terms of economies of scale, name recognition, and supplier negotiating strength, large retail chains often have substantial advantages over smaller ones. This has resulted in intense competition among local retail establishments, particularly in terms of price and selection.

Customer Preferences: Mega retail chains may be appealing to consumers due to their extensive product selection, more affordable prices, and user-friendly interfaces. It may be challenging for local

stores to compete on these fronts, particularly if they fail to differentiate themselves from their competitors or adapt to the changing market.

Impact on Small Economy: The arrival of large retail chains may lead to employment losses as small firms struggle to compete or maybe forced to close. As a consequence, the community may witness a decline in property values and a decrease in tax revenue.

Survival Strategies: In order to remain viable, local retail establishments must innovate and distinguish themselves from their competitors. This could involve focussing on specialised markets, enhancing client service, or utilising unique product offerings that resonate with the community. Local businesses can enhance their visibility and more effectively contend against large retail chains by collaborating through programs such as cooperative marketing or business organisations.

Adaptation to Changing Landscapes: In order to adapt to the constantly changing dynamics of the market, local firms must possess agility and flexibility. This may involve the implementation of technological investments, the optimisation of inventory control, or the exploration of internet sales opportunities.

Selection and Accessibility: The presence of huge retail chains may enhance customer selection and accessibility. However, it is essential to consider the potential impact on diversity and uniqueness within the local retail landscape in the future. The influence on the community includes enhancing the local economy and cultivating a sense of belonging through the support of local enterprises. Consumers must evaluate the trade-offs between convenience and broader societal implications while making purchases.

Market Concentration: The prevalence of major retail chains may lead to market concentration, thus restricting consumer choice and inhibiting competition. Regulators may need to monitor market dynamics to ensure equitable competition and prevent anti-competitive practices.

Innovation and development: The retail sector may see innovation and development due to competition from major retail chains. Local enterprises may need to embrace change and leverage their agility to identify new opportunities for growth and innovation.

6. Conclusion

Our research on evaluating the impact of huge retail chains on local retail establishments demonstrates that, although competitive pressure is undeniable, retail enterprises may adapt, collaborate, and thrive in an evolving retail landscape. Consumers profoundly impact market dynamics

through their purchasing choices, necessitating that governments balance the benefits of competition with the imperative to uphold sustainability and diversity within local economies. To foster local partnerships, it is advisable for retail establishments in the vicinity to collaborate in forming cooperatives or alliances, enabling them to collectively sell their unique products and enhance their negotiating power with suppliers. They can sustain their competitiveness against major retail chains by implementing this strategy. The study's shortcomings mostly pertain to the sample size and the perspectives gathered from a limited number of sources. Future research efforts should aim to increase the sample size and ensure a more diverse representation of various retail businesses by highlighting the formal secondary data statistics.

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8. Tables

Table 1: KMO Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.898
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3742.413
	df	136
	Sig.	.000

Table 2: Communalities

Communalities		
	Initial	Extraction
C1	1.000	.990
C2	1.000	.746
C3	1.000	.990
C4	1.000	.891
F1	1.000	.991
F2	1.000	.984
F3	1.000	.917
F4	1.000	.935
P1	1.000	.731
P2	1.000	.548
P3	1.000	.510
P4	1.000	.983
OB1	1.000	.318
OB2	1.000	.615
OB3	1.000	.982
OB4	1.000	.975
OB5	1.000	.985
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

Table 3: Total Variance

Total Variance Explained									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	11.041	64.950	64.950	11.041	64.950	64.950	11.024	64.850	64.850
2	1.805	10.618	75.568	1.805	10.618	75.568	1.579	9.291	74.141
3	1.244	7.317	82.885	1.244	7.317	82.885	1.487	8.744	82.885
4	.863	5.077	87.962						
5	.759	4.464	92.426						
6	.591	3.475	95.900						

Total Variance Explained									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
7	.363	2.134	98.034						
8	.123	.721	98.755						
9	.093	.550	99.305						
10	.049	.289	99.594						
11	.024	.143	99.737						
12	.014	.085	99.822						
13	.012	.069	99.891						
14	.008	.047	99.937						
15	.006	.035	99.972						
16	.003	.020	99.992						
17	.001	.008	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

Table 4: Component Matrix

Component Matrix			
	Component		
	1	2	3
C1	.995	.017	-.012
C2	.132	.664	.536
C3	.994	.033	-.005
C4	.939	.087	-.040
F1	.994	.058	.001
F2	.987	.022	.093
F3	.914	-.234	-.166
F4	.967	.021	.001
P1	.451	-.644	-.336
P2	.267	-.637	.266
P3	.276	.431	-.498
P4	.991	.036	.000
OB1	.223	.484	-.185
OB2	.349	-.208	.671

Component Matrix			
	Component		
	1	2	3
OB3	.990	.040	-.004
OB4	.984	.067	.044
OB5	.991	.059	.026
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			
a. 3 components extracted.			

Table 5: Theme 1 analysis

Theme 1: Navigating Competitive Pressure: Adapting Strategies in the Retail Landscape.

C1	Do you think that marketing tactics by branded retail outlets have impacted your business
C3	On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you feel branded garment chains have affected the number of customers visiting your store?
C4	To what extent do you believe branded garment chains have influenced customer loyalty to your store?
F1	How would you rate the impact of branded garment chains on your store's overall profitability?
F2	After the entry of branded retail chains, have you been forced to rethink your pricing strategy
F3	Do you think branded retail chains can offer at lower prices due to economies of scale
F4	Do you think branded retail chains can offer at lower prices due to economies of scale
P1	On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall quality of garments offered by branded garment chains compared to those in your store
P4	Rate the level of competition posed by branded garment chains specifically in terms of product quality.
OB3	On a scale of 1-5 rate the impact of variety of products after the entry of branded garment chains
OB4	Have you improved your in-store experience after the entry of branded retail chain, rate on a scale of 1-5
OB5	Rate the overall impact of branded garment chains on your business on a scale to 1-5

Table 6: Theme 2 analysis**Theme 2: Competing in Quality and Customer Experience**

C2	How important do you consider brand image and reputation in attracting customers to your retail outlet compared to branded garment chains?
F3	Do you think branded retail chains can offer at lower prices due to economies of scale
P1	On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall quality of garments offered by branded garment chains compared to those in your store
P2	How do you perceive the craftsmanship of products in branded garment chains compared to those in your retail outlet?
P3	How satisfied are your customers with the quality of garments purchased from your store?
OB1	On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the variety of products offered by branded garment chains compared to your own brand?

Table 7: Theme 3 Analysis**Theme 3: Customer-Centric Competition: Prioritizing Satisfaction and Support**

C2	How important do you consider brand image and reputation in attracting customers to your retail outlet compared to branded garment chains?
P3	How satisfied are your customers with the quality of garments purchased from your store?
OB2	On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the level of support provided by branded garment chains to their customers compared to your own shop?

9. Appendix

Table 8: Component Matrix

Total Variance Explained			
Component	1	2	3
1	.999	.042	.006
2	.036	-.753	-.657
3	.023	-.657	.754
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			

10. Figures

Figure 1: Survey Demographics

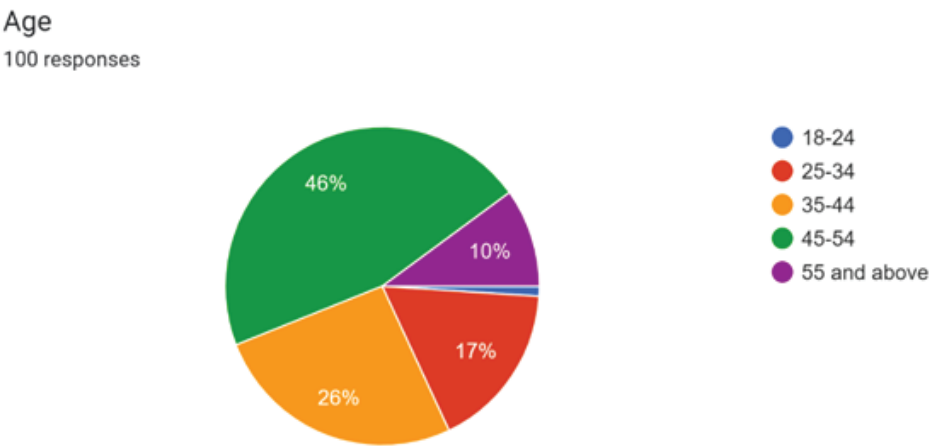
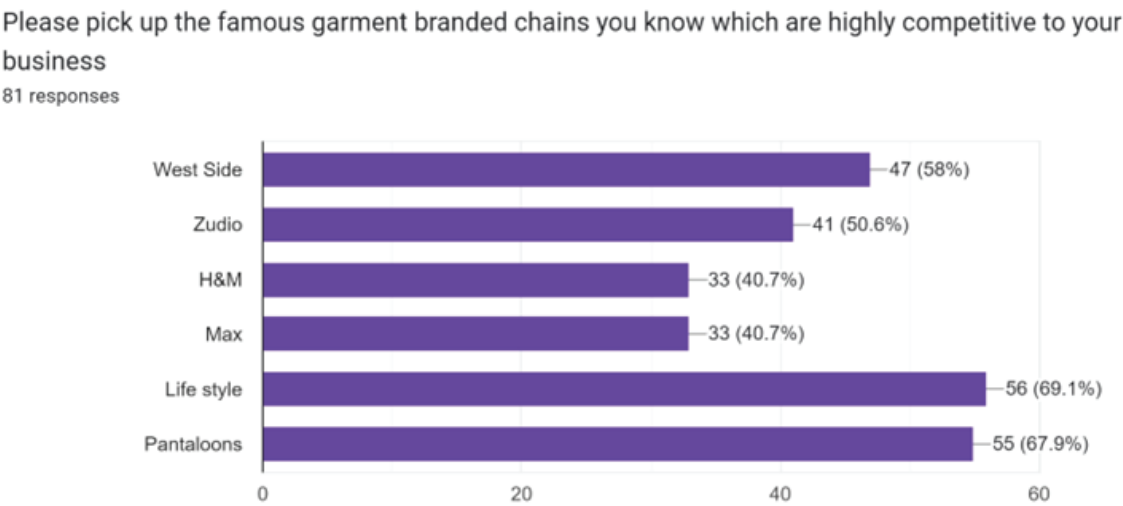


Figure 2. Histogram of retail outlet and competition



Adam Smith In Beijing? The 'Irreconcilability' Of Chinese Modernity

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August 20, 2025
FLAME Working Paper Volume 2, Issue 1

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of FLAME University.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment: I am indebted to Dr. Anjan Chakrabarti (Calcutta University), Dr. Jabin Jacob (Shiv Nadar University), Dr. Anubrata Deka (FLAME University) and Dr. Yamini Krishna (FLAME University) organizers and participants at the International Conference on the Political Economy of Development (2023) held at FLAME University for providing comments, suggestions and critical feedback on draft versions of this essay. Dr. Mathew Forstater (University of Missouri Kansas City) for his guidance, expertise and support. Any shortcoming or mistakes are the sole responsibility of this author.

Funding: Not applicable

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Abstract

Adam Smith's theory of economic growth, in Book I of the *Wealth of Nations* (from now on referred to as WON), is founded on the idea of the division of labor. It is argued that the division of labor occasions economic dynamism, resulting in increased income and effective demand, thus creating the conditions for another round of deepening and widening division of labor. In essence, we have a circular growth process that begins with the division of labor and produces the conditions for another round of division of labor. A limiting factor for this circular growth process is the extent of the market that can be overcome through foreign trade. Giovanni Arrighi, in his book *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*, situates the importance of the institutional setting of a strong state in undertaking the propagation of foreign trade and commerce to overcome the limitation imposed by the extent of the market argument and evaluates and comprehends the macro-historical economic experience of China. It is argued that the absence of a strong state in Imperial China resulted in the great divergence, and in contrast, the existence of a strong state explains the economic resurgence of post-1979 reform China. This analysis problematizes these arguments through an illustration of the idea of the impartial spectator as the basis for comprehending the complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, state, and society. The first objective is to argue that the idea of the impartial spectator does not adhere to an original absolute form of the Impartial Spectator but rather can be conceptualized as an inherently fluid concept that can be contextualized to the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. The second objective is to illustrate the specificity of this contextualized impartial spectator and the explanatory power to aid us in analyzing, evaluating and comprehending the irreconcilability of a market-based society and the persistence of China as a 'figure of lack'.

Keywords: Adam Smith, impartial spectator, China.

1. Introduction

Adam Smith's theory of economic growth, in Book I of the *Wealth of Nations* (from now on referred to as WON), is founded on the idea of the division of labor. It is argued that the division of labor occasions economic dynamism¹ that results in increased income and effective demand, thus creating the conditions for another round of deepening and widening division of labor (Forstater & Murray, 2009; Smith, 2003a). In essence, we have a circular growth process that begins with the division of labor and produces the conditions for another round of division of labor (Arrighi, 2007; A. Lowe, 1984; Adolph Lowe, 1975; Rosenberg, 1965; West, 1964). This circular growth process is restricted by the "famous theorem" (Young, 1928, p. 529) of the extent of the market. As it is the power of exchanging that first gives occasion to the division of labor it is limited by the "extent of that power (of exchanging), or, in other words, by the extent of the market" [emphasis added] (Smith, 2003a, p. 19). The incremental outward spiral of the circular growth process is dependent on the spatial extension of the 'power of exchanging' from domestic agriculture (based inland) to domestic manufacture (based in the towns), and once the domestic markets reach their limits, 'venting-the-surplus' (Myint, 1958, 1977) through foreign trade. It is here that Giovanni Arrighi (2007), in his book *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*, situates the importance of the institutional setting of a strong state in undertaking the propagation of foreign trade and commerce². From this theoretical vantage point, the task of analyzing, evaluating, and comprehending the macro-historical economic experience of China is undertaken. The simplified version of the argument is that the absence of a strong state in Imperial China resulted in the great divergence³, and in contrast, the "existence of a strong state" (Arrighi, 2007, p. 43) explains the economic resurgence of post-1979 reform China. The analysis, however, is underlined by a restrictive operative assumption—first of the two kinds of market-based economic development⁴—where the market-based economic development exploits (or not) a given social framework's hidden potential for economic growth, but the market does not alter the social framework in any fundamental way.

¹ In the first three chapters of Book I of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith lays out three propositions to account for the great increase in output which follows from the division of labor. The first is that the dexterity of the worker improves, second the specialization of labor saves time as the worker does not have to change from one process to another and third, the division of labor encourages invention. Though it is the famous example of the pin-maker that is associated with Smith's emphasis on the division of labor it does not capture the underlying dynamism that was to follow from the division of labor. The woolen coat example, also appearing in Chapter 1 of Book 1 of the *Wealth of Nations*, on the other hand, captures the economic dynamism that the division of labor occasions. Through this example it can be argued that Smith is illustrating the economic dynamism that results from increasing returns to scale, the development of external economies, positive feedback, backward and forward intersectoral linkages and learning-by-doing.

² In the historical context, the existence of the strong state was also evident in the economic expansion of the British Empire (Brebner, 1948; Fay, 1930; Weiss & Hobson, 1995) and in fact Smith (Smith, 2003a, 2003b) himself had emphasized on the role of the state in the building of canals to foster the spatial extension of the domestic market, first domestically and second, to enable the venting-of-surplus.

This analysis takes off by problematizing this restrictive operative assumption. The first objective is to argue that a restrictive operative assumption is anathema to Smith's political economy, which is founded upon a complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, state, and society envisioned in the idea of the impartial spectator found in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (from now on referred to as TMS⁵). The second objective is to argue that the idea of the impartial spectator can be conceptualized as an inherently fluid concept that can be contextualized to the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. The focus is on the importance of the Cultural Revolution in its facilitative capacity for institutionalization of a contextualized impartial spectator that helps explain the persistence of irreconcilability of a flourishing market-based society that has fostered an economic miracle (Justin Yifu Lin, Cai, & Li, 2003) while continuing to persist as a 'figure of lack' (Chakrabarty, 2000). The term 'figure of lack' refers to the tendency to read the Chinese economic experience in the post-1979 reform era in terms of a "lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into "inadequacy"" (Chakrabarty, 1992, p. 5) in the political as well as the economic sense. It is made obvious by referring to the absence of democratic political institutions and the achievement of economic growth despite the lack of the institution of private property rights.

One justification for the 'figure of lack' characterization of the post-1979 reform Chinese experience, when restricted to the political connotations, is that there exist clear interlinkages between Smith's historical stages of economic progress with the Hegelian idea of historical stages of political forms (Hui, 2014). In Smith's stadial thesis, the historical stages of nomadic, pastoral, agrarian, and commercial categorize the conditions of different geographical regions and people determined by the modes of production that characterize each of the historical stages (Meek, 1977; Smith, 1982c, 2003b). The native tribes of America are designated as the lowest and rudest state of society, the Tartars and Arabs as the embodiment of a relatively advanced state of society, but it is the ancient Greeks and Romans that are designated as the advanced state of society. Setting a grading scheme for the "degree of civilization" (Winch, 1978, p. 86) attained, ranging from the rudest to the commercialized societies of ancient Greeks and Romans, with the civilized states of Europe as their closest kin.

³ A term coined by Kenneth Pomeranz (2021).

⁴ "The second kind of market-based economic development, in contrast to the first kind, is one that tends to destroy the social framework within which it occurs and to create the conditions (not necessarily realized) for the emergence of new social frameworks with a different growth potential. The social framework can also change for reasons other than the inner dynamic of the economic process" (Arrighi, 2007, p. 41).

⁵ (Arrighi, 2007, p. xi) in his 'Preface and Acknowledgments' very clearly states that the objective of the book is to "offer an interpretation of the ongoing shift of the global political economy", in which East Asia, and in particular China has a role to play, and explain this shift from the standpoint of theory of economic development found in the *Wealth of Nations* (WON). This analysis is based on a broader reading of Smith's writings, focusing primarily on the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, with the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* serving as a bridge between the two main published books.

⁶ The popular formulation of this assertion is evident in works such as: *Is China Democraticizing?* by Minxin Pei (1998), *The Coming Collapse of China* by Gordon G. Chang (2001), *Inklings of Democracy in China* by Susan Ogden (2002), *China's Democratic Future: How It Will Happen and Where It Will Lead* by Bruce Gilley (2004) and *The World is Flat* by Thomas L. Friedman (2005).

If such is the case, then restricting the analysis to the 'economic'—through the restrictive operative assumption— is an exercise in prudence as the flourishing of a market-based society will result in the realization of political liberty in the post-1979 reform Chinese context⁶. An argument that is evaluative of the original case of English society and validated through the experiences of the late developers and late democratizers, South Korea and Taiwan (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000).

Such determinacy is also argued by those who do not restrict themselves to a reading of WON. Albert O. Hirschman (1982, 2013) argues that the advent of commercial society produces a polished human type— a civilizing force—in possession of a set of moral dispositions that are conducive to the attainment of political liberty. The issue with this deterministic view is its implicit dependence on the assumption that an original and absolute form of the impartial spectator—the Impartial Spectator—underpins the complex interrelationship between functionality of the market, state, and society. Thus, teleologically determinist arguments of the prophesized flattening of the Chinese political system are implicitly or explicitly founded on the understanding that the Impartial Spectator will be replicated and instituted in the post-1979 reform Chinese context. It is on this basis that China's historicism can be characterized as a political 'figure of lack'. One must be wary of limiting this 'figure of lack' characterization to its political connotations only. Even the economic reform experience of China is argued to be a partial reform equilibrium that will flatten to the general reform equilibrium (Pei, 2006). The emphasis here is on the lack and absence of primacy accorded to private property rights, which have remained subservient to state ownership and cooperative ownership. The legitimacy is derived from the argument that the Impartial Spectator situates the protection of private property rights by political authority as the *conditio sine qua non* of a market-based society, making the Chinese economic experience as persisting in a partial reform equilibrium⁷. This dependence on an original and absolute form, whether implicitly or explicitly, is questioned here. The basis for this line of questioning is that Smith himself had not ruled out the possibility of multiple formulations of the impartial spectator that deviate from the original absolute form (Macfie, 2003). Rather, the impartial spectator can be conceptualized as a fluid concept that can be contextualized to socio-historical contexts other than the "originating node" (Buzan & Lawson, 2020, p. 193) of the British socio-historical context. The contextualized impartial spectator in the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China is illustrated, and of interest here is the importance of the Cultural Revolution in enabling the institutionalization of the contextualized impartial spectator. Second, it is argued that this contextualized impartial spectator has enabled an economic miracle while continuing to persist as a 'figure of lack', be it in terms of a partial reform equilibrium or its resilience to transitioning to an ideal type of political structure.

⁷ Another example is that of the economic discourse that revolved around the effectiveness or efficiency of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Conventional economic wisdom dictates the need to flatten (privatize) them to resolve the issues arising from the principal agent and soft-budget problem (Zhou Q., 2000), the negative impact it has on economic growth (B. Chen & Feng, 2000; J.Y. Lin & Liu, 2000), the adverse impact on entrepreneurship (H. Li, Yang, Yao, Zhang, & Zhang, 2012) and the needed exposure of SOEs to competition with privately owned enterprises (Arrighi, 2007). This conventional wisdom reflects a strict adherence of categorizing the Chinese economic reform agenda as a partial reform equilibrium.

The remainder of the essay is structured as follows. The first section critically reviews the literature that conceptualizes the role of the state in the propagation of foreign trade. The review is limited to those grounded in Smith's political economy, as it provides the perfect leeway in extrapolating Arrighi's arguments and then critiquing the restrictive operative assumption that his arguments are based on. It is argued that the post-1979 reform Chinese experience can be better comprehended by unraveling the complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, state, and society. The second section builds the idea of the impartial spectator as fundamental to evaluating the complex interrelationship. Crucial here is the idea of the impartial spectator developed in the TMS, and a natural extension of which is that this idea need not adhere to an original absolute form of the Impartial Spectator. Rather, it is conceptualized as an inherently fluid concept that can be contextualized to the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. The specificity of this contextualized impartial spectator is illustrated and argued to enable us to analyze, comprehend, and provide an explanation for the apparent irreconcilability of a market-based society and the persistence of China as a 'figure of lack'. The objective here is to investigate the basis for the persistence of the irreconcilability and should not be construed as arguing that China will forever persist as a figure of lack. The last section offers the concluding remarks.

2. The Finding of Smith in Beijing: From Divergence to Limited Convergence

The prevalent and popular version of Smith's political economy is the materialistic self-interested individual as the source for augmentation of fortune (or capital⁸). It was this idea that was taken to be the source code to the "mystical principle of the "invisible hand"" (Samuelson, 1947, p. 36) that is celebrated as the profoundest observation in the history of economic ideas (Kenneth J. Arrow & Hahn, 2007; K.J. Arrow, 1990; Coase, 1976; Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Henry, 2008; Hollander, 1973; Kennedy, 2010; Tobin, 1991). The metaphor of the invisible hand formulates a rational scheme where the profit motive and competition align the self-interested individuals to produce a harmonious society, and any government intervention hampers the achievement of this said harmonious society. The proponents of export-led growth, molded in the same clay, extend the metaphor of the invisible hand to explain the critical asymmetric existent in the North-South trade dynamic. That is the North specializes in manufacturing and the South in primary products. This critical asymmetry is explained by refurbishing the idea of increasing returns to scale—found in "older economists" (Young, 1928, p. 527) such as Smith—accruing from accumulated knowledge and human capital (Darity & Davis, 2005).

⁸ "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their interest" (Smith, 2003a, p. 16).

The rise of this export-led growth paradigm in the 1970s was an intellectual rebuttal to the import-substitution strategy that had been the mainstay for Latin American as well as the East Asian economies in the post-war era (Caldentey, 2008; Gereffi & Wyman, 1990; Palley, 2012). The import-substitution strategy, as opposed to the proponents of export-led growth, had identified the critical asymmetry in historical contingencies⁹ that had set the pattern of specialization in North-South trade dynamic (H.-J. Chang, 2002; Prebisch, 1950, 1984; Singer, 1949, 1975, 2018). The pressing concern here was that the manufacturing sector has a dynamic potential that fosters increased productivity through external economies and increasing returns that results in a competitive advantage reflected in the nation's balance-of-payments position (H.-J. Chang, 2002; Prebisch, 1950, 1984; Singer, 1949, 1975, 2018). The pressing concern here was that the manufacturing sector has a dynamic potential that fosters increased productivity through external economies and increasing returns that results in a competitive advantage reflected in the nation's balance-of-payments position (Forstater & Murray, 2009; Rosenberg, 1965; Smith, 2003a). This is the basis for the world being split into competitively successful manufacturing economies (North) versus sluggish primary economies (South). A process that Nicholas Kaldor (1972) had termed as the polarization process. The policy imperative was the needed visible hand of the state to promote and propagate domestic manufacturing to dam the downward spiral of widening lag of economic growth. A polarization that had been aggravated by the long-term deterioration of terms of trade, hastening the adverse impact on the balance-of-payments position of Latin American countries.

The opportunity for a rebuttal against the import-substitution strategy had arisen due to the oil shock in the late 1970s and the resultant debt crisis that was crippling the Latin American economies. The proponents of the export-led growth paradigm situated the cause of the dire economic situation in the interventionist state. Marking the revival of the principle of comparative advantage and the state was relegated to policy obsolescence on the grounds that the state could not be regarded as an "impartial and omnipotent social guardian" (Ha-Joon Chang, 1994, p. 540). If such was the consensus—laissez-faire as opposed to state intervention—how are we to evaluate the success of the developmental state in Japan (Cumings, 1999; Johnson, 1999, 2022) and the interventionist state of the East Asian economies (Amsden, 1992; Kohli, 1999, 2004; Wade, 2018; Weiss & Hobson, 1995)? How is it that the developmental state is considered necessary for economic growth in East Asian economies but not so, even if it was the norm in Latin American countries? This difference in viewpoint is because

⁹There is literature that has focused on explaining the source of this critical asymmetry with the explanations ranging from 'original sin' of the Atlantic slave trade, slavery in the Americas, and British colonialism (Darity, 1982a, 1982b, 1992; Dutt, 1992; Eltis & Engerman, 2000). There is literature that has focused on explaining the source of this critical asymmetry with the explanations ranging from 'original sin' of the Atlantic slave trade, slavery in the Americas, and British colonialism (Darity, 1982a, 1982b, 1992; Dutt, 1992; Eltis & Engerman, 2000).

the strong state was the prime mover in the transitioning of East Asian countries to outward-oriented development strategies to take advantage of accelerated outsourcing of standardized activities of labor-intensive industries, as opposed to the inward-oriented (import-substituting) mode of development that continued to be followed in the majority of Latin American countries (Gereffi & Wyman, 1990; Palma, 2009). The outward-oriented development strategies fit in well with the prescribed 'openness' of trade and the needed visible hand of the state in making effective and many-sided policies facilitative towards the emerging global trade dynamics.

Giovanni Arrighi's analysis situates the importance of 'openness' of trade to economic growth and the needed existence of a strong state in the WON and applies it to analyze the macro-historical economic experience of China. The emphasis is on Smith's foundational idea of the division of labor, which is the beginning and end point of the "virtuous circle of economic growth" (Arrighi, 2007, p. 54) and the limit that is imposed on this circular growth process by the extent of the market. It is here that the institutional setting of the strong state is situated, as it proves necessary to facilitate and promote foreign trade to overcome the 'hitch' of the extent of the market. This framework is utilized to evaluate and explain the contrasting macro-historical economic experience of Imperial China and post-1979 reform China. It is argued that Imperial China was on the 'path to natural opulence' as it had undertaken the systematic spatial extension of the market by developing domestic agriculture first and then domestic manufacturing, but crucially absent was the strong state to facilitate foreign trade. The absence of a strong state to facilitate the outward spiral of the circular growth process is how the 'real puzzle' (Roy Bin Wong, 1997) that industrial countries of western Europe—on the 'unnatural or retrograde path of economic development'—did not undergo the great divergence, whereas Imperial China did, is explained¹⁰. On the other hand, the economic miracle of post-1979 reform China is due to its adherence to the path to natural opulence, where the domestic agricultural

¹⁰ The debates on the causes of the great divergence can be broken down into two positions, the "long-term lock in theories" and "short-term accident theories" (Zheng & Huang, 2018, p. 8). The former view focuses on the differences between China and West Europe that had locked them in on differing trajectories, with Max Weber (1951, 2013) emphasizing the intense process of rationalization that resulted in the emergence of market-based economies, bureaucratic states, and propagation of science and technology. The Marxist approach, though different from the Weberian perspective in fundamental terms, also emphasized the development of market-based economies as the motor force of history. Even the dependency theorists and world-systems analysis, building on elements derived from Marx's focus on exploitation, accord centrality to market-based development as spreading from the West and incorporating the passive and non-developing 'Rest' in the modern world-system (Anievas & Nişancioğlu, 2015). The long-term lock in theories were critiqued for their Eurocentrism as it was implicitly assumed that the rise of the West was happening while the 'Rest' stood stagnant, devoid of rationality in its oriental despotism (Blue, 1999; Hung, 2003; Wittfogel, 1957). Instead, a new interpretation of economic history was forwarded where the 'Rest' was not a static observer but rather that both China and West Europe formed a world of surprising resemblance (Elvin, 1973, 1984; Goldstone, 2002; O'Brien, 2020; Sugihara, 2003; Vries, 2010; R.B. Wong, 2002; Roy Bin Wong, 1997). This came to be known as the California School, which argued that these resemblances, in terms of elements of economic modernity, had persisted in Imperial China independent of the historical phenomenon of the early modern West. These arguments are akin—though relatively lesser known—to those that had argued the 'discovery of history' in China with the Tang-Song transformation determined as the decisive point for the beginning of a modern economic age and the finding of 'sprouts of capitalism' in the Ming and early Qing dynasties, respectively (Faure, 2006; Feuerwerker, 2013; Miller, 2000; D. Xu, Wang,

sector was developed through the household responsibility system and then domestic industrial development was fostered through the contract responsibility system (in tandem with the management responsibility system¹¹) for the state-run industries and the establishment of shareholding companies. There is no denying that the economic success achieved has to be attributed to the gradualist approach¹² – ‘crossing the river by feeling for the stones¹³’ –to achieve a domestically induced large-scale, prolonged, and unexpected economic resurgence. The crucial point that is being pointed out is that in the case of post-1979 reform China the strong state’s facilitative role in propagating foreign trade and commerce had brought the Chinese economy to the cusp of a great convergence (Brandt, Ma, & Rawski, 2014) that it possibly could have achieved, potentially, a good many centuries ago¹⁴.

The primary issue with this ‘finding of Smith’ in Beijing is that it is built upon a restrictive operative assumption that limits the analysis to a scenario where the market-based economic development exploits (or not) a given social framework’s hidden potential for economic growth but does not alter the social framework in any fundamental way. The social framework can undergo changes, but those changes originate in processes and actions of a non-economic nature rather than from within the process of economic growth. This restrictive operative assumption is problematic when considering the complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, state, and society envisioned through the idea of the impartial spectator. First, the functionality of the market is not built on the “granite of self-interest” (Stigler, 1971, p. 265) but in a complex *mélange* of primal individuality for bettering our condition that is tempered by social norms and customs personified in the impartial spectator. What we have instead is an “implicit social theory” (Macfie, 2010, p. 70) where society conditions the sentiments that approves or disapproves of an individual’s character or action. It is here that the impartial spectator serves as the precise and distinct measure for the complex conditioning apparatus essential to structuring moral behavior but also sets the foundation for the economic man that fits the requirements of a market-based society (Heilbroner, 1982). The implication here is that with the advent of a market-based society, the impartial spectator bestows glory and admiration upon the individual who is successful in the pursuit of riches, that is, the acquisitive tendency of the private accumulating capitalist. Second, the impartial spectator, the embodiment of the social norms and

Curwen, & Li, 2000; Zurndorfer, 1997). R. Bin Wong (1997), in his influential work, argued that the resemblance between west Europe and Imperial China was in the existence of market-based economy driven by the division of labor. Despite this resemblance, the increase in productivity in the agrarian economy of Imperial China, from the deepening and widening division of labor, resulted in population growth that was to eventually reach a Malthusian limit– a high-level equilibrium trap (Elvin, 1973)– to further expansion. This high-level equilibrium trap could only be overcome through exogenous factors, such as the invention of steam as a source of mechanical energy (Lavelly & Wong, 1998; Rosenthal & Wong, 2011) or the fortuitous accident of finding coal and resources in the New World that enabled the production of land-intensive products (Pomeranz, 2021). These fortuitous accidents and discoveries then explain the ability of the West European countries to overcome the high-level equilibrium trap while the Imperial Chinese economy underwent the great divergence. Arrighi’s disagreement, however, is with Wong’s emphasis on exogenous factors when in fact the real puzzle could be explained endogenously in the needed existence of a strong state to undertake foreign trade to overcome the ‘hitch’ of the extent of the market.

customs, confers adulation and excites emulation in the excellence of 'others', thereby serving as an order-bestowing principle. Yet still, there still arises the possibility of envy as we have "little fellow-feeling with the joy of success" (Smith, 1982b, p. 140), and the role of political authority is to "secure wealth and to defend the rich from the poor", primarily through the protection of private property rights (Smith, 1982c, p. 19). The above illustration should suffice to provide a hint that a complex interrelationship is envisioned through the impartial spectator, developed in more detail in the following section. The question remains as to whether Smith had stipulated one absolute and original form of the impartial spectator—the Impartial Spectator—that sets in stone the complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, state, and society. Evident in arguments that post-1979 reform China should be evaluated from the standpoint of feasibility (transitional institutions) and not what is desirable (best practice institutions of the free market) (Qian, 2017). In essence, the economic miracle of post-1979 reform China needs to be understood as a partial reform equilibrium in the sense that cooperative land ownership of the non-state sector (Township and Village Enterprises TVEs) does not adhere to the standard model of property rights or the flourishing of market-based society has not resulted in the destruction of arbitrary sources of power favorable to political liberty. Implicit here is a teleologically deterministic viewpoint that the flourishing of market-based society will eventually flatten to achieve the best practice institutions—standard model of private property rights or the ideal type of political structure¹⁵—to perch itself at the general reform equilibrium. Thus, China's reform experience is asserted to be a 'figure of lack' when compared against the standard model implicated in the Impartial Spectator and implicitly assumed that the fixed complex interrelationship in the Impartial Spectator will be replicated and instituted in the post-1979 reform Chinese context.

¹¹ Qi (2018, 2020) has meticulously shown that in the post-reform era the 'Maoist incentive system' within the SOEs have been progressively dismantled, with the first phase characterized by the introduction of bonuses and piece wages for the workers while maintaining the benefits system of housing and job security. There were obviously problems of profitability as the workers were still provided with benefits. The second phase, much more importantly, resulted in the cadres becoming the capitalist managers along with the dismantling of the social benefits that had previously accrued to the workers and in the last phase, the state-owned enterprises began a policy of "increasing efficiency by reducing employment" (Qi, 2018, pp. 418–422). It is here that the contract responsibility proves important as the gongren (urban workers/formal workers) were replaced by the nongmingong (migrant) in lieu of increasing efficiency by reducing employment of those who could still avail the benefits implicated in the iron rice bowls.

¹² The interested reader can turn to a plethora of work that have emphasized on the importance of the Chinese state (effectively, the Communist Party of China), both theoretically and analytically, in the achievement of an economic miracle. The following is certainly not an exhaustive list but does include a literature from varied perspectives and ideological inclinations: Adams & Brock (1993); Brandt & Rawski (2008); Brandt, Ma and Rawski (2014); Bremmer, (2008); Chang, (2002); Garnaut, Song and Fang (2018); Jessop (2002); Lin, Cai and Li (2003); Naughton and Tsai (2015); Nolan (1995); Perry & Wong (1985); Rawski (2011); Roland (2004); Skinner (1996); Weber (2021); C. Xu (2011).

¹³ As with many aphorisms associated with Deng Xiaoping's name, this one was not coined by Deng Xiaoping. The first record of Deng's use of this expression was March 22, 1966 (Vogel, 2011).

¹⁴ The share in world GDP of Imperial China, as a percentage of the world total, stood at 24.9 in 1500, reducing to 22.3 per cent in 1700, to increase again to 32.9 per cent in 1820 (Maddison, 2006). According to the International Monetary Fund, China's GDP based on Purchasing Power Parity, share of the world stood at a paltry 2.26 per cent in 1980, increasing to 4 per cent in 1990, with a significant spike to 13.61 per cent in 2010 and expected to be on the upward trajectory to 19.05 per cent in 2024.

Contrary to this standard interpretation, it is argued here that the idea of the impartial spectator can be conceptualized as a fluid concept that can be contextualized to a socio-historical context other than the originating node of the British socio-historical context. Enabling us to evaluate, analyze, and comprehend the complex “interpenetration and mutually conflictual relations between the (functionality of the) market, society, and the state” (Wang & Karl, 1998, p. 12). In the following section, we first build upon the idea of the impartial spectator as a stand-in for the complex interrelationship envisioned by Adam Smith. Important here is the Cultural Evolution in the institutionalization of a contextualized impartial spectator, upon which the irreconcilability of a market-based society and the persistence of the ‘figure of lack’ characterization of China is reconciled. To these tasks we now turn to.

3. Adam Smith’s Political Economy: The Role of the Impartial Spectator

What determines the degree to which actions are to be deemed fit or considered to be an object of resentment? Does there exist a precise and distinct measure to estimate the social basis of approval or resentment? In the last edition of the TMS, Smith argues that the “precise and distinct measure can be found nowhere but in the sympathetic feelings of the impartial and well-informed spectator” (Smith, 1790, p. 49 as cited in Raphael & Macfie, 1982, p. 17). As (Fleischacker, 2004, p. 47) succinctly puts it:

(T)he “impartial spectator” begins as a product and expression of society, but becomes, once internalized, a source of moral evaluation by which the individual can stand apart, and indeed criticize, his or her society. *Individually free action* and the *social construction of the self* are compatible, for Smith, even dependent on one another. [emphasis added]

It is in this complex mélange of individuality and society, intermediated by the impartial spectator, that primal human nature is tempered to give us the socialized individual. There can exist, obviously, varying designations of sentiments at the individual level, but there are some precise sentiments that qualify as inviolable by society.

¹⁵ In the Imperial context, the focus has been on examining the benefits of a regime of economic liberty for the growth of commercial prosperity. An example of this is Landes’s (2006) argument that situates the failure of Imperial China in the institutionally rigid regime that was not characterized by economic liberalism and thus adversely impacting the emergence of a commercial society. The failure of Imperial China is situated in the failure of the Qing dynasty’s inability to partake in the benefits that accrued from the Industrial Revolution, as did Britain and their contemporaries (McCloskey, 2010) due primarily to fear of the long-term prospects of economic growth disrupting the continuation of the balance of power and alignment of interests of the Empire (Brandt et al., 2014). Thus, the divergence is explained in the inability of Imperial China to transition from Empire to a nation-state, a must for the unfolding of modernity in its historical context (Hui, 2014). These arguments fit well with the underlying causal relationship between a regime of liberty, fostering commercial prosperity.

With the advent of a market-based society, as Heilbroner (1982, p. 432) argues, the complex conditioning procedure “creates not only moral man” who is prudent but also an “economic man whose social activities have been altered in the manner” that fits the requirements of a market-based society. That is the development of a market-based society with a flourishing commercial dynamic means that the deference structure embedded in the impartial spectator bestows glory and admiration upon the individual who is successful in the pursuit of riches, that is, the acquisitive tendency of the private accumulating capitalist. The condition of the accumulating capitalist is the most fortunate and becomes the object of admiration and excites emulation, “originally founded in our admiration of the excellence of others” (Smith, 1982b, p. 114). Implicit here is an order-bestowing principle of subordination that is critical to the maintenance of the “distinction of ranks and the order of society” in which the private capitalist, one of the “three great, original and constituent orders of every civilized society” (Smith, 2003a, p. 248) subordinates the other who lives on rent and those who live by wages. This principle of subordination is institutionalized in the impartial spectator that structures the upward-oriented sympathy where “our sympathy with our superiors being greater than that with our equals or inferiors: we admire their happy situations, enter into it with pleasure, and endeavour (sic) to promote it” (Smith, 1982c, p. 401).

What we observe here is that the functionality of the market is founded upon the socialized individual, where the original passions of the primal individual are tempered by the complex conditioning apparatus of society, a distinct measure of which is the impartial and well-informed spectator. The question, however, remains as to what the point and purpose of political authority (the state). The justification for political authority is dependent on the question as to “what that political power will be used to secure” [emphasis added] (Lindgren, 1973, p. 64). Despite the glory and admiration bestowed on the acquisitive tendency and the order-bestowing principle of subordination instituted in the impartial spectator it was understood that the affluence of the rich will ignite envy, and the role of political authority is to defend those “who have some property against those who have none at all” (Smith, 2003b, p. 207). Given that the social bond of any community is dependent upon the maintenance of preferences and aversions embodied in the impartial spectator, that is the hierarchy accorded to the acquisitive tendency of the capitalist, the moral basis of political obligation and political authority is justified in the usage of political power in securing the *conditio sine qua non* of a market-based commercial society: the protection of private property rights. It is evident here that the impartial spectator plays an indispensable role in underwriting the sociological basis of politics, the enforcement and protection of morals and the rise of government. Thus, through the idea of the impartial spectator, a complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, state, and society is envisioned.

To articulate the historical economic experience of China based on an assumption that effectively ignores the complex interrelationship envisioned by Smith is problematic. As previously argued, with the advent of a commercial society, the impartial spectator bestows admiration and

emulation on the private, accumulating capitalist. In the case of Imperial China, there persisted a “lack of connection” (R.B. Wong, 2002, p. 458) – “little respect for foreign trade Beggarly commerce” (Smith, 2003b, p. 178) (Smith, 2003b, p. 178) –between private accumulating capitalist and the government. A result of the absence of the deference structure personified in the impartial spectator is necessary for the advent of a market-based society with a flourishing commercial dynamic. When viewed in this way, the divergence of Imperial China can be situated in presence of a strong state that protected the deference structure that was geared towards obstructing the advent of commercial society. In sharp contrast to the absence of a strong state that Arrighi situates the answer to the great divergence experienced by Imperial China.

The main issue, however, is the interpretation that Smith had stipulated an original and absolute form of the impartial spectator—the Impartial Spectator—that sets in stone the moral and political obligation structuring the complex interrelationship between the functionality of market, state, and society. This interpretation has attenuated the malleability inherent in the idea of the impartial spectator, as Smith himself had never explicitly ruled out the possibility of multiple formulations of the impartial spectator that can deviate from the original and absolute form. Making it possible to articulate the idea as a fluid concept that can be contextualized in the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. Take, for example, the emphasis on the role of political authority in the protection of private property rights. If we assume that Smith had in fact stipulated the Impartial Spectator, then the existence of ‘ambiguous property rights’ (C. Chang & Wang, 1994; D. D. Li, 1996) in the non-state sector (township and village enterprises, TVEs) of China can be interpreted as not adhering to the standard model. It could be chalked off to transitional institutions or a partial equilibrium, as previously noted, with the implication that it will eventually transition to the standard model of private property rights instituted in the Impartial Spectator. To explain the deviations from the standard model, the large TVE corporations are explained based on persistent ‘imperfections’ of both market and government (Che & Qian, 1998). On the other hand, if Smith’s objective had not been to stipulate an intuitive solution to moral and political obligation in a final and immediate sense—“declaring spontaneously yea or nay” (Macfie, 2003, p. 87) –the existence of the ambiguous property rights can be situated in the impartial spectator specific to the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. For example, to explain the economic performance of TVEs, despite it deviating from the standard set out by the original and absolute form of the Impartial Spectator, the cooperative nature of traditional Chinese culture is alluded to (Weitzman & Xu, 1994). Certainly, an interesting argument as socio-cultural factors can structure moral obligation such that hierarchy is accorded to a cooperative acquisitive tendency rather than a private acquisitive tendency. A better illustration can be undertaken when the distinct measure of the impartial and well-informed spectator in the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China is built out and its implications evaluated in sustaining the irreconcilability of a flourishing market-based society and its persistence as a ‘figure of lack’. To this task we now turn to.

4. The Impartial Spectator in post-1979 reform China

Among observers of China, the “particular character of the Chinese Sixties” (Hui, 2006, p. 4)—that is the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (from now referred to as CR)—is understood to have played an important role in paving the way for market-oriented reforms introduced in 1979. The role of the CR, as the quintessential enabling factor, is due to the years of exhaustion and trauma from ‘continuous revolution’ (Bernstein, 2013) and the funneling of that exhaustion and trauma to question the credibility of Marxism as a framework for China’s development (Westad, 2010). These arguments, however, have focused on the motivations of leaders to undertake the market reforms but an evaluation of the puzzle as to how the complex, destabilizing, and contradictory maneuver of introducing market reforms while maintaining the stability and viability of the Communist Party of China (from now referred to as CPC) is missing. The contention here is that this contradictory maneuver can be explained by evaluating the contextualized impartial spectator that has played a crucial role in reconciling the apparent dissonance between market reforms and China’s continued characterization as a ‘figure of lack’. Two specific processes have played a crucial role in the institutionalization of this contextualized impartial spectator. The first is the process of de-politicization and the second is the process of de-theorization (Hui, 2009). We begin here with the first process.

The concept of ‘line struggle’ had been integral to the CPC’s political culture centered on open debate and multiple forms of organization. For example, the ‘proletarian revolutionary line’ espoused by Mao Zedong versus the ‘bourgeois reactionary line’ led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping are representatives of a line struggle with deep underlying ideological cleavage¹⁶. The CR, in effect, was a violent factional struggle between ‘two lines’ or ‘two roads’ paradigms to stamp out the ‘capitalist roaders’ that were accused of fostering and propagating ‘revisionist policies’. It was an attempt towards politicization by getting rid of the bureaucratization that had degenerated into mere power play. The violence that was unleashed and the attendant societal tumult from the intense factional struggle resulted in a crisis of trust in the vanguard party and a crisis of faith and confidence in the future of the country (J. Chen, 1995; Domes, 1990). It is this frustration and loss of faith that was recomposed to justify the process of *depoliticization* that relegated politics in command (revolution first and construction second) as derivative to economy in command (construction first and revolution was to follow).

¹⁶ Implications of this ideological cleavage were evident in foreign policy, economic development, educational policies, leadership and techniques of administration, scientific method, and other services (Dittmer, 1977; Lieberthal, 1971).

Quite ironically, the CR had fertilized that which it “was intended to forestall” (Walder, 2016, p. 614)—that is depoliticization—as it became the justification for the official campaign to ‘thoroughly negate’ (chengdi fouding) the intellectual tradition of line struggle within the CPC. The result was that market reforms came to be officially accepted as the sole ‘road’ or ‘paradigm’.

This emphasis on market reforms, however, did not see the relegation of the CPC. On the contrary, the CPC situated itself as the primary medium to reversing the economic capitulation that had been experienced during the CR¹⁷. Given the historical connection between the CPC and the political concept of ‘class’, the economic revival was dependent on overcoming the fundamental contradiction of ‘class’. The political basis of this contradiction was the CPC’s ideological commitment to labor and its role to safeguard the workers’ welfare through the social contract of iron rice bowls, and in return, the workers pledged their political loyalty to the Party (E. Friedman & Lee, 2010; Qi, 2018; Walder, 1984). This ideological commitment was in direct conflict to the policy imperative of the economy in command that necessitated the dismantling of the iron rice bowls to foster accumulation. This contradiction was overcome through the process of de-theorization that successfully separated theory (political ideology) and practice (market reforms) such that revolutionary campaigns were to be replaced by a rational bureaucratic mode of governance (Hui, 2006; Lowenthal, 1970, 1974). This, however, did not mark the end of a politically charged campaign era. Far from it. The party’s appeal for political action through mobilization and self-renewal inherent in the political concept of class was repurposed into aspects of mobilization of the masses for nation-state centered drive towards economic modernization (Hui, 2009).

The invisible hand of Mao (Heilmann & Perry, 2011) was alive and well as it underwent political reinvention to promote compliance to economic policies that would make ‘some....get rich first’ as opposed to previous political objective of egalitarianism, propagate commercial consumerism (Chung, 2011), state-led social engineering of birth planning conducive to economic growth (White, 2006) and the ‘New Socialist Countryside’ initiative of the early 2000s to ameliorate the simmering discontentment arising from the imbalance between industry and agriculture (Elizabeth J. Perry, 2011). Another interesting implication of the political appeal of the CPC (‘mass line’ politics) is that it has resulted in a quasi-democratic institution where connection and consultation are maintained with those being led, but always firmly under the control of the Party.

¹⁷ In the 1950s, China’s economy was 50 per cent larger than that of Japan’s, but by 1976, the Japanese economy was twice that of China’s, and Japan’s GDP per capita had grown to 13.7 times that of China’s by 1976 (Maddison, 2006). Even South Korea’s GDP per capita was 1.7 times that of China’s in 1950, and the ratio grew substantially to 4.4 by 1976 (Maddison, 2006). Some might argue that in 1949, the People’s Republic of China’s growth trajectory can only be compared to those countries that were mired in poverty, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. Even then, after 1949, the PRC was on a progressive path to catching up and leaving behind its impoverished bedfellows, only to regress to parity levels during the ‘decade of chaos’.

The prime example of this is the enunciation of the 'Mass Line Education and Practice Campaign' by Xi Jinping (Zhao, 2016a, 2016b). Through this campaign, the issue of corruption within the CPC was raised by the leadership, but the rectification was to be undertaken under the firm control of the Party leadership to renew faith in the Party as the mediator to achieve the 'China Dream' of national rejuvenation.

It is here that the "living legacy of the Cultural Revolution" becomes evident, for it created the economic and political circumstances that "*facilitated* the turn to market reform and enhanced the regime's prospect for survival" (Walder, 2016, p. 614): perestroika without glasnost. The moral obligation instituted in the contextualized impartial spectator was the policy imperative of moving away from the failings of the Mao Zedong Thought's emphasis on egalitarianism (*pingdengzhuyi*) towards 'Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics', in which the pursuit of material wealth was celebrated in the adage 'to get rich is glorious'. Important here was the process of *depoliticization*, as it was able to situate market reforms as the sole 'road'. On the other hand, the moral basis of political obligation was the imperative of reversing the dismal state of the economy during the CR and attaining a well-off society (*xiaokang shehui*) under the tutelage of the state. This was hinged on the separation of political ideology from market reforms achieved through the process of *de-theorization*, where on the one hand it helped overcome the fundamental contradiction of class and yet retain the potency of political action, albeit in a new avatar, to achieve its objective of a well-off society.

What are the implications of this contextualized impartial spectator on evaluating the persistent irreconcilability of a flourishing market-based society and China's continued characterization as a 'figure of lack'? For starters, since the introduction of reforms, the acquisitive tendency of the private capitalist has experienced a sort of phasing in. During the rural entrepreneurial decade of the 1980s they were accorded supplementary (*buchong*) status, deemed an important element (*zhongyao zuzhi bufen*) of the socialist market economy during the state-led urban decade of the 1990s and only in November 2002 the doors to 'other social strata' of the private capitalist—apart from the *workers, farmers, soldiers and intellectuals*—was opened, constitutionally (Dickson, 2007; Guiheux, 2006; Yang, Huang, Deng, & Bordignon, 2020). This progressive increment in stature may be interpreted as convergence towards economic modernization where occupational competence ('experts') becomes the common criterion, rather than party loyalty ('reds') in determining who occupies what position (Bian, Shu, & Logan, 2001; Lee, 1991). What is observed, however, is that the private accumulating capitalist has been kept ensconced within the party apparatus, and compliance with the objective of national rejuvenation is maintained through tangible economic benefits of preferential access to markets and accessibility to state-owned financial institutions crucial for survivability and prosperity (Chow, Fung, Lam, & Sami, 2012; Cull, Li, Sun, & Xu, 2015; Fan, Wong, & Zhang, 2007; Francis, Hasan, & Sun, 2009; H. Li, Meng, Wang, & Zhou, 2008; W. Zhou, 2009). Despite the persistence of corruption—evident in the 'Mass Line Education and Practice Campaign' initiated by Xi Jinping—it is not the same, in terms of

degree, to the Eastern European countries that underwent a similar transition away from communist systems/socialist economies. In the case of Eastern European countries, corruption played an important role in the purchase of state benefits (Åslund, 1989; Hellman, Jones, & Kaufmann, 2003), whereas, in China, despite the problem of corruption the “key currency” (Milhaupt & Zheng, 2015, p. 185) is that of growth potential. The centrality of the CPC—vanguard party for the ‘masses’—is maintained through an organizational structure that is defined as a networked hierarchy of vertically integrated groups organized under the CPC (the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council) strategically linked to private business groups as well as to other governmental organs and state-run educational institutions (L.-W. Lin & Milhaupt, 2013). The basis of this networked hierarchy with the CPC at the helm is derived from the moral tones underlining performance legitimacy (Gallagher, 2015) of political authority instituted in the contextualized impartial spectator. In this instance, glory and admiration are not bestowed on the acquisitive tendency of the private accumulating capitalist, and from this follows the subservience of private property to state property and collectively owned property (the basis of ‘ambiguous property rights’). Even if the focus here is limited to the role of the CR, the deep roots of the Confucian tradition’s decree of the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ that emphasizes the political authority’s responsibility in bringing peace and prosperity for the ruled must also be accounted for. In fact, so important is this moral basis of political obligation that *minzhu* (democracy)—which has a broader and deeper meaning than the institutional and operational definition stressing competitive elections and majoritarian rule (Elizabeth J. Perry, 2008, 2015)—is understood as a system in which people’s interest are reflected in a populist mission led by the government to achieve the collective goal of betterment of society (Zhang, 1994).

Important in the formulation of the impartial spectator, as previously noted, is the order-bestowing principle of subordination. In the socio-historical context of China, of the three great, original and constituent orders of every civilized society, hierarchical status is not accorded to the private capitalist but rather is bestowed on political authority, that is, the CPC. Given this centrality of political authority, it is important to evaluate the impact of the base color of ‘class’—given the CPC’s revolutionary history—on the distinction of rank and order that must be maintained. For one, this has resulted in the establishment of a labor-state accord as opposed to the capital-labor accord instituted in the U.S. (Kotz, 1994; Z. Li & Qi, 2014). This labor-state accord has resulted in a collective bargaining process that is a party state-led collective bargaining process that is unlikely to reach the stage of worker-led collective bargaining (Chan & Hui, 2014). This is a complex balancing act, as on the one hand it retains aspects of performance legitimacy in terms of being the vanguard party for labor while on the other hand, abetting the problems that arise from labor discord by acting as a disciplining agency. There is no doubt that a certain degree of ‘mummification’ (Russo, 2016) of the political concept of class through the dismantling of the iron rice bowls, replacing the *gongren* (urban workers/formal labor) with the *nongmingong* (migrant workers/informal labor) and reduction in labor share of income in China (Qi, 2018). Yet still, the maintenance of order of society in which an upward

oriented sympathy is colored by aspects of responsibility that is bestowed and incorporated within the CPC has resulted in the national champions (the state-owned enterprises, SOEs) continued provisioning of 'public goods' that aim to mitigate the fallout from the drive for increased profitability of China's private enterprises and foreign multinationals by absorbing surplus labor for maintaining social stability conducive to the functioning of the whole economy (Bai, Lu, & Tao, 2006; Huang, Li, & Lotspeich, 2010; Qi & Kotz, 2020). Contrast this to the role of the state in the case of South Korea, where union activities were systematically contained and wages lowered on the grounds of the policy imperative of getting the prices wrong as a penalty for lateness to growth and development (Amsden, 1992). Despite the similar Confucian traits, geopolitical setting, and history of inculcation, it is the regime dynamics that explain the difference between China and South Korea (Cheng, 1990). The regimes in Korea, be it Rhee's regime (1948- 1960) or the leadership of Park Chung Hee (1961-1975), were low in capacity for political co-optation and mobilization in comparison to the mass mobilization that had been at the core of the founding of the CPC in 1949. The implication here is that the regimes in South Korea came to depend on a private capitalist class for ensuring performance as well as political legitimacy. Thereby laying the foundations for a deference structure where the private accumulating capitalist was to be at the helm of the order-bestowing principle of subordination of the contextualized impartial spectator in the South Korean socio-historical context. Neither was it molded by a mass struggle, nor did it have to contend with the base color of class.

5. Conclusion

The objective here is not to claim that China will never overcome its 'figure of lack' characterization, but rather, the main thrust of the arguments is geared towards evaluating and comprehending its continued resilience as a 'figure of lack'. The focal point of the argument is a detailed illustration of the contextualized impartial spectator specific to the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. The arguments that followed can be broken down in the following manner. It is first argued that to comprehend the depth and scope of Adam Smith's political we must undertake an analysis of the 'whole Smith'—the *TMS*, the *WON*, and the *LOJ* acting as the connective bridge between the two—and the emphasis he lays on the idea of impartial spectator laid out in the *TMS*. Among the few who do wrangle with the complex questions raised by the 'whole Smith' assume that Smith had stipulated an original and absolute form of the Impartial Spectator that sets in stone the complex interrelationship between the functionality of the market, the state and society. It is in comparison to the Impartial Spectator that China is labelled as a 'figure of lack' be it in terms of the persistence of ambiguous property rights, the role accorded to the 'national champions' (SOEs) or its stubbornness to transition to the ideal type of political structure. This assumption is problematized by arguing that the idea of impartial spectator and the attendant complex interrelationship can be interpreted as a fluid

concept that can be contextualized to the socio-historical context of post-1979 reform China. It is here that we observe the living legacy of the Cultural Revolution (CR) that was critical to the institutionalization of a contextualized impartial spectator that situates moral obligation in the attainment of a well-off society and the moral basis of political obligation under the tutelage of the CPC. Additionally, the implications of this contextualized impartial spectator are highlighted, where the emphasis is on explaining the continued resilience of its 'figure of lack' characterization.

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Book Review
Purposeful Birdwatching:
Getting to Know Birds Better by Rob Hume

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August 20, 2025
FLAME Working Paper Volume 2, Issue 1

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: Not applicable

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Rob Hume, *Purposeful Birdwatching: Getting to Know Birds Better*. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter, 2024, 336 pp., \$28, ISBN 9781784274689.

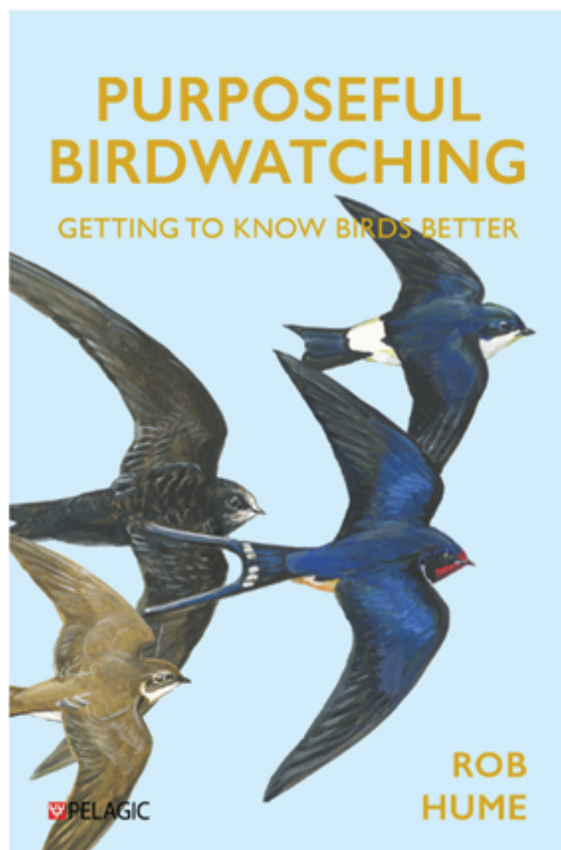
Birdwatching is the observation of live birds in their natural habitat, which has become a popular pastime and scientific sport. It was developed almost entirely in the 20th century, with the help of optical aids like binoculars, which allowed people to see and study wild birds without harming them. Birdwatching is accessible and can be done in various locations, from backyards to parks, and it can be a fun hobby for people of all ages. It is also important for conservation research, as birdwatchers contribute a significant amount of data to researchers, helping them understand bird populations and their behaviour. Birdwatching is also beneficial for physical and mental health, as it involves getting outdoors and exploring nature.

Robert 'Rob' Hume, an English ornithologist and renowned author, has achieved great success with his birding publications for different publishers. His artistic talent is evident in the impactful illustrations that enhance the quality of his books. Previously serving as the editor of the acclaimed *Birds* magazine at the RSPB and overseeing the youth-focused *Bird Life* publication at The Lodge, RSPB's headquarters, Rob has a rich editorial background. Additionally, he has organized wildlife excursions across Europe, Israel, and Africa, exploring diverse bird habitats in regions like Europe, India, Sri Lanka, Australia, the Caribbean, and North America. Rob explains with twenty-three smoothly woven chapters how to make birding more enjoyable, fulfilling, and worthwhile in his new book, *Purposeful Birdwatching: Getting to Know Birds Better*. It glazes with its mix of memoir, gentle advice, and enthusiastic advocacy; this book sets out a case for meaningful birdwatching.

Purposeful Birdwatching: Getting to Know Birds Better caters to a diverse readership, making it an engaging and informative resource for birdwatchers at every stage of their trail. Whether one is just beginning to explore the avian world or is a seasoned birder with years of field experience, the book offers meaningful content tailored to varying levels of expertise. Hume's guidance helps novices build a strong foundation in birdwatching, introducing essential tools, techniques, and the mindset needed to move beyond mere identification toward a richer, more attentive engagement with avifauna. Intermediate birders will find the detailed exploration of behaviours, habitats, and fieldcraft, such as sea watching and raptor observation, particularly enriching. For experienced birdwatchers, the book delivers thoughtful reflections and nuanced observations drawn from the author's extensive experience, offering new ways to look at familiar species and landscapes. With a core focus on birding in the UK and Europe, the insights are nonetheless globally relevant, as the principles of purposeful birdwatching transcend geographic boundaries and resonate with nature lovers everywhere.

One of the standout features of this work is its thoughtful integration of illustrations and field notes, which significantly enrich the reader's learning experience. Rather than relying on highly stylized or photographic imagery, the book features hand drawn sketches that portray birds in natural postures and real-life scenarios. These illustrations serve as practical visual aids, emphasizing key identification features such as plumage details, beak shapes, and flight silhouettes. By capturing birds in motion, whether in flight, at rest, or interacting with their surroundings, the sketches reflect how birds are typically observed in the field, under varied lighting and from different angles. This dynamic presentation makes the identification process more intuitive and realistic.

Birdwatching, as described by Hume in the very first chapter, is fundamentally a personal and aesthetic pursuit driven by a deep appreciation for birds and their beauty. Despite occasional diversions into activities like twitching or migration holidays, the author's core motivation remains unchanged: a genuine love for birds and the emotional response they evoke. Rob acknowledges the potential for birdwatching to serve a more purposeful role, as suggested by fellow enthusiasts like Ian Wallace and Ken Smith, who advocate for a more scientific approach to the hobby. However, his focus remains primarily on the aesthetic and emotional aspects of birdwatching, viewing birds as subjects of beauty and wonder rather than objects of scientific study, even the most common species like the blackbird. Through vivid descriptions and personal anecdotes, the chapter invites readers to share their passion for birds and encourages appreciation for the beauty found in nature's everyday wonders. This style of illustration in field guides is a classic example of expression in the field of natural history. *In the Field, Among the Feathered: A History of Birders and Their Guides* by Thomas R. Dunlap compelled the exploration of how birdwatching has evolved over time, particularly through the development of field guides. The central theme was the transformation of birdwatching from a practice that once involved collecting specimens through hunting to one centered on ethical, observation-based identification. Dunlap underscores the revolutionary impact of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* (1934), which introduced simplified illustrations and emphasized key field markings, setting a new benchmark for bird identification. It also traces how field guides, particularly from the mid-20th century onward, began to incorporate ecological context. The influence of technology is another major focus. Dunlap discusses how the advent of photographic and digital tools transformed the way birders interact with field guides, blending traditional artistic techniques with modern visual precision. Beyond the technical and ecological aspects, it also delves into the cultural significance of birding. Once the domain of aristocrats and scientists, birdwatching gradually became a widespread pastime embraced by people from diverse backgrounds. Overall, Dunlap thoughtfully examines how field guides have shaped not only the practice of birding but also the identity and community of birders themselves. Therefore, by pairing Hume's illustrations with insightful field notes, the book not only enhances recognition skills but also encourages readers to cultivate their own powers of observation. In doing so, it fosters a deeper, more meaningful engagement with birds, emphasizing an appreciation of their behaviour, ecology, and the subtle beauty of their natural habitats.



Rob Hume reflects on their lifelong passion for birdwatching in further chapters, which began in childhood and has remained a constant source of joy and fascination. The text touches upon the concept of “purposeful birdwatching,” which involves contributing to scientific knowledge through focused observation and study. While the author accepts limitations in this regard, they emphasize the value of studying birds and their habitats for conservation and research purposes. He explores the diverse motivations behind birdwatching, ranging from a desire to connect with nature to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Birdwatching is portrayed as a hobby that expands one's mind, fosters appreciation for the natural world, and provides opportunities for social interaction and travel.

Further chapters discuss various ways to engage with one's interest in birds. Birdwatching has no strict rules except ensuring that the welfare of the birds comes first. One can pursue birdwatching in various settings, from the countryside to urban areas, without limitations, as long as no harm is done to the birds or their habitats. Rob shares personal birdwatching experiences, highlighting the diverse ways in which one can enjoy birds, whether it's a casual observation during a walk or a dedicated journey to see new species. One's interest in birds can be intertwined with other disciplines such as art, photography, geography, biology, ecology, or climate science. These fields provide additional insights into bird habitats, behaviour, and ecological dynamics.

Books play an important role in this field. Rob has dedicated a separate chapter to deal with this. The text delves into the historical evolution of bird guidebooks, reminiscing about early editions and their impact on his journey. It mentions influential authors and their contributions to field guides, highlighting the transition from multi-volume sets to pocket guides from childhood *Ladybird books* to more comprehensive guides like the Collins *Pocket Guide*. They also touch upon the narrative style of some bird books, contrasting them with the concise language of traditional field guides, offering insights into the importance of literature in shaping birdwatching experiences.

Where and when does a particular species of bird occur? This is an amazing question that every birder strives to know. Rob discusses the significance of understanding bird distribution, habitats, and seasonal timing for effective birdwatching. He mentions various studies and surveys that have

contributed to mapping bird distribution, highlighting the importance of local observations. He underscores the importance of timing, using examples like plumage variations in winter and migration patterns to illustrate the relevance of seasonality in bird identification.

We all love bird colorations, Hume delves into the intricate relationship between birds, color, and light, expressing his fascination and awe while acknowledging the complexity of the subject. He emphasizes the profound impact of light on birds' appearances, from the iridescence of a Lapwing's wing to the vivid blue plumage of a Peacock. Rob vividly describes a moment of observing Gulls in changing light, highlighting how their colors shift and adapt to different environmental conditions. He explores the variability of bird coloration and its significance in identification, drawing attention to the dynamic nature of bird appearances influenced by factors like lighting, weather, and background.

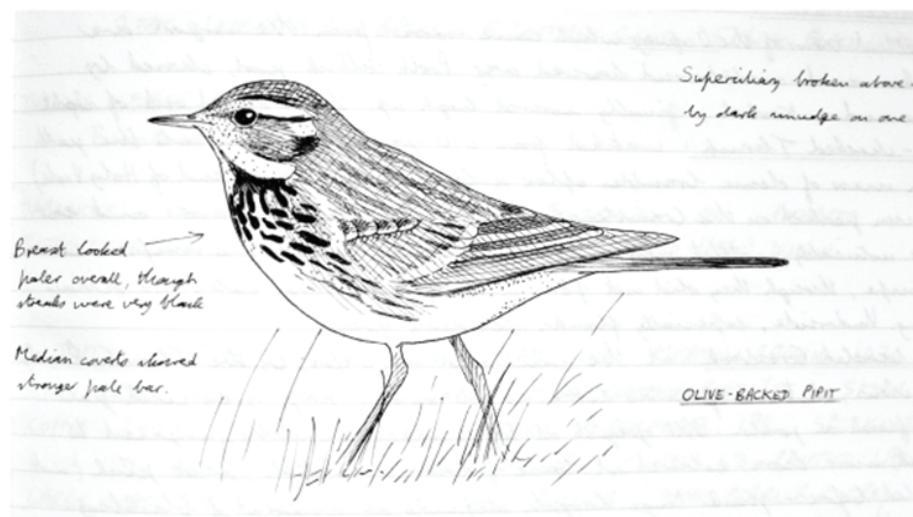
Notepad and pen are always a companion of birders along with a pair of binoculars, despite the availability of smartphone apps and digital resources. Drawing parallels with memory studies and the pitfalls of relying solely on recollection, the author argues for the value of handwritten notes and sketches in reinforcing memory and enhancing observation skills. Highlighting the discipline of note-taking and sketching, the text stresses the need to pay close attention to details and encourages birdwatchers to document their observations for personal learning and verification purposes.

The evolution of illustration styles in bird guides has been shaped by a confluence of technological advances, shifting artistic sensibilities, and the changing needs of birdwatchers. In the early 19th century, bird illustrations were often more decorative than scientific, rooted in artistic traditions that prioritized visual appeal. Notable works such as *A Century of Birds from the Himalaya Mountains* (1832) by John Gould featured exquisite hand-colored lithographs, which, while visually striking, were intended more for aesthetic admiration than practical field use. As the century progressed, illustrators began to adopt a more anatomically precise approach, influenced by developments in natural history. Edward Lear's bird drawings from the 1830s exemplify this transition, blending artistic finesse with increasing anatomical accuracy. During this period, however, field guides were scarce, and bird identification typically relied on museum specimens rather than direct observation in nature.

The 20th century marked a pivotal shift with the publication of Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* (1934), which introduced a revolutionary visual approach. Peterson's stylized illustrations, enhanced with arrows pointing to key field marks, made bird identification far more accessible. This functional design, known as the Peterson Identification System, prioritized quick recognition over intricate anatomical detail and set a new standard for field guides.

By the late 20th and into the 21st century, the advent of high-quality photography brought another transformation. Modern field guides began incorporating photographic images of birds in diverse settings and lighting conditions, offering realism that complemented traditional illustration. Advances in digital tools also enabled hyper-realistic illustrations that merged the precision of photography with the interpretive clarity of artwork. Today's comprehensive guides by experts such as Salim Ali, Pamela Rasmussen, and Barry Taylor often blend both illustrative and photographic elements to accommodate various learning preferences.

In this context, Rob Hume carries forward the legacy of stylized sketches. Rather than focusing solely on static identification, the book emphasizes observational techniques, encouraging readers to engage deeply with bird behaviour and movement. Hume's approach reflects a broader trend in contemporary birdwatching literature—shifting the focus from mere recognition to meaningful understanding of avian life.



This olive-backed pipit was based on field sketches made on Tresco in the wonderful Isles of Scilly, which I have not visited in many years but remember so well. The bird itself was found by my long-time RSPB colleague, Chris Harbard.

Hume narrates the journey of a birdwatcher from their early days of observing birds to their present experience. It agrees with the improvement with experience but also recognizes that not everyone strives to become an expert. He recounts personal anecdotes of encountering new bird species and highlights the importance of being in the right place to see birds, regardless level of expertise.

The book captures the essence of birdwatching as a solitary yet rewarding pursuit, offering advice and reflections to those embarking on birdwatching journey. It greatly reflects on the emotional aspect of birdwatching, emphasizing that the experience is personal and unique to each individual. Rob suggests how seeing birds, even from a distance, can evoke strong emotions and memories. Even distant views of birds can hold meaning and significance, transporting the observer to different places and providing a sense of connection to nature. All chapters capture the transformative power of birdwatching to evoke feelings of nostalgia, appreciation, and wonder.

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