

Regions of International Studies ✨



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Editor's note

Last issue, we tried to figure out how to survive being in your 20s (spoiler: still no idea). This time, we're diving into something we do know a thing or two about- regions of International Studies.

We know- studying in IS already makes you feel like an expert in your region (and maybe a little too confident in tutorial discussions). But take this opportunity to learn a few fun facts about other areas to be able to casually drop into your next friend group convo- like the roots of the muralist movement in Mexico or the stigmatization of same-sex relationships in East Asia.

We promise that we will also make it more fun than your usual lectures (although it might not be an easy task). If you want to procrastinate writing your thesis or other assignments, enjoy our stories about the role of Russian propaganda in African Facebook groups, the role of hummus in Middle Eastern politics, the lived experience of exchange in Chile and many more! We have tried to gather stories that are as diverse as the BAIS student body itself.

*With love (and a stack of JSTOR tabs open),
BAISmag board*

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Café Brazil

Located in the heart of the Santiago Centro, in the Yungay neighborhood, one can stumble upon Café Brasil. A two-minute walk from metro station Cumming (named after Ricardo Cumming, a Chilean politician and military man), this establishment, where we have spent much time, has a rich history and sociocultural impact on its neighborhood.

Founded in the turbulent 1980s, Café Brazil became a place full of memory, an archive of history and a symbol of resistance against the military dictatorship.

In 2002, it moved to its current location at Avenida Ricardo Cumming, in a building that once served as the centre of the presidential campaign of the Communist Party under Gladys Marin. She became a symbol for the clandestine resistance under the dictatorship, head of the marxist-leninist guerilla FPMR, and a close friend of Fidel Castro. Gladys Marin's legacy lives on, not only on the posters decorating the walls, next to Che Guevara and Salvador Allende, but also on the menu. You can try her favorite dish: 'El menú de las resistencia': porotos a la chilena con pan y pebre served with a glass of wine.

Another Chilean tradition that can be experienced in the café is *cueca*. Officially designated as part of Chilean identity during the dictatorship—when it was made a mandatory subject in schools—*cueca* has since been reclaimed and reshaped. Among its various styles is *cueca brava*, a more rebellious genre that emerged in the 20th century and was used to convey political messages. In the café, *cueca* bands participate in this renegotiation of the genre as every Thursday a new band plays a politically engaged set. Classes are also offered to teach different styles of *cueca*, away from the dictatorship-era versions that most people know. On other nights, bands fill the rooms with music, reviving Chilean classics from Victor Jara to Violeta Parra.

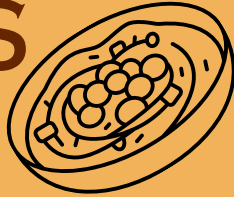
Finally, the café remains an important place for political and social debates through events designed to spark thought. Last October, for example, we attended a movie series about the political history of the country. The documentary screenings were followed by open discussions about the topics, which were an occasion to test our knowledge and question what we had been taught.

As a fun fact, and as a continuation of its rich history, the café now sits in Santiago's new presidential neighborhood. In 2022, Chilean President Gabriel Boric chose to settle just five minutes away—a sign that Café Brasil remains an important place in Chilean politics.

Alex and Julina



NATIONAL IDENTITY, GASTRONATIONALISM AND THE “HUMMUS WARS”



Food is a powerful marker of identity and an expression of the culture and history of a population. Recognized by UNESCO as part of our cultural heritage, it is also an element that brings communities together. Traditional dishes were created during specific historical events and social contexts and the recipes that we know nowadays have gone through severe changes and modifications.

When thinking about factors that influence politics, food is rarely the first thing that comes to mind. Yet, it plays a crucial role in shaping personal identity—just think of the dishes your family made for you while growing up—and, more broadly, national identity.

Without realizing it, when we think about certain dishes, our mind immediately associates them with a country. When we think of pizza, we think of Italy, when we see sushi, we are going to link it to Japan, when we think of burritos, Mexico comes to mind. In the MENA area it's the same. When we look at the region, we are going to associate it with dates, olives and chickpeas.

As mentioned before, beside bringing communities together and shaping identities, food can also be the place for political debates and discussions. One of the latest phenomena to be studied is the cultural appropriation of foods as a power move. Many examples can be found across the Middle East and North Africa, but the most famous is the "Hummus Wars"—a cultural and culinary dispute between several Middle Eastern countries over the origins of hummus, a dish made from chickpeas, tahini, lemon juice, olive oil, and garlic.

The debate over its origins is still ongoing, but the earliest documentation of hummus-like recipes has been found in a 13th century cooking book, most likely to have been written in Syria, called *Al-Wusla ila al-Habib fi Wasf al-Tayyibat wal-Teeb*.

Different countries have claimed to have invented the iconic Middle Eastern dish, from Syria to Lebanon, from Palestine to Turkey. What scholars agree on is that it is safe to say that it originated in the Levantine region. However, following the founding of Israel in 1948 and the country's industrialization, Israel also began to claim hummus as part of its national cuisine. This led to the so-called "Hummus Wars" which started in 2008 when Lebanon accused Israel of trying to appropriate hummus since the country was marketing it as an Israeli dish. Lebanon took legal action, wanting hummus to be recognized as Lebanese. They did not succeed, but their action sparked a debate that is still ongoing today on whether food can play a more important role in international politics. One outcome was a competition between Lebanon and Israel over the world record for the largest serving of hummus which saw Lebanon as the winner. At the same time, it highlighted how food is not just a factor shaping culture, but it can indeed be political.

Although Israelis have asserted that the Bible mentions hummus-like recipes, it has been argued by the scholars Hirsh and Tene in their analysis "An Israeli Culinary Cult" that the growing popularity of hummus in Israel was a consequence of the process of industrialization.

They suggest that the national significance of the dish was largely constructed by the food industry, which used gastronationalism—a concept defined by sociologist Michaela DeSoucey as the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to reinforce national identity and evoke nationalist sentiment.

Gastronationalism in Israel did reinforce Israelis' national identity, but it also weakened the Palestinian one and it has been argued in the last century that this process has also been implemented as a way to erase Palestinian culture due to the ongoing conflict since the creation of the Jewish state. This is not the first time Israel has claimed ownership of Middle Eastern dishes, a practice some critics have referred to as gastro-colonialism. A similar case occurred with falafel, which is now widely marketed as traditional Israeli street food despite its Palestinian roots.

These examples show that even though we don't realize its social importance, food is political and it can carry a lot of cultural meaning. In the case of Palestine, dishes are a substantial part of the cultural identity of a population that is without a state, but that can maintain a national identity through food.



EMERGENCY SUMMIT IN PARIS: GEOPOLITICAL CRISIS IN EUROPE

Since Russia launched its military attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the conflict has placed significant military, economic, and political pressure on Europe. It is not only the biggest military conflict in Europe since World War II, but the full-scale invasion has re-emphasized a returning East-West divide: despite the earlier established economic cooperation, by now, the West aims to reduce economic ties with Russia. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen spearheaded efforts for the EU to impose multiple sanctions targeting Russia's financial and energy sectors. As part of this strategy, the EU introduced the REPowerEU plan to end its reliance on Russian fossil fuels before 2030.

Diplomatically, relations between Russia and the EU have also weakened. In early 2023, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš expelled Russian ambassadors from their countries, prompting retaliatory actions from Moscow. At the same time, these states established a defense line: on January 19, 2024, the defense ministers of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were in Riga to announce the creation of a joint defense initiative known as the Baltic Defence Line. In parallel, NATO increased its presence in the region, in light of the increasing security threat from the East.

However, not all European leaders have aligned with the EU's stance. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has pursued alternative diplomatic efforts outside of EU frameworks, seeking potential peace negotiations. The meeting of Orbán with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 5, 2024 was controversial for its lack of prior disclosure to other EU member states and was seen as a pro-Russian stance on the war, leading to significant criticism from fellow EU leaders.

Internal divisions within the EU also stem from domestic issues in the two biggest countries. In Germany and France, both governments collapsed simultaneously in December 2024 amid economic policy disputes and the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), led by Alice Weidel. In France, political fragmentation is even more severe, as President Emmanuel Macron's government failed to maintain public support and lost a snap parliamentary election. This led to a fractured legislature and political uncertainty in both countries, making decision-making processes to address economic and geopolitical challenges difficult at the EU level.



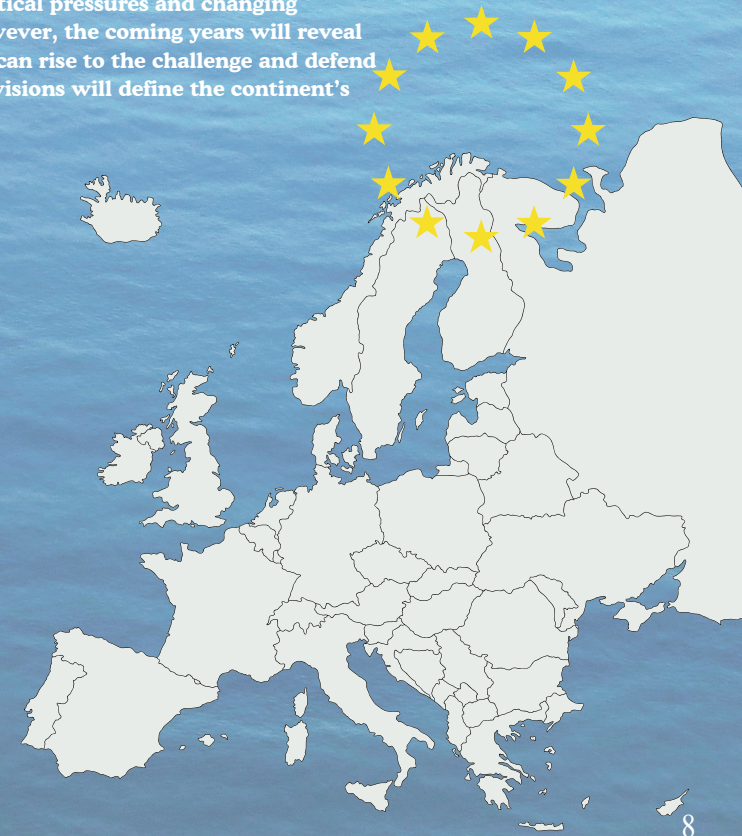
Meanwhile, the possibility of Donald Trump's return to the U.S. presidency in 2025 poses another challenge for Europe. During his first term, Trump openly criticized NATO, calling it "obsolete," and repeatedly pressured European allies to increase their defense spending - while paradoxically aligning with figures such as Elon Musk in support of far-right parties that oppose such increases. His administration's protectionist economic policies, including tariffs on European goods, strained transatlantic trade relations that further damaged EU-US relations.

In February 2025, Donald Trump initiated direct peace negotiations with Vladimir Putin, excluding Ukraine and other EU representatives. During a phone call, Trump proposed a diplomatic resolution and planned an in-person meeting with Putin in Saudi Arabia. The international community expressed concerns as such an agreement could undermine NATO unity and European security.

In response, Macron called for an emergency summit involving Germany, Britain, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, European Council President Charles Michel, and Ursula von der Leyen. The summit's agenda will focus on the challenges facing European security and the future of Ukraine.

What does the future hold for Europe? The continent stands at a crossroads, facing geopolitical pressures and changing transatlantic relations. However, the coming years will reveal whether European leaders can rise to the challenge and defend democracy or if internal divisions will define the continent's future.

By Janka



THE INTERSECTION OF ART AND POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA: THE MEXICAN MURALIST MOVEMENT

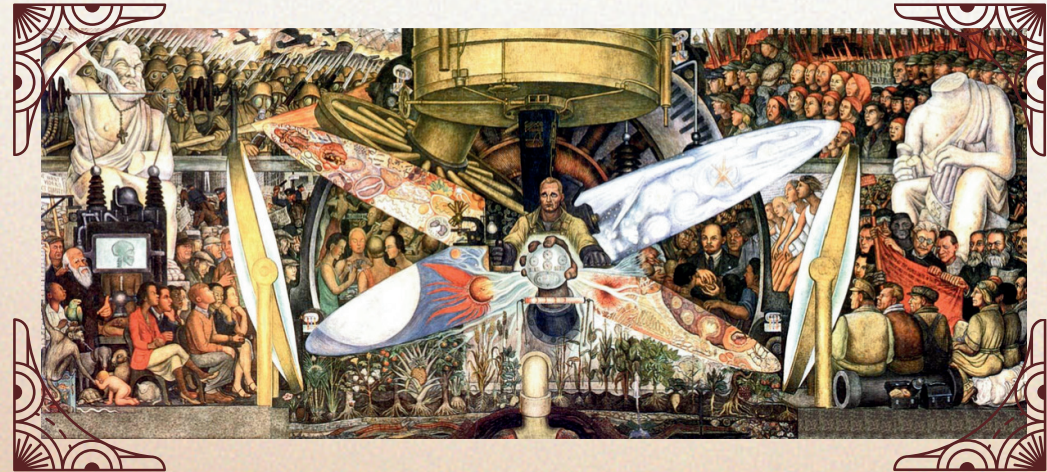
Art can stand for many things, from self-expression to communicating political messages. It serves as an outlet that allows the author to create something meaningful for themselves and for others. In Latin America, art movements were a common way to engage in political resistance and express political stances.

The Mexican Muralist Movement began in the 1920s when the government encouraged artists to create art as a way to promote pride and nationalism after the Mexican Revolution. These artworks aimed to promote cultural identity and educate people about Mexico's history. Additionally, the government wanted to paint a powerful vision of Mexico's future and the country's progress in the people's mind. Despite the government's initiation to create these artworks, it has spun into a movement in which murals became a means to communicate radical political ideas. The movement became widely known since the murals were displayed in public spaces, which, at the same time, also challenged the elitist nature and limited accessibility of art. The leaders of the movement, often referred to as "los tres grandes" or "the big three" were David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera.



"The Epic of American Civilization" is Orozco's most significant work. It consists of 24 panels and tells the story of the Americas from the Indo-Hispanic civilisation to the modern ages. The mural can be separated into two main parts: the first 10 panels depict the story of the Native Americas, and the last 14 tell the story of the continent from the Spanish Conquest. Its most important panels include "Cortés and the Cross," illustrating how the Spanish Conquest brought destruction and the imposition of Christianity. One of the most optimistic panels, the "Modern Light of the Spirit," represents the possibility of spiritual renewal by portraying a resurrected Christ shedding its skin.

Orozco's work challenges the Western discourse at the time that the history of the Americas began with British colonization. It depicts the birth of the Americas with its native people of Mesoamerican civilization as they have been living there for centuries in peace and harmony. Through this work, Orozco presents America's history as cyclical in nature, with the recurring themes of destruction and creation, rather than a linear tale of progress. While many of his contemporaries glorified progress, Orozco's vision of the future was more critical as he incorporated darker themes and ambivalence throughout his artworks. This theme is evident in the panel called "The Machine", which warns against the dehumanizing nature of industrialization as the massive machine system seems to be feeding off human bodies.



The 'Man Controller of the Universe' by Diego Rivera is a powerful depiction of a utopian future in which everyone could join together to work towards a better future. The fresco emphasises the binaries of good and evil, as well as communist and capitalist societies. Famous figures in the artwork include the Russian communist leader Lenin and, in contrast, John D. Rockefeller Jr., depicted as a wealthy capitalist indifferent to the poor conditions of the working class. The main figure, however, is the man in the centre of the fresco, who appears to be in control of the universe. He has a tired, worn-out expression on his face as he is at a crossroads,

trying to decide which way the future will go. This theme is very much in line with the period when it was painted, as fascism was rising in Europe, and the world was still recovering from the Great Depression. Through the fresco, Rivera suggests that many different races and ethnicities, depicted in the bottom left and around Lenin's figure, can join together to live in a better world. He also rejects the capitalist values that Rockefeller represents and Nazi fascism. Following this line of thought, it may also not be a coincidence that the central figure of the Controller is a blonde man with blue eyes.

By Timi

Breaking Up the Family: A Look at US-Canada Relations in the Trump Era

For the past century, Canada and the U.S. have enjoyed one of the most stable bilateral relationships in the world. The two have been seen as siblings of sorts, with the countries continually coming to each other's aid in trade, policies, and defense. Every family relationship has its rough patches though, and it seems like the second Trump presidency is once again making things frosty between these two neighbors. In the first month of Trump's latest term, Canada has seemingly been in the news everyday, mostly as a target of the president's latest geopolitical rows. First, he floated the idea of annexing Canada as the 51st state. Then, a few short days later, Canada was accused of smuggling fentanyl across the U.S. border and slapped with 25% import tariffs. Given the long history of friendship between the U.S and Canada, it seems that nothing can shake the bond these two share. As the old adage goes however, actions have consequences, and Trump's new foreign policy towards his northern neighbor could drastically change the lives of Canadians and Americans alike.

Making Cents of Tariffs

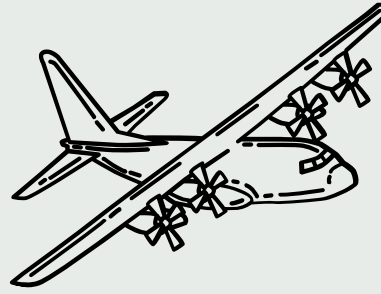
Tariffs have been used for decades as an economic tool to disincentivize foreign imports, especially from countries seen as economic adversaries. The way they work is simple in principle. Countries put tariffs on importers of foreign goods, which means that consumers theoretically pay a higher price for goods made abroad vs. the same goods that are made domestically. This price manipulation pushes people to buy things made in their home country, thereby strengthening domestic industry. The issue is that, due to geographical proximity as well as over 50 years of legislation meant to decrease trade barriers, the two countries' supply chains and wider economies are inexplicably linked, with jobs and goods continually cycling between borders. This makes it nearly impossible to separate industries in such a way that would be beneficial for tariff implementation. In the auto industry for example, the American Chrysler Pacifica minivan has its engine sourced from Detroit, but is assembled in Windsor, Canada, whereas Ford makes their engines in Windsor for cars that are assembled elsewhere.

What happens when you throw tariffs into the mix? Both Americans and Canadians are about to pay more for their cars. But this problem isn't limited to the auto sector. The U.S is a big importer of Canadian oil, wood, paper, and plastic while Canada is reliant on the U.S. for goods like fruit, bourbon, and household appliances, which will be among the thousands of products that Canada plans to put over 100 billion U.S. dollars of tariffs on. While Trump recently decided to delay the tariffs by one month, they are set to cost the average American family 1,200 U.S dollars a year and the average Canadian family about 1,340 U.S dollars a year if they do come into effect.

Shifting Sentiment

Tariffs and talk of territorial takeovers have affected more than just the wallets of the two nations. The recent hostilities have caused Canadians to rethink their relationship with the U.S. According to national pollster Angus Reid, 91% of Canadians want to depend less on the U.S. in the future, with citizens increasingly opting to buy Canadian products and cancel U.S. vacations in favor of travelling domestically. The calls for Canadian annexation have also gotten a frosty reception, leading to booing of the American anthem at an NHL game and a tenseness in the air at Niagara Falls, a natural landmark shared by the two countries. Where do US-Canada relations go from here? It's hard to say. Most Americans and Canadians still look at each other favorably, but only time will tell which path the current political climate will steer these neighbors down.

Russia and Africa: A Dangerous Friendship?



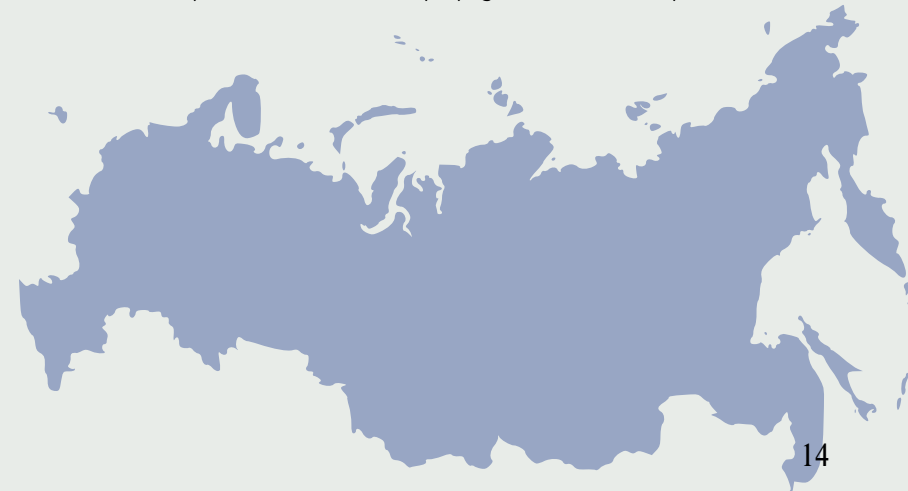
Last year the Russian Wagner Group caught the attention of Western media after a failed military rebellion and the 'mysterious' death of their leader in a plane accident. Many media outlets, among which is Deutsche Welle, made extensive news reports and even a small Youtube film covering Wagner activities in Africa (I highly recommend you check those out!). The Wagner Group is a government structure of private military contractors who participate in military conflicts in Ukraine, Syria and Africa. After the death of Prigozhin, several troops were merged into Russia's so-called "Africa Corps" and put under the command of the Russian Defense Ministry. The group has played a significant role in securing key economic and political interests for Russia, particularly in resource-rich nations such as the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Libya. Wagner's operations often involve protecting ruling elites, securing lucrative mining contracts, and countering Western influence on the continent. In this article, I will give you an overview of the involvement of the Wagner Group in the region. But first, I would like to talk about the broader role of Russia in Africa and try to answer the question of whether Russian-African friendships are a threat to Europe.

Unlike some Russian political leaders, I have no intention of giving you a historical lecture. Notwithstanding, to understand the relationship between the two regions, it is necessary to mention that the Soviet Union had a significant influence in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa during the Cold War. Specifically, the Soviet Union provided economic and technical support, offered loans, and organized training programs for personnel in several African nations which were leaning towards the 'socialist' model rather than the 'capitalist' one. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Russia withdrew from Africa as they were preoccupied with internal affairs, and had expressed no special interest in expanding its power in the region until 2014. As was mentioned in the European Parliament briefing of 2024, the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine and open conflict with the West, 'put the spotlight on the African continent again as an area of geopolitical rivalry'. Just recently, Deutsche Welle reported about huge 'Russian influence campaigns' in Africa in which Moscow is portrayed like Dubai with its skyscrapers. As the experts from Deutsche Welle point out, the media campaigns aim to strike 'anti-West sentiment' and promote portrayal of Russia as a friend of Africa in their anti-colonial fight. The media campaigns are by no means the only Russian strategy. Since 2019, 43 military cooperation agreements have been established with African countries and Russia has emerged as a leading arms supplier to Africa, accounting for 40% of the continent's major weapons imports between 2018 and 2022. On top of that, Russia has signed nuclear cooperation agreements with 20 African countries.



Speaking of military cooperation, this brings us back to the Wagner Group. If you are curious what exactly they do in Africa, it makes two of us. After my research, I can tell you that apparently they have protected President Faustin-Archange Touadéra and supported government forces in their fight to maintain control amid the ongoing civil war in Central African Republic. Additionally, Russia appears to have secured a naval presence in Sudan in exchange for providing military assistance. Finally, the Wagner Group is also active in the Sahel region, where anti-Western military leaders govern Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—each relying on Russian support.

All of these facts, to say the least, sound disturbing, don't they? However, I do find it important to mention that when it comes to trade, overall imports from Russia constitute only 2% of all the imports of the continent, compared to, for instance, 25% from China. Thus, many experts argue that economically, Russia does not have a lot to offer to Africa. The symbolic gestures of Putin, such as the 'gift' of 50 thousand tonnes of grains is ridiculous since 100 million tonnes of cereals are being imported every year. Furthermore, the expert of Carnegie Institute, Ronak Gopaldas, presents the opinion that no matter the outcome of the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia's military and financial capabilities are likely to be too exhausted to continue supporting Africa. Gopaldas also argues that while it is important to take the Russian influence in Africa into consideration, their interest in the region and, most importantly, capabilities, should not be overestimated. Thus, we all should continue to keep an eye on Russia's actions in Africa but try not to fall for Russian propaganda and its false promises.



From Acceptance to Stigma: How Same-Sex Relationships Became Taboo in East Asia

By Vanessa

The treatment of people in same-sex relationships varies starkly within East Asia – some countries, like Taiwan, have started adopting legislation protecting the LGBTQ+ community, while others, like China and South Korea have a much more conservative stance. Japan is somewhat in between as local governments are more willing to push for more progressive laws, while the national government refuses to recognize discrepancies in its legislation. Although LGBTQ+ rights are nowadays hotly debated in East Asia, this has not always been the case. What many people do not know is that same-sex relationships weren't always perceived to be controversial in the region. For prolonged periods of time, they were just a normal part of life. So what changed?

Acceptance in the Past

In large parts of East Asian history, same-sex relationships weren't a big deal. Chinese emperors had male lovers, Japanese samurai had romantic relationships with their apprentices, and in Korea, same-sex relationships among the elite were recorded, though not widely discussed. This is not to say that East Asia of the past was a LGBTQ+ haven. Relationships were simply seen in a different light. Marriage was about producing heirs to continue the family line, therefore, different kinds of relationships outside of marriage weren't unusual – same-sex relationships included. It wasn't until more rigid social norms, influenced by outside forces, came into play that the latter became taboo.

Why Did Things Change ?

The shift from acceptance to taboo came largely with colonialism and modernization. As Western powers colonized East Asia, they brought with them their laws that criminalized homosexuality, which stayed even after colonial rule ended. Another factor that influenced the changing views on homosexuality was the influence of missionaries that preached stricter moral views, as well as the desire of East Asian countries to modernize in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to catch up with the West, which led to the adoption of more rigid family structures as seen abroad.

In the context of newly emerging concepts like the nation-state and nationalism, governments started promoting the idea that a strong nation needed "strong" families. To justify this, Confucian values, which had previously been more flexible, were reinterpreted to emphasize strict gender roles and the idea that marriage had to be between a man and a woman. This push for traditional family structures created a lasting stigma that still influences attitudes today.

What Do Things Look Like Today ?

Nowadays a lot is changing for LGBTQ+ communities in East Asia. Taiwan is a pioneer in the region as the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage. In South Korea and Japan, LGBTQ+ communities are also gaining more visibility as, for example, big pride parades are being hosted annually, which has pressured local governments in Japan to begin to recognize same-sex partnerships. Nevertheless, legal recognition remains a battle against conservative societal norms and political reluctance.

China depicts an interesting case – while there are no laws outright banning same-sex relationships, the government has cracked down on LGBTQ+ activism and visibility. Amongst the people, however, especially young and urban populations, attitudes with regard to the LGBTQ+ community have changed rapidly in recent years. Especially same-sex relationships are becoming more visible in pop culture and social media. Yet with censorship increasing and human rights activists being persecuted, progress remains complicated. South Korea faces a similar rift. On the one hand, LGBTQ+ movements are growing in the country, while, on the other hand, deep-rooted religious and conservative values halt political progress.

A general observation that can be made in the region, therefore, is that younger generations are pushing for change facilitated by the rise of modern communication technologies that allow the local LGBTQ+ communities to connect to the global movement. However, traditional family expectations still exert strong pressure which slows down progress and political willingness to push for inclusive legislation. So overall, changes can be observed, though acceptance is not yet a guaranteed development.

Where Are Things Headed ?

Progress depends on legal recognition, political will, and shifting social norms. Taiwan's legalization of same-sex marriage has the potential to be a precedent for the rest of East Asia. This success for the East Asian LGBTQ+ community has already catalyzed growing public support in the region and a momentum toward national change. Increased LGBTQ+ visibility in media and more progressive corporate diversity policies are also playing a role in normalizing acceptance. While challenges remain, many are optimistic that legal victories and generational shifts could drive further progress in the years to come.



Empowered or Imperilled? The Consequences of Russia's New-Found Alliance with China for the Nation

By Cicely

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in 2022 and the subsequent Western sanctions, Russia has been forced to pivot many of its operations towards China. This relationship has been primarily pragmatic, characterised by a strange, asymmetrical balance of power, tilted toward China. For Russia, this relationship is more than a geopolitical alignment, but a lifeline in a time of increasing isolation on the world stage. It is a way for Russia to increase its global prestige in a time where it has marked itself distinctly against the West.

The relationship with China lacks much ideological uniformity, although both countries are positioned against the United States hegemony due to their authoritarian natures, making it distinct from comparable Cold-War era alliances. Yet, it has been deeply consequential in terms of its strategic impact. So, how is this relationship shaping the trajectory of Russia's influence? This is more than a relationship between two of the largest countries on the planet — it signifies a redefinition of influence and power, positioned against the democratic values that have come to be associated with the West. As these countries attempt to forge new alliances and their own sphere of influence, there may be greater conflict between democracy and authoritarianism in the coming years, in a more multipolar world.

The Russian-Chinese relationship is more strategic than ideological. Relations between these two countries are, of course, nothing new. Associations began in the 16th century, but the two nations became rivals in the 20th century with border disputes and ideological grievances. This new relationship has a tone of suspicion, perhaps due to their historical differences. Ideology is rarely mentioned and the two nations focus instead on their pragmatic shared interests — namely, countering Western dominance in the global order, reshaping the international system, and ensuring their respective national security and sovereignty.

The nature of this relationship can seem vague. They are aligned on some issues, but do not explicitly devote time to discussing the specifics, as they are both ultimately aiming to be the hegemon themselves. It is clear, however, that this is not a relationship based on trust, or mutual affection. In February 2022, Western analysts and governments were preparing themselves for Russia to strike Ukraine. Moscow and Beijing, on the other hand, were crafting a “no limits” partnership, declaring themselves a united front against the West. This committed the two nations to political, economic, and military cooperation going forwards. The relationship has emerged circumstantially through Russia's pivot away from the West, and increasingly aggressive actions through the annexation and invasion of Ukrainian territory in 2014 and 2022. The two nations instead operate on a basis of transactional cooperation. Russia provides China with energy sources and political cooperation; China offers Russia an economic lifeline in a definitive period of downturn.

Energy is key to Russia's economic strategy here. It has directed its most valuable assets eastward, building new infrastructure that reflects its pivot towards the Asian market — such as the Power of Siberia pipeline, which has been operational since 2019. However, the so-called economic lifeline comes at a great cost for Russia. China holds many of the stakes in the bargaining aspect of this relationship, as they are now Russia's largest energy customer. Russia has been forced to sell energy at lower prices than is effectively sustainable, weakening its economic and political position. This will likely lead to a long-term Russian overdependence on China.

It is clear, therefore, that for Russia, this partnership is a double-edged sword. It provides crucial economic and political support in a time of increased tensions with the West. But, Russia is playing a dangerous game. It risks relegating itself a junior partner in this relationship, which will undoubtedly be a sharp contrast to its historical prestige as a global superpower.

Moreover, Russia risks losing its historical influence in Central Asia if it continues to play this game. The region has become a focal point of competition within the partnership. Due to Russia's historic links to the region, it considers it to be in its sphere of influence. But China has noted the economic potential of Central Asia and begun pouring investments into it in order to bolster influence there. This has inevitably had the effect of challenging Russian dominance and offering a new — possibly more attractive — alternative. Through the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), China has increased infrastructure, trade routes, and energy projects which are fundamentally incompatible with Moscow's interests.

Russia, due to its weakened economic position, naturally struggles to counterbalance China's influence. It is clear that the two countries are aligned on the matter of counterbalancing Western influence, but tensions are simmering beneath the surface over who can ultimately wield greater influence.

The Russian-Chinese partnership is, more than anything else, a survival strategy for Moscow. Russia is facing extraordinary levels of diplomatic and economic isolation, so it has turned eastwards for support, in search for a partner which provides economic benefits and can help to reshape the global order. Whilst Moscow has received crucial benefits from this, it risks entrenching its dependence on Beijing and reducing its own bargaining power and influence in the “near abroad”. For now, the partnership is allowing Russia to maintain a semblance of strength on the global stage. But, in the long-term, the nation risks becoming disempowered, and overly dependent on its southern neighbour.

Behind the Beauty: The Hidden Costs of Tourism in South and Southeast Asia

South and Southeast Asia is a region that has captivated the hearts of budding travelers and explorers for years. It has recently exploded with popularity as more people find themselves drawn to the rich cultures, cuisines, and beautiful scenery of the region. Popular destinations include—but are not limited to—Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, and India.

And yet, in the face of this, questions are being raised about the environmental impact of tourists on the region, who create carbon emissions through traveling and plastic waste. South and Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable places in the world to the effects of climate change, due to its densely populated coastal areas, rapid urbanization, and dependence on monsoon-fed local agriculture. Infrastructure has been destroyed in recent years, thousands have died as a result of flash flooding, and the boom in population has led to overcrowding, resulting in the rapid spread of diseases such as malaria due to the high temperatures. And so, the region is faced with a dilemma: how to balance sustainability with the economic growth that tourism provides. According to the ASEAN Post, tourism in 2018 provided 5.3% of the region's gross domestic product, underlining the sheer importance of this industry for South and Southeast Asia.

The region is famous for its stunning beaches, coral reefs, and marine ecosystems. However, irresponsible tourist practices and a lack of properly enforced legislation around the issue have threatened these natural beauties. In Boracay, the Philippines, for example, the authorities were forced to close down the resort island for six months, to rehabilitate it, as it had become so polluted by overtourism. Sewage had been piped into the sea, oil spills from boats had occurred, and the beach had been heavily littered. In Thailand, as well as in Malaysia and Indonesia, a crisis of coral bleaching has emerged, due to the rising global temperatures and excess of tourist activities such as snorkeling and diving in marine ecosystems. Sadly, the oceans have suffered from plastic pollution, which has had irreversible impacts on marine life and ecosystems.

Furthermore, the rapid expansion of this industry, through the development of resorts and hotels, has led to rapid deforestation and environmental damage. Indonesia alone has been responsible for 14% of global tropical deforestation in recent years. The numbers alone are shocking; from 2001–2009, Southeast Asia has lost an area larger than Thailand in forest coverage. The island of Borneo is expected to lose approximately 30% worth of its total land area in forest. If this current rate of devastation continues, the area will lose approximately 40% of its biodiversity and species by the year 2100.

So, how are the effects of the problem of overtourism being counteracted? What is being done to ensure that the economic benefits provided by tourism are not being offset by the sheer scale of environmental damage that is occurring as a result of this?

Various methods have been tried, with differing levels of success. Bali, for example, attempted to stem the flow of tourists by introducing a 30-day visa policy for visitors. It did not, however, have a significant impact on the number of visitors to the island.

Bhutan's tourism sector has committed itself to a policy of "high-value, low-impact" tourism. This has limited the number of visitors and imposed entry fees upon tourists, whilst positioning the nation as an exclusive destination for authentic experiences. The policy has largely been successful in "branding" the country in a unique way and promoting investment, also helping to conserve the natural beauty of Bhutan. The nation is now widely regarded as a model example of balancing the effects of tourism with domestic economic growth.

The archipelago of Raja Ampat in Indonesia, a zone of particular marine biodiversity, has implemented strict marine conservation policies. They cap the number of visitors and enforce eco-friendly accommodations in order to protect the local community and conserve the environment. This has been a successful policy, with the Raja Ampat reef in good health, relatively unscathed by the issues that plague other tourist attractions such as coral bleaching, disease, and climate change.



"tourism in 2018 provided 5.3% of the region's gross domestic product, underlining the sheer importance of this industry for South and Southeast Asia"



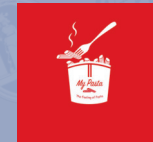
There are several more initiatives taken throughout the region. Trekkers to Nepal who seek out the thrills of climbing the highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest, are now required to remove their own waste whilst walking the route, to reduce pollution. The island of Boracay in The Philippines now enforces strict waste management policies to avoid further closure and degradation. The closure in 2018 had a devastating impact on local livelihoods. Maya Bay in Thailand, which was popularized by the 2000 movie The Beach, has undergone several closures in order to allow its ecosystem to recover from the effects of tourism and is planning more in the future. It now enforces strict visitor caps.

South and Southeast Asia is at a crossroad between environmental conservation and economic growth. Whilst the booming industry has the potential to lift millions out of poverty, create jobs, and create a unique identity for the region throughout the world, without careful management, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation could do much more harm than good. It has already been established that the region has suffered greatly as a result of climate change. If the necessary steps are not taken, with fundamental reform and strong leadership, then the effects could be devastating.

The challenge it faces will be to strike an effective balance between these two issues, which adequately addresses the needs of communities, species, and the environment, whilst also creating jobs and promoting growth. Then, the region will be able to thrive as a world-class destination without sacrificing its natural heritage.

By Cicely

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