

Using Norbert Elias' concept of the established and the outsiders, explain the so...



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Contents

This paper explores the relationship between two apparently different themes — the essentially postmodern, 20th century “ established and outsider” social philosophy expounded by Norbert Elias (Elias and Scotson, 1994) and the distinctly 21st century and essentially economic programme encapsulated in the Post-Washington, Post-Beijing Consensus (PWBC) (Peerenboom, 2014). Every policy, however, has social consequences, and this paper examines the social consequences of the PWBC in an Eliasian context. This paper begins by explicating Elias’ established and outsider philosophy before moving on to describe the PWBC.

The social consequences of the PWBC shall then be analysed within the Eliasian context in order to achieve a deep understanding of what these social consequences are and what they could mean for the people of China should the PWBC come to full fruition. The paper ends by drawing together the findings in a conclusion that while the PWBC comprehensively addresses China’s economic dilemma, its narrow focus and elision of the need for a free media and democratic representation indicates that social consequences go unaddressed, and that China faces social unrest and dislocation as a result.

Elias’ research as far as this paper is concerned relates to the distinctions between the established — those who comprise the official establishment and unofficial, socially mediated cliques — and the outsiders — those lacking in connections or social advantage — who are excluded from the power, economic and knowledge structures of the society in which they live (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Elias’ philosophy found expression in his significant <https://assignbuster.com/using-norbert-elias-concept-of-the-established-and-the-outsiders-explain-the-social-consequences-of-chinas-move-towards-the-post-washington-post-beijing-consensus/>

research into the lives of the people of “Winston Parva”; Elias’ Winston Parva was a long-established community, the members of which viewed themselves within structural confines — a quantitatively ordered, dimensional and objectively classified concept (Hofstede, 2001) — something that offended Elias’ postmodern tendencies, where the objective is not to seek prima facie classification, but to search for depth and understanding (McSweeney, 2002). The initial research in Winston Parva was conducted by John Scotson, who was a member of the community and was therefore able to establish the validity of his research that long-term immersion endows (Christians, 1997). Elias took Scotson’s initial research and rewrote it, adding the insight of the philosopher to its original observational validity. The post-war history of Winston Parva rendered it particularly suitable for sociological enquiry. Pre-1945, Winston Parva had been a community divided on class and economic lines. The powerful “established” included businessmen, officials and professionals (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The disempowered established consisted of the community’s unskilled labour, skilled artisans and shopworkers; these count among the established because they were bonded through family, occupation and society, and found particular identification in these aspects of their lives (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Post-1945, however, a new influx of people arrived in Winston Parva. These comprised primarily people from various large cities, seeking homes to replace those lost as a result of wartime bombing (Elias and Scotson, 1994). These outsiders had little in common with each other, there were few extended familial ties and no social ties to bond them into a community; also, for them, work was often hard to find as their skills were

not transferrable (Elias and Scotson, 1994). This influx became the outsiders, viewed by the established as “ the minority of the worst” (Elias and Scotson, 1994: 7). Elias' concept of the established, characterised by cohesion, self-support, self-praise and self-affirmation and the outsiders, characterised by lack of cohesion, lack of economic power and subject to the blame of others (Elias and Scotson, 1994), is transferrable to many other social settings. It is by this process that the social conditions for people in China undergoing the upheaval of the PWBC shall now be examined.

China has seen remarkable economic growth in recent decades, although growth that was typically in double figures until 2009 has slowed since then to a still-impressive but markedly reduced level of 7 per cent per annum for 2015 (The Economist, 2015). China's economy has been predicated upon exporting manufactured goods and high levels of investment from government-controlled financial institutions (Peerenboom, 2014). China's home-grown variety of post-Mao socialism has facilitated this and has unintentionally led to wide economic disparities among the population; as Chinese former premier Deng Xiaoping said, “ let a portion of the population get rich first” (Hilton, 2012: n. p.). At first sight it appears that post-Mao China has little in common with the Winston Parva of Elias and Scotson (1994). It is important, however, to appreciate that China's growth has been macro-economic; much has been achieved in terms of headline data, although for the Chinese equivalent of the newcomers to Winston Parva — the migrants to Chinese cities — the situation is markedly similar. As Hilton (2012) explains, the established of China are the main beneficiaries of

Chinese economic growth, whereas the outsiders, while achieving the

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greater economic stability that comes with industrial employment, experience geographical and social dislocation. This bears comparison with the outsiders of Winston Parva; they too experienced geographical and social dislocation (Elias and Scotson, 1994). While the political and economic histories and macro-economic situations of Winston Parva and the Chinese cities may differ, the social experiences of their outsiders are significantly comparable. The question remains, however, whether the history and macro-economic situations of these outsiders is influential in their social condition. With one important qualification it appears not, as contemporaneous literature for both countries suggests that the vision of outsiders is preoccupied by their present and their future, not reflecting on their past (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). The present is the situation described in this paper; the past for China is the Cultural Revolution, and the past for Winston Parva is the Second World War. The important qualification relates to an aspect of China's past and present that, while interesting, remains outside the remit of this paper — China's inaccurately named One-Child Policy (Cai, 2010). As China's migrants to the cities are mostly young and single, the effects of the One-Child Policy can be presently discounted, although this may change as the migrant population matures. Presently, however, China faces the dilemma of being caught in what is called the middle-income trap — the situation where development stalls due to an inability to adapt its economic model to enable the leap from middle-income to high-income status (Ginsburg, 2014). To enable this leap to high-income status, China needs to radically change its economic model from that of exporting cheaply manufactured goods to one of exporting fewer but more expensive premium

products and building a comprehensive and sophisticated service sector — a feature that all high-income countries share. Other developing countries have followed the Washington Consensus paradigm for economic growth, comprising focus on markets and international co-operation (Williamson, 1989), with limited success (Fofack, 2014). China, however, followed its own path, known as the Beijing Consensus or China Model, comprising the export-led, high-investment programme described above (Peerenboom, 2014).

While this may bear little comparison with today's Britain, it exhibits startling similarities to the investment-led post-war British drive for exports that was underway in the late-1950s when Scotson conducted his initial research (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Unlike British government policy of the 1950s and beyond, however, there is no immediate provision for representative democracy or media freedom within the PWBC (Banerjee and Duflo, 2008).

The success of the Beijing Consensus has been remarkable, but with significant adverse social consequences including income disparity, particularly noticeable between rural and urban areas, and a lack of urban social provision and infrastructure (He and Su, 2013). Like Elias' Winston Parva (Elias and Scotson, 1994), Chinese cities have seen mass inward migration from diverse rural areas; these arrivals are recent and socially diverse, and have little in the way of local familial connections or social power. These are the outsiders who come for employment in the burgeoning Chinese private sector, set in contrast against a largely state-employed long-standing urban establishment. As such they correspond significantly to Elias' outsiders. Where they differ, however, is that unlike Elias' outsiders in Winston Parva, they are almost wholly in employment and so have a degree

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of economic power. Their economic power is, however, at present limited by the middle-income exigency of China's export-led, high-investment economy, predicated upon mass exports at low production cost (Peerenboom, 2014) — a significant component of which is low remuneration rates. As such, they bear comparison with the outsiders of Winston Parva who also experience economic want due to unemployment (Elias and Scotson, 2014). The PWBC advocates a combination of the free-market approach of the Washington Consensus and the authoritarianism of the Beijing Consensus (Peerenboom, 2014). It is motivated by the need for China to escape the middle-income trap. Income and social status are interlinked as the outsiders in Winston Parva illustrate, although this is not the only relevant factor. In order for communities to be built — the means by which outsiders can achieve established status — it is necessary for social and material infrastructure to be built (Tanaka, 2015). The PWBC recognises the need for material infrastructure — housing, transport, hospitals and schools — as it is clear that as the migrant population matures, these facilities will be necessary; however the position regarding social infrastructure is less clear. Similarly, Elias and Scotson's (1994) Winston Parva possessed the necessary material infrastructure. As has been explained, the economic situation of the Chinese cities and Winston Parva bears comparison through, in the Chinese cities' case, low remuneration rates and, in Winston Parva's case, unemployment. This, however, is where the similarity ends; while the economic outcomes for each location may be similar, the social effects of low pay and unemployment are very different (Stewart, 2005), although amelioration is possibly in sight through the income-raising measures of the

PWBC in China and local training and employment measures in Winston Parva. The Chinese government appears to be either unclear about or unwilling to address the social infrastructure issue. The migrant population in Chinese cities currently works hard to support families in rural areas but, as the migrant population matures, its priorities and needs will change, and the question to be addressed is whether top-down, unrepresentative government will be able to identify that population's social needs and adequately address them. The lessons from Winston Parva suggest not; in Winston Parva, building an estate and filling it with unconnected people from disparate backgrounds and locations did not build a community, and while the outsiders of Winston Parva were poor and largely despised by the established, they at least had the benefit of representation at national and local levels. They also had the benefit of a free media, so their voices could be heard. It appears that the social effects of low pay/unemployment and the presence/absence of representation and a free media crucially distinguish the cities of China from the community of Winston Parva. The established-outsider tension in Winston Parva implicit in the praise and blame associated with unemployment and other facets of social status was maintained from within by the self-supporting established (Scotson and Elias, 1994); however, viewed from outside, such self-affirming practices are regarded as illegitimate, as was the case highlighted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, whereby outsiders' plight was identified by the media and subsequently resolved through the power of their democratic representatives (Katrina 10, 2015). Concerning the presence/absence of democratic representation and a free media, in China, unlike in Winston

Parva, the voices of the outsiders cannot be heard and, without democratically accountable representation, their social needs cannot be adequately addressed. China faces a social dilemma as serious as its economic one, but one that cannot be mediated due to the lack of representation and media access, and while the PWBC may address the economic problems faced by China, it seems unable to provide any solutions to its incipient social ones.

This paper set out to address how, using Norbert Elias' concept of the established and the outsiders, the social consequences of China's move towards the PWBC may be explained. Elias' established-outsider concept was explained using the illustrative example of Winston Parva — the site of Scotson's and later Elias' research. Significant parallels were found between the situations of outsiders in Winston Parva and those in Chinese cities; in both situations, the outsiders were new arrivals from disparate origins, who had no familial or occupational ties to the area or each other. Neither group of outsiders had the means of building a community. There were, however, differences; the Chinese outsiders have a limited degree of economic power whereas their Winston Parva counterparts did not and, while the economic differences are negligible, the social consequences are not, although amelioration in both locations is in prospect; also, the Winston Parva outsiders had access to a free media and democratic representation, whereas the Chinese outsiders do not. The PWBC crucially lacks dimensions in these latter regards, and this is why the social needs of the Chinese outsiders are unlikely to be met by it, and their social future looks bleak and resolvable only through social unrest and dislocation. Elias' established-

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