Neither Local nor Global:

A Political Ethnography of Storytelling and Norm Diffusion in the UNDP China

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the practice of storytelling in norm diffusion based on an in-depth political ethnography of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in China. Closely engaging with glocalisation literature, this dissertation focuses on the manner in which non-linear and multidirectional norm diffusion that disrupts, fractures and transcends the local-global opposition, creating entanglements across layers of orders and scripts. Norm translators are the main actors in the mediation and communication of reframing and relocating normative packages. Empirically, this dissertation addresses the insufficient attention paid to the everyday micro-dynamics of norm diffusion, and particularly how norm circulation and contestation unfold and intensify in the context of emerging powers. The UNDP China office thus serves as an ideal case to study how such practices and processes unfold over time. My methodological approach is political ethnography, employed through a period of intensive fieldwork and participant observation carried out from 2015 to 2018, when my work at the UNDP allowed unparalleled access to materials and the internal organisational processes.

My fieldwork experience highlights the critical role played by stories in translating and appropriating norms. Drawing on the theories of in-between storytelling in institutional contexts, this dissertation argues that an internalisation process of "norm metamorphosis" translates original norms into textual realities, projects and stories. These stories are normative, canonical, ambiguous, open to interpretations, and used as persuasion instruments. Detailed case studies then demonstrate the emergence and application of stories in human rights, rule of law and development cooperation. The content, form and audience of the stories are shaped by issue characteristics and ideological backgrounds, bearing the hallmarks of UNDP officials and local actors. The dissertation further describes how local norms return to the global stage through the UNDP's narration of China's development experience. Instead of reinforcing the local-global opposition, these stories carve out intermediary and liminal spaces through which concepts and ideas travel and transform, redefining the identity of international organisations and transnational networks in recursive conversations.

Acknowledgement

September 6th, 2016. My longest birthday was spent over a long haul flight from China to Britain. Thanks to the time difference, my time as a younger self was extended for eight hours. During my extended youth on the plane, I skipped through the notes on my doctoral research, and tried to make up for the countless summer days I should have worked. It was at that moment, scrutinising the months-old notes under the white reading light, I detected an unsavable sense of detachment and disinterest. It would be irrational and ultimately stupid to change the subject now, I told myself. Two years of research (including the master thesis), negotiations with my supervisor and the department, reassessments, all of these all over again! But for some reason, I was determined that there was no way of going back to my previous research subject. Getting off the plane, I messaged my team leader at the UN and asked for the possibility of returning to the office for field research. Everything seemed to work out well. Two months later, I was in Beijing, starting my fieldwork with a new subject in formation. It ended up in what you are reading now.

I was fortunate enough not to regret this decision. This luck is the result of collaborative efforts. I am indebted to the Department of Politics and International Relations and St Antony's College at Oxford for their numerous and generous support. My supervisor Patricia Thornton has shown great patience and understanding throughout my master's and doctoral years. I have benefited tremendously from the reviews of Rosemary Foot, Miriam Driessen, Rana Mitter and Emma Mawdsley, as well as from the writing and research training at the Dahrendorf Programme with Timothy Garton Ash. The DPhil peer networks including Muzhi Zhou, Will Allen, Sharinee Jagtiani, Maryhen Jimenez Morales, Yang Yi, Flair Donglai Shi and Jodie Yuzhou Sun and the Winchester Writing Club have supported me throughout the most difficult times. Needless to say, my research would not be possible without the openness of the UNDP office, and here I especially thank the UN resident coordinator Nicholas Rosellini, UN country director Agi Veres, deputy country director Patrick Haverman and team leaders including Gu Qing, Carsten Germer and Niels Vestergaard. Colleagues including Andrea Pastorelli, Wu Di, James Yang, Liping Li, Haoran Zheng, Wang Rui, Shuwen Zhou, Weizhu Sun, Ruoqi Zhu and Madam Ge have shown me a great level of professionalism as well as most welcoming atmosphere. Also, I will never forget the days living in the Hutong district in

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Glossary

Administrative Centre for China's Agenda 21 (ACCA21)
Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
China Centre for International Economic Exchange (CCIEE)
China Development Bank (CBD)
China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE)
Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation (CAITEC)
Chinese Initiative on International Law (CIIL)
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
Country Programme Document (CPD)
Development Assistance Cooperation (DAC)
Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA)
Friends and relatives association, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
Governance for Equitable Development" (GED)
International Poverty Reduction Centre in China (IPRCC)
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)
Mainstreaming, Acceleration, Policy Support (MAPS)
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST)
National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)
National People's Congress (NPC)
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
Poverty, Equity and Governance (PEG)
Resident Coordinator Office (RCO)
Re-education through Labour System (RETL)
Resident Representative (RR)
Responsibility to Protect (R2P)
Results Oriented Annual Report (ROAR)
Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE)
South-South Cooperation (SSC)
State Forestry Agency and National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)
Supreme People's Court (SPC)
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Target for Resource Assignment from the Core (TRAC)
U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
United Nations Country Team (UNCT)
United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNECO)
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

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Chapter 1
Introduction

It was a cold winter afternoon in Beijing. The events assistant in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) refilled the teacups for the guests in the small conference room for the third time. The meeting between the UNDP and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community-based organizations was running over time due to an escalating debate.[1] The central question dividing the participants was whether and how to reconcile the national and international frameworks on human rights.

This meeting was set up to discuss the Chinese Initiative on International Law (CIIL)'s report regarding the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR is an international human rights mechanism under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council, in which states are examined by other states and civil organizations on their human rights records. The Chinese government had previously accepted the recommendations from Denmark and Ireland in addressing discrimination on the basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) in 2013. Accordingly, the LGBT organizations were preparing this mid-term report following up the implementation of recommendations in China. As part of a regional project on LGBT rights, the UNDP China office acted as a "safety umbrella" under which civil organizations came together and coordinated action plans.

[1] I am aware the limitations of the term LGBT in including the diversity and fluidity of sexual orientation and gender identity. The choice of this term instead of LGBTI, LGBTQI or SOGIE is mainly to be in line with the UN projects and meetings I attended and the more common use of this term by interview participants. I recorded this meeting in fieldwork notes (13 January 2017).

The participants immediately protested when the CIIL proposed to integrate the UPR report with the National Human Rights Action of China (2016-2020) – a governmental plan published months before. An officer from a community organization voiced her doubts about the possibility of reconciliation. She reminded the participants of China's most recent stance when it voted against the UN resolution to establish an independent expert on SOGIE issues in June 2016. On this basis, she argued that advocacy from the international level could easily be rejected and resisted by the government, and that it would therefore make more sense to focus on the domestic context alone if mentioning the national plan at all. Representatives of a gender-focused health institute partially agreed with this suggestion, while preferring to use the report as an "additional note" alongside the national action plan and extend the official definition of discrimination to include SOGIE sensitivity. The need to draw on the national human rights framework and to engage with the government soon drove the discussion towards the specification of localisation strategies, including the preparation of two versions of the report for different audiences.

However, it was not long before the current towards localization was reversed. CIIL questioned how far we could proceed whilst solely focused on the national framework. "It is not a question of keeping 30% or 70% of the UPR reference", the director of CIIL emphasized, "It won't make any sense if we do not discuss fully the international aspect". This raised the question of the objective of the report, when all participants agreed on the aim of persuading the government to accept the norm and protect the rights of the LGBT community. The vote of the Chinese government against setting up the UN SOGIE expert was then reinterpreted as an expression against this specific

institutional proposal, rather than as an overall rejection of the SOGIE agenda. The subject of discussion thereafter shifted to the measures of connecting the national and international frameworks. The Yogyakarta Principles and official UN covenants were considered as the global normative basis.[2] Instead of making reference to the covenant on civil and political rights, the director of a community organisation suggested the usage of the covenant on economic, social and cultural rights and the "right to development" as a framework more amendable to the government. Nonetheless, potential engagement with foreign governments and embassies was treated with caution. International pressure, especially the follow-up monitoring from Western governments, was unanimously discarded as "ineffective" and "useless", and everyone found the implication of foreign governments "teaching Chinese authorities" appalling. In the end, this planned one-hour meeting turned into a three-hour discussion until it was interrupted by dinner. Although the meeting had not reached an agreed action plan, participant organisations came to the conclusion that there was no baseline from which to argue for policy changes in China. The foundation for advocacy should be "cases", especially regarding case collection in the areas of education and employment mentioned in the last UPR review, and the focus ought to be on how to "turn the cases into effective appeals".

Such moments never ceased to intrigue me since I began my fieldwork at the UNDP China. Unlike the formal portrayals of diplomatic procedures or

[2] Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Laws in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity was drafted by an expert meeting in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2006 (with additional principles and state obligation complemented in 2017). Though not an international convention, the Principles highlight the aspects of the existing international human rights law regarding LGBT rights and have been adopted among activist organisations and cited in UN documents.

sessions of UN conferences, these meetings, workshops and discussions that unfolded on daily basis were messy, precarious and often disorienting. The views and stances of actors involved were constantly shifting and fluctuating, and resulted in unintended designs and dynamics in the travelling of norms. The LGBT project marked my entry into this complicated reality, as the first UNDP project in which I participated. The project team maintained an intimate and trusting relationship with local partners that rendered the contradictions and complexities in norm diffusion more pronounced. Nonetheless, as my stay at the UNDP extended with involvement in and exposure to other projects, I realised that these moments occupied a predominant place in the everyday workings of the office. Norm diffusion was rarely a smooth and simple process of a global norm "coming down" to the local, or of local actors "repacking" global scripts. It involved constant back-and-forth movements and ideational juxtapositions between the spatial and temporal domains defined by the local and the global, upholding the differences and narrating the entanglements.

Let us return to the thick description of the meeting above, which described how the UNDP and other norm translators attempted to forge a common advocacy strategy pertaining to human rights. The local-global tension was at the centre of this discussion, and the translators kept moving between the strategies of localisation and globalisation, reinterpreting local policies and selecting global normative elements, in order to strike an acceptable balance between the two. Such practices reflect what Anna Tsing (2011) calls "friction" in local-global encounters, a process that situates ideas and norms in contestation, negotiation and appropriation, and requires the sustained efforts of creative agents to reconstruct these norms across unequal

and unstable interconnections. “Friction” is not equivalent to hindrance: instead, it is only through these frictions that movements of norms across boundaries become possible, their contents rendered locally identifiable and universally engaged, and the political mobilisation and development interventions become feasible. The UNDP and other agents with whom I interacted are caught in these frictions on an everyday level, and how they respond and react sheds light on the micro-dynamics of norm diffusion.

The context of China brings in another dimension to these dynamics. As an emerging power, China adopts a double role in the process of norm diffusion. The socialisation of the state into global norms is accompanied by its power to resist and reshape the frameworks, and its agenda of inserting local ideas into the international regime as part of its “discursive power” (*huayu quan*, 话语权; Pu 2012, Johnston 2014). This presents a complicated picture of norm diffusion beyond the one-directional and linear model, and underlines multi-dimensional movements of norms within feedback loops that include top-down introductions of global scripts, as well as bottom-up adaptations and creations of local norms returning to the international level. Therefore, in the discussion above, the concepts of “foreign” and “the West” were carefully disassociated with the universal implications of the LGBT norms in order to allow local connections to emerge and the national governments to engage with them.

Two observations stand out in the everyday and multi-dimensional frictions of norm diffusion. One is the absence of references to norms in the form of international conventions and treaties. The standard analysis of norm diffusion focuses on particular transnational documents as the yardstick of

norm acceptance or resistance, but in micro-level practices, these conventions are only briefly mentioned and largely negligible. An extreme case I encountered was when a UN programme coordinator, specialising in gender projects, raised the question, "What is CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women)?" This cannot be regarded simply as a matter of professional competence, as in daily work one rarely negotiates with other actors through the usage or presentation of these formal texts. Normative messages are dissected and fragmented into specific concepts and projects, embedded in the "cases", "experiences", and "lessons" narrated by the actors. As in the example above, the actors in everyday practices of micro-level norm diffusion were not short on abstract international conventions, of which there was already abundance; but they were instead in a constant need of specific cases and stories to support their claims and render their ideational preferences legible in contexts.

A further observation is that through the contestation, negotiation and recursive interactions between local and global norms, the boundaries between the two are gradually transgressed and conflated, to the extent that it is no longer easy to draw a clear distinction between them. Is the responsibility to protect the LGBT community part of transnational liberal norms, or does it have resonances in the genealogies of national legal framework? Is the "right to development" an element of global human rights activism, or an idea endorsed by the Chinese government to deflect criticism of its national priorities? Entanglements emerge out of the narratives of the actors, linking the normative preferences and frameworks between the two domains, challenging the existing moral borders, and placing ambiguity at the centre of interactive processes. It may frustrate and disappoint some social

scientists that norm diffusion arrives at such undefined and ambiguous terrain, without tangible and measurable outcomes. However, it is exactly the entanglements and ambiguities of these local-global encounters that reveal the fine-grained, obscure and elusive workings of norms in-the-making that is the focus of this dissertation: how do norms actually diffuse at an everyday level in the context of an emerging power? Furthermore, how do actors link and translate the global norms to the local or *vice versa*? How do they transform unfamiliar beliefs and abstract frameworks into the familiar whilst caught in the daily multi-layered frictions of local-global encounters?

This introductory chapter summarises the path that this dissertation undertakes in order to explore these questions, and the theoretical and methodological landscape it traverses along the way. It firstly reviews the existing literature and underscores how it has not fully addressed both the micro-level and multi-dimensionality of norm diffusion in the context of a local-global dichotomy. Using the UNDP China as the site for an in-depth ethnographical analysis over time, I identify the ubiquitous role of stories in everyday practices of translating and appropriating norms. From there, the dissertation draws on theoretical inspirations from anthropology and political sociology to further shed light on how storytelling works in an institutional context, and particularly on the manner in which personal stories and stories of country experiences are strategically employed by actors, while building the interconnections across local and global normative domains. Like the narratives described and analysed here, this dissertation is also transgressive, moving between international politics, anthropology, sociology and development studies in order to address a subject that is interdisciplinary and boundary-crossing in nature.

Three Waves in Norm Diffusion Literature

Norms are defined as "shared expectations about the appropriate behaviour held by a community of actors (Finnemore 1996, 22; also see in Keck and Sikkink 1998; Khagram, Rikker, and Sikkink 2002).[3] Norm diffusion refers to the interdependent processes that are conducive to the spread of norms, a definition that separates diffusion from its association with adoption (Gilardi 2013, 454). Instead of presenting as the binary outcome between rejection or adoption, the arrival of a norm is more likely to produce mixed results, such as partial compliance (Noutcheva 2009) or incomplete internalization (Goodman and Jinks 2008), which underlines the disparities between commitment and compliance (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 2013). Therefore, adoption is less equivalent to diffusion than alternative outcomes, while diffusion is more accurately conceptualised as a constant process of negotiation and appropriation. Regarding the actors participating this process, I focus on the role of international organizations and especially the United Nations, which largely defines itself through the activities setting, monitoring and enforcing international norms (Krasno 2002, Barnett and Finnemore 2004, Weiss 2013).

While acknowledging the roles of the UN in norm diffusion, previous scholarship is less focused on the everyday operations of international organisations or the complexities in the micro-level dynamics of norm diffusion, which has been identified as a general weakness within the

[3] It is worth noticing that within the literature ideas and norms are often used interchangeably, with the recognition that ideas can be held privately without normative implications while norms are always collective (Goldstein 1993; Archarya 2004, 240).

literature (Weyland 2005, Sharman 2008, Gilardi 2010). To summarise briefly, theories of norm diffusion have mainly evolved in three waves. The first wave of "globalism" emerged at the end of the Cold War, conceptualising norms as universal and cosmopolitan. Scripts and action plans constructed at the global level are instantiated in treaties or social movements, which diffuse along a linear and top-down pathway to socialise local populations into a broader normative community (Meyer et al. 1997, Boli and Thomas 1998). Transnational actors are norm entrepreneurs and advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998) that effectively mobilise material and organisational resources to pressure or coerce passive and reactionary local actors.

The absence of domestic and local factors in such approaches gave rise to the second wave focusing on "localism", which emphasised norm diffusion as a matchmaking and congruence-building process between global ideas and local contexts. National institutions, ideologies and histories act as heuristic filters that selectively allow certain global norms to establish a "cultural match" with pre-existing beliefs and frameworks (Legro 1997, Cortell and Davis 2000, Checkel 2001). The degree of fit is further subject to the local agency that adapts or contests the normative resonance. The "persuadee" comes to the centre of analysis, when local actors consciously choose and reconstruct the global ideas, rendering them compatible or incompatible with local beliefs, institutions and orders (Acharya 2004, Groß 2015, Zimmermann 2016).

Following on from the foregoing approaches, the literature focus gradually shifted from the global to the local, recognising the agency of participant and the involvement of a multiplicity of institutions, complicating our understanding of norm diffusion. Local and global norms were placed in a

reciprocal relationship with each other, in which translations were envisaged as travelling through feedback loops and enabling bottom-up diffusion and norm circulation (Acharya 2011, Acharya 2013, Zimmermann 2019). Portraying norm diffusion as a constant process of negotiation and adaption, the third wave "glocalism" used "vernacularisation", "hybridity" and "heteropias" to emphasise the mediated outcomes that fall between the clear-cut domains of global scoialisation and constitutive localisation (Levitt and Merry 2009, Richmond and Mitchell 2012, Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, Prantl and Nakano, 2018). Norm diffusion is thus the product of non-linear and multi-directional movements of norms. What emerges from these multiplex interactive processes is something neither local nor global, with norms absorbing characteristic of both local and global frameworks to create new ideational arrangements.

Notwithstanding the increasing complexity of these studies, significant drawbacks remain. On the theoretical level, there is a persistent local-global dichotomy implied and embedded in the literature: either, the global is the powerful and homogenising force that converts the passive and contextualised local; or, once local agency is restored, all resistances and interpretations are regarded as effective engagements that reconstruct the generalised and detached global. The limitations inherent in the binary opposition between local and global has been scrutinised in the studies of international development. The conceptualisation of "development discourse" (Ferguson 1994, Escobar 1995) that establishes a contrast between developers/developing, North/South and Us/Them is challenged by less essentialising and polarising interventions (Crewe and Harrison 1998, Lewis and Mosse 2006). Instead of deconstructing development as an imposition of

universalised agendas and hegemonic interests against the local, recent studies underline the contradictions, uncertainties and inconsistences present in everyday practices, and the complex interfaces between different categories of actors and knowledge. Existing and imagined boundaries are under a permanent process of contestation and negotiation, as the "fictive partition between the global and the local is undermined by the actual practice of those who are supposed to enact it" (Robin 2003, 379; quoted in Crewe and Axelby 2012, 59). In other words, instead of existing as isolated and separate entities, the local and the global are equally situated in a fluidity of constructions: they are indefinable, permeable, and mutually constitutive (Kearney 1995, Tsing 2011).

Therefore, the theorisation of local and global domains as mutually separate and exclusive cannot fully account for local-global encounters: if glocalisation points out the circulative relationships and in-between outcomes, can we further imagine a perspective on norm diffusion that no longer treats local and global domains as homogenous and separate entities? Instead of the reshaping of boundaries through feedbacks and corrections, norm diffusion can be a de-boundaring and de-territorialising process that transgresses, blurs and fractures the boundaries between the two. Furthermore, this means that the actors cannot easily be classified as either local or global, as they are in-between translators and brokers that facilitate and disrupt the communication through different layers of normative orders and meanings. International organisations, particularly, are not homogenous entities that represent the universal and standardized power of global norms: they are "battlefields of knowledge" where multiple perspectives and interests co-exist and collide (Bebbington et al. 2006), enmeshed with local

relationships and internal politics. The nationalisation of staff in the UN system reflects the fact that the "transnational norm entrepreneurs" are often composed of local actors, while distinguishing themselves from the ideal of "uncontaminated locality" for their international experience and connections. The mixed and conflated identities of normative brokers and translators themselves add another layer to the ambiguous boundaries between local and global.

On the empirical level, there is a continuing lack of attention to the detailed micro-level dynamics and practices in norm diffusion. The literature draws attention to the causal mechanisms and "an evolutionary or everyday form of progressive norm diffusion" (Acharya 2011, 21). However, the empirical materials to support this "everyday form" are largely limited to critical junctures in international and diplomatic histories, without examining how heterogeneous actors participate in the daily activities of norm translation. Moreover, the awareness of multidirectional movements of norms has not produced enough studies of how the translations and circulations of normative messages evolve and unfold through multiple orders, institutions and spaces (see in Zwingel 2012, Risse 2013, Zimmermann 2016, Berger 2017). It remains unclear how local practices and beliefs, particularly those from non-Western institutions and states return to the global normative debates, challenge the *status quo* and reshape ideational frameworks. A duality or paradox is posed by the presence of emerging powers, as they resist and adopt, challenge and conform, reshape and embody, crafting an expanding space in the transnational normative landscape.

In summary, the three waves of literature on norm diffusion have left empirical and theoretical gaps in relation to my central research questions.

There is a lack of attention to the micro-level and everyday practices of norm diffusion, and to the multi-directional flows in the context of non-Western powers. The empirical complexities further reflect the problematic theoretical assumption that situates the local-global relationships in a binary opposition. To analyse norm diffusion as a glocalising process in bridging, connecting and transforming the boundaries between the two, it is important to trace the actions of translators and brokers involved, and to identify their practices and strategies of breaking down the conceptual dichotomy. This then requires a turn to "ethnographic, micro-historical and micro-political" perspectives (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003) that recaptures the richness of details and textures, and links the theoretical gap to the empirical need to explore the everyday practices of norm diffusion.

UNDP China as Case Study

In response to the lack of studies on the everyday practices and multidirectional movements in norm diffusion among emerging powers, this dissertation chooses the case of the UNDP China. The UNDP was established in 1966 as the merging of two predecessor organizations, the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) and the United Nations Special Fund. As a global development network, the UNDP denotes "the most extensive and most consistent presence of the entire UN system" (Murphy 2006, 4). With the general aim of human development and reduction of inequality, the UNDP provides resources and expertise to countries across a wide range of fields such as poverty reduction, climate and disaster resilience, democratic governance and peace building, and thus has a much broader and more flexible mandate in comparison to other UN agencies.

Its mission and ability to diffuse multiple global norms are further reinforced through the institutional arrangement that defines the UNDP as the coordinator of the UN system. The "Resident Representative" (RR) of the UNDP country office (also known as the Resident Coordinator, RC) is responsible for coordinating the development activities of all other UN agencies at a country level. This historical tradition was consolidated in the UN reform process under the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in which the UNDP Administrator is assigned to chair the newly founded UN Development Group (UNDG) to unite the "funds, programmes, specialized agencies, departments and offices of the UN system" (Murphy 2005, UNDP 2016). In this way, the UNDP acts as an "agency of UN agencies" – it plays a central role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in the formulation and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, the study of the UNDP provides an overarching, multifaceted and complicated picture of norm diffusion through the UN system that is unlikely to be observed in any other parallel UN organization.

The second feature of the UNDP is the principle of national ownership embedded in its formulation and execution of development assistance (Stokke 2009). The premise of self-help that bases development cooperation on the requests and priorities of the recipient governments was established in the early years of EPTA since 1949 and was formally written into the UN General Assembly Resolution 1710/XVI in 1961. This idea of self-determination was then repeatedly emphasized in the following years. In 1992, when the Country Strategy Note became the major instrument for coordination and implementation of UNDP activities, the principle was restated: "on the basis

of the priorities and plans of recipient countries, and in order to ensure the effective integration of assistance provided by the United Nations system into the development process of countries…a country strategy note should be formulated by interested recipient governments, with the assistance of and in cooperation with the UN system, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator (A/RES/47/199, 93rd plenary meeting, 22 December 1992)".

Although not always effectively practiced, the insistence on national ownership and local demand still distinguishes the UNDP from many other UN agencies which might have left the impression of constantly "teaching or lecturing the national governments" (Conversation, 10 November 2016). This builds a "trusted relationship" between the UNDP and the recipient country, which ensures the consent if not full commitment of national governments to the UNDP activities.[4] As planned activities are the results of joint efforts between national governments and the UNDP, local-global dynamics play out in a relatively stable institutional background. This provides the chance to examine the patterns and tendencies in how actors mediate local-global relationships, without considering the institutional changes that might radically shift the actors' behaviour.

Third, the UNDP represents the institutional location where the advocacy of global norms is explicitly outlined and the interactions between local and global actors take place on an everyday basis. Partially triggered by the decline of core funding, the UNDP adopted the revolutionary programme of "advocacy" in 1986 that centralised the promotion of human development

[4] The political capital of the UNDP as its unique advantage was stressed by Richard Manning, the former alternate executive director at the World Bank and former chair of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, during his talk, "The Sustainable Development Goals at Risk?" 16 May 2017, University of Oxford.

policies and the rights of women, the poor, minorities and other disadvantaged people as the primary objective of the organization and its core identity. This reform highlights the UNDP as the vocal advocate for global norms, as well as its strategy to maximize the impact by focusing on upstream and policy-changing activities (Stokke 2009, 376). At the same time, the UNDP maintains its development programs on the ground and continues to extend its local networks and field-based expertise. These two characteristics consolidate the position of the UNDP as the UN branch that engages closely with local actors on a daily basis to negotiate and implement global normative agendas. The UNDP thus becomes the agency that explicitly integrates norm diffusion as its organizational identity and actively engages in micro-level activities to advocate normative changes. In conclusion, its size and broader focus, the role of coordinator in the UN system, its principle of national ownership that maintains a constant level of local-global interaction, and its identity as a norm champion make the UNDP an ideal case for studying the everyday dynamics of norm diffusion.

As for the local actor, China represents a crucial case in the global landscape of norm diffusion. China as a member of the emerging powers is becoming a more active and influential player in international regimes (Ikenberry 2008). The participation of emerging powers is nonetheless two-fold. One the one hand, they accept the international standards and adapt their behaviour accordingly. Johnston (2014) outlines three paths through which socialisation processes take place: mimicking, when states learn the behavioural norms from their peers; social influence, when states are pressured by the evaluations of co-members in international community; persuasion, when states experience a cognitive transformation and accept the

normative values as guidelines. This line of argument is particularly effective when applied to explain the behavioural change of novices, as they are either uncertain of the rules or in weak positions to negotiate the existing order. Kim's work on the relationship between China and the United Nations, for example, describes how China's early interaction with global norms leads to a shift from "system-transforming to system-maintaining preferences" (Kim 1999), resonating with China's own policy to "link up with the international track" (*yu guoji jiegui,* 与国际接轨).

However, with the deepening of interaction and integration into the international regimes, emerging powers cannot be confined as followers of existing norms. Their international leverage and status empower them with the possibility of reshaping the global norms and promoting their own voices (*huayu quan,* 话语权). After the 2008 financial crisis, particularly, the shift in the balance of power gave rise to the BRICS countries (Stuenkel 2013, Liu 2016). Despite their internal diversity, emerging powers form alignments that challenge the legitimacy of international system, exemplified by the BRICS Summit (Epstein 2012).

Emerging powers therefore assume a dual role in norm diffusion: they are norm takers as well as norm makers. Pu (2012) describes the relationship between emerging powers and global norms as a two-way process of socialisation. Normative agents are not merely passive recipients targeted by international regimes. They influence the content and process of norm diffusion at the same time, through incremental strategies and direct challenges (also see in Reilly 2012). This creates a feedback loop, as norms are being reconstructed at the local level and then returned to the global level

(Prantl and Nakano 2011). It thereby presents us with a complicated picture of multi-directional norm diffusion, which extends beyond the one-directional and linear logic embedded in the existing theoretical frameworks.[5]

China, meanwhile, is arguably the leading player among emerging powers, demonstrated by its ability to mobilise other BRICS countries in the Copenhagen negotiations and its resilient economic development when other emerging powers encountered stagnation or recession (Abdenur 2014). Another particular dimension is its identity as an authoritarian state, which appears to indicate the propensity to resist, challenge and reject global norms and orders (Gat 2007). Still, previous works question this assumption, through the examples of China's compliance and gradual internalisation of external norms, even in the highly contested domains of human rights that pose threats to the regime's legitimacy (Foot 2000, Kent 2007).

Given China's current prominence in the international system, the literature on its relationship with global normative regimes is limited. Firstly, the literature mainly focuses on how China engages with international institutions on a macro-level, providing general and broad narratives on its interactive patterns and behavioural changes (Pearson 1999, Kent 2013, Johnston 2014). Few studies divert from the emphasis on foreign policies, to the aspects of how international institutions actually operate with local actors in China.[6] This micro-level of interaction acts as the front line where norm

[5] It should be noted here that multi-dimensional norm diffusion is not limited to emerging powers, as it has seen an increased attention to the interactive effects between local and global norms (for example, the impact of African countries on humanitarian intervention norms). Emerging powers, given their prominence in international stage, make such dynamics more visible and intensified.

[6] A few notable exceptions include Morton's book on *International aid and environment in China* (2005), Zweig's analysis of the domestic interests and international linkages (2002), Zhou, Zhang and Zhang's work on foreign aid in China (2015). Their works focus on the

diffusion is contested and negotiated. Secondly, the literature looks at China's impact on global norms primarily through its security mandate, while less concerned with development norms (Abdenur 2014). After the end of its self-reliance policy in 1979, China received around 200 multilateral development projects in three years, more than any other UN member states. This trend continued throughout the reform era and yielded greater implications for China's society than its diplomatic stance on international security agendas. With the transition from recipient country to both recipient and donor country in recent years, China's dual role in development cooperation reflects the position of emerging powers and the encounters between global and local norms. Therefore, to address the literature gap on emerging powers and global norm diffusion, China is selected as the country case with attention to the micro-level dynamics brought by international development institutions.

The country office of the UNDP in China possesses the features of the UNDP as an international development agency while operating with its own characteristics in the context of an emerging power. Having signed the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement with the government in 1979, the UNDP became the first UN organization to establish a presence in the communist regime. As the institutional base of the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), it is now home to 25 UN agencies operating in China. Initially, the UNDP recruited "seconded staff" from the Beijing Service Bureau for Diplomatic Missions affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China, and from 2003 to 2004 some of them were offered the opportunity to stay and became formal

interactions on the institutional levels between local and global actors, rather than on normative or ideational aspects.

UN staff.[7] Nowadays the UNDP office follows a standard UN personnel system, with internationally and nationally recruited staff, gradually replacing long-term permanent contracts with short-term consultant positions. Over its almost four decades of cooperation with the government, the UNDP has covered a wide variety of issues including poverty reduction, grass-roots democracy, environmental sustainability, disaster relief, public health and gender equality, achieving an exceptional level of trust from the Chinese government exemplified in its projects on poverty reduction and cultural rights of ethnic minorities in Tibet and the Muslim regions of western China.

Every five years, under the leadership of the RCO and the UNDP, the UN Country Team (UNCT) in China will negotiate with the government to formulate the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) that describes the outcomes and strategies of UN activities closely linked to the national priorities of development. In accordance to the priorities listed in the UNDAF, a more specific Country Programme Document (CPD) is produced to guide the operations of the UNDP, in which the outputs and planned projects are outlined in detail as an action plan and as future reference for evaluation and assessment. The Ministry of Commerce in China serves as the main counterpart of the UNDP, and the China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE) as the implementation partner through which the UNDP channel its resources to

[7] The "secondment system" has been used in formerly communist countries including China, Cuba and North Korea. The UN offices can only recruit personnel from designated agencies that are usually managed or selected by the government so that the staff will be screened before taking positions at international organisations. Beijing Service Bureau for Diplomatic Missions was established in 1962 and served such a purpose. Kerstin Leitner, the UN Resident Coordinator in China (2000-2003) changed the problem of the "dual identities" and offered the seconded staff to be employed by the UN directly. The secondment system in the UN China offices mostly stopped afterwards (Interview, 28 August 2017).

other ministries and local institutions. In recent years, projects have diversified the implementation partners (*duikou danwei*, 对口单位) to include other government entities, such as Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation(CAITEC), State Forestry Agency and National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), and a growing number of private firms. The adjustment of the relationship with CICETE is under negotiation, though it still remains the primary governmental partner of the UNDP. This arrangement is exclusive to the country office in China, which reflects the request of the government as well as the principle of national ownership, ensuring governmental support as a consistent institutional framework for UNDP activities.

With China becoming an Upper Middle-Income country and its achievements of MDGs benchmarks, the role of the UNDP has undergone a transformation in recent years. The decline of core funding from the headquarters to the China office has pushed the latter to narrow its focus and intervention on upstream policy advocacy. The repositioning process can be traced back to 2011, when the country team discussed how to maximize its impact, and held an internal consultation with the government on the future of the UN in China (UNDAF 2016-2020: 5). This resulted in a reaffirmed recognition of the UNDP and continued governmental support for its presence, with demands from the Chinese government to enhance global engagement through the UNDP (more details in Chapter 6). It gave rise to the new role of the UNDP as the international platform "facilitating development partnership between China and other developing countries" (ibid. 24), especially through the channels of South-South Cooperation (SSC). The

restructuring of the UNDP country office can be seen as part of the "redesigning process" defined by Barnett and Coleman (2005). It becomes a trade-off between the UNDP's urgent need to ensure its organisational survival with new ideational and material resources, and the motive to maintain its autonomy and pursue development mandates.

The reorientation of domestic activities and expansion of global engagements reflect the complicated relationship between China and international normative institutions, in which the latter attempts to introduce norms to shape China's behaviour in both domestic and international realms, while absorbing the local development experience into the formation and revision of global norms. This largely challenges the dichotomous description of the relationship between international actors and developing countries and the one-directional flow of global norm into local context (Hall 2003, Weyland 2005, Chwieroth 2007, Orenstein 2008, Weaver 2010), and captures a multi-dimensional picture of norm diffusion (Krook 2012, Zwingel 2012, Risse 2013) concentrated at a country level that is rarely discussed in previous literature. Therefore the UNDP China is selected as an empirically crucial case to be studied.

The specific norms and projects chosen for examination reflect the characteristics and dynamics of the UNDP China office. In this dissertation, I look at three groups of norms in the fields of human rights, rule of law and development cooperation advocated through the UNDP China office. The issue areas of human rights are where the Chinese government conventionally resist, and also where the most innovative and inventive translations and reconstructions of global norms take shape. Particularly, the introduction of emerging norms on sexual and gender minorities creates new lines of

confrontation and negotiation, with a cohesive coalition between the UNDP and civil society actors. The rule of law portfolio, on the other hand, represents the traditional component of the UNDP, based on a close relationship with its governmental counterparts. The legitimacy of international standards and lessons continues to play an effective role for local actors, despite encountering ideological paradox and ambiguity. The third case regarding development cooperation is where the incentives for promoting local norms cumulate from both Chinese institutions and the UNDP. The local development experience faces the two parallel norms, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) framework that historically forms through North-South aid, or the South-South Cooperation (SSC) framework that advocates for renewed relationships between development partners, posing a challenge to integrating the Chinese lesson into global normative packages. Thus, instead of looking into the diffusion of a particular norm, I examine the translations and appropriations of a multiplicity of norms through the institutional framework of the UNDP China, in order to identity the common tendencies in everyday dynamics along the multi-directional flows of normative messages.

Political Ethnography as Method

To explore these dynamics in detail, I adopt the approach of political ethnography. Following the recent "ethnographic turn" in comparative politics and international relations (Vrasti 2008, Gusterson 2008, Wedeen 2010, Taber 2010, Schatz 2013, Leander 2015), this approach emphasises the deep immersion into the local place and close interaction with the subjects in their embedded social contexts. Remaining as an underexplored areas in the

mainstream ethnography traditionally focused on the "powerless", political ethnography draws attention to the study of elites, "the politics and its main protagonists" including officials, politicians and activists (Auyero 2006).

The immediate advantage of ethnographic method is the provision of access to the materials, actors and political processes that are elusive and hidden to outsiders, which is especially the case for formalised bureaucratic institutions. My "insider" status in the United Nations allowed me to access internal documents, meetings and informal conversations that demonstrated the detailed and obscure micro-dynamics beyond published texts and news releases. The daily interaction with actors nurtured trust (although this was not always the case) and encouraged a polyvocality of narratives and expressions that reflected the divergences of actual practices.

Such orientation to everydayness is a distinct feature of ethnography that differentiates it from other methods in politics research. It focuses on the locally produced politics that emerge out of human interactions and recognises their inconsistencies with the abstract generalisations on systems and structures (Kubik 2009). Nonetheless, the emphasis on the locale does not delimit the scope of ethnography or undermine its global vision. Illustrated through the practices of global and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1998), the exploration of everydayness, instead, becomes a way of examining the manifestations of global interconnections, where the meanings of the global are rendered concrete and contextualised. At the same time, it integrates the locality into a larger transnational picture where the local and global symbols, ideas and institutions entangle, and thus retains a theoretical sensibility to the question of local-global encounters in this dissertation.

The choice of ethnographic method is also an adaption to the experiences and challenges in the field. I began my research with a typical design in political science, armed with a question on norm diffusion "variation", and walked into the UNDP with the intention of identifying "dependent" and "independent" variables through mixed methods. The first challenge was the availability and reliability of data. Participating in the International Aid Transparency Initiative, the UNDP launched an open data platform on its projects worldwide in 2012, and topped the global ranking for transparent aid agencies for consecutive years.[8] This created the opportunity for quantitatively collecting and analysing digital data. However, the fieldwork at the UNDP soon revealed that most project data on the platform was outdated. Lacking the incentives to maintain the database, the project managers regarded updating information as another administrative burden to their workloads. Furthermore, the information on projects was severely limited, often failing to demonstrate the cross-cutting issues, the unexpected outcomes of implementation, or the revisions of the project in practice. As a senior official explicitly stated in a meeting reviewing the office projects: "do not trust our own internal data" (Fieldwork Note, 15 November 2016). While the access to authentic and genuine data posed a problem to internal staff, the rhetoric on transparency turned into a source for ridicule and sarcasm, as a consultant put it, "we are only transparent about what we want you to know" (Conversation, 16 November 2017).

[8] "UNDP opens data on over 6,000 projects in transparency drive", UNDP 2012. "UNDP tops global index for international aid transparency for second consecutive year", UNDP 2016.

The second challenge concerned the ontological assumptions of social science research, together with limitations on data. It was tempting to identity the results of norm diffusion, say gender equality, through tangible and measurable variables. However, in practice, it was difficult to find consensual categories on what these variables would be, or to identify clear causal mechanisms between projects and their impacts (Gilardi 2013). The actual outcomes of UN projects on norm diffusion were only tangible in a long-term process, "sometimes taking years of waiting to be visible" (Interview, 21 January 2017). Moreover, the involvement of multiple agencies, both domestic and international, made it unlikely to attribute policy changes to one specific international organisation. This "causality problem" equally troubled the officials at the UNDP, as they were constantly requested, through administrative procedures such as the Quarterly Report or Quarterly Assessment, to submit the evidence on project results. One example was the drafting of the Results Oriented Annual Report (ROAR), a document summarising the country office's annual activities to headquarters. The process of writing the ROAR was a process of constructing the linkages between, on the one hand, the "progressive changes" in national policy frameworks and social statistics, and on the other hand, the UNDP-supported projects that overlapped with these areas. The portraits of causal relations emerged out of intense negotiation and compromise, driven by organisational interests to claim responsibilities in the management culture of auditing (Strathern 2000, Schwegler 2011), even when the role of the UNDP in these normative changes were questionable or minimal.

These practices raised doubts on the reliability of the published assessment documents, one of the few channels through which outsiders

could look into the operations of international institutions. Furthermore, it posed a reflective question on the ontological preference of social science research: whether it was another knowledge system that centralised the causal relations to evaluate the quality and meaning of research, and neglected other equal aspects of social reality? The "causality problem" led me to focus less on causal mechanisms than detailed practices, which eventually shaped the research question to reflect on the process of norm diffusion itself, rather than merely its outcomes. Moreover, the temporal features of the projects, which usually ran for several years and evolved throughout the period, influenced the arrangement of fieldwork. Instead of devoting an uninterrupted chunk of time, I was based at the UNDP for all together one year but across three periods from 2015 to 2018. The multi-timed and "junctured" method of returning to the field allowed me to examine a project in its longer cycle. My personal title changed each time, from "intern" to "senior intern" and to "researcher," and brought variations to data accessibility. Therefore, field experience and methods constantly redirect and reorient research, while the empirical and theoretical findings are based on this evolving and dialectical process – despite the reluctance and hostility of social scientists to the word, it is an interactive "compromise" on material availability, institutional access and interpersonal relationships.

The materials on the norm diffusion processes are collected in three ways: read documents, ask experts and practice oneself (see in Checkel 1999). The first is UN documents that include programme documents, reports, policy papers, assessments and meeting memos. The identity as an UN staff allows me to access unpublished institutional documents and records that trace the

development of the UNDP country office and of projects since the late 1990s.[9] As Eastwood (2006, 182) points out, the UN is a "textually mediated organization", in which the texts not only reflect and organize the practices and social relations of the organization, but also act as the sites in which struggles and negotiations take place – which are especially visible when the successive drafts and final documents are compared. The limit of texts in uncovering the embedded processes is then compensated by interaction with the people involved in norm diffusion activities. Approximately 50 semi-structured interviews and focus groups are combined with informal on-the-spot interviews ("friendly conversations" or "chats") that initiate an open-end inquiry that prepares for formal and planned interviews (DeVault and McCoy, 2006). The recruitment of interviewees is based on positional and reputational criteria through a snow-balling sampling method, that include country directors, team leaders, programme managers, international consultants, interns, representatives from civil society organizations and private firms, and when possible, government and party officials. The third part of the materials comes from participant observation as a programme assistant at the UNDP. Often regarded as central to the ethnographic method, participant observation builds sustained contact with the subjects and provides an opportunity to experience the negotiating and constructing processes oneself, which is particularly useful for understanding the positions, motivations and decision-making of relevant actors.

[9] In detail, the exclusive documents and archives I obtained formed the basis for the tracing the rule of law projects and especially the internal communications in the abolishing the re-education through labour system (Chapter 5), the restructuring of the UNDP China office in the early 2000s (Chapter 5 and 6), and the phases of the project on International Poverty Reduction Centre (Chapter 6).

Main Arguments

My deep immersion into the UNDP China led to the discovery of something that is constantly emerging, yet too commonplace to be visibly noticed: the stories. It was not long before I realised the absence of "norms" in form of international conventions, treaties or statements – these formal documents rarely make their appearances except occasionally in reports and high-level forums. Instead, when expressing and communicating normative messages in daily interactions, stories and narratives are ubiquitous.[10] It can be a personal story of a battered woman, or an account of another country's successful legal reform, that is used to challenge the existing ideational framework or promote alternative normative preferences. The legitimacy, authenticity and meaning of these stories become the focus points for negotiations among local and global actors. The turn to story feels almost natural and intuitive, as I find myself constantly employing and revising these accounts to express solidarity or disapproval soon in the office. In comparison to the objectivity and indifference in the extracted clauses from conventions, stories are intimate, contingent and spontaneous, functioning as the intermediaries, the channels of communication and the sites of frictions in local-global encounters. How does such everydayness and everywhereness of stories inform us about the process of norm diffusion?

[10] In the context of norm diffusion, strictly speaking, there are three types of stories within international organisations. The first is individual stories about norms in private interactions. The second is stories about norms when being circulated internally within an organisation. The third is stories about norms beyond an institution, when it is diffusing the norms towards other collective actors. The three types of stories are enmeshed in practice, while the internal diffusion of norms is often with a clear purpose of sharing and stimulating a similar effect on norm diffusion with external actors. This chapter focuses on how norms turn into stories at the institutional level in the latter two contexts, when being told by personnel on behalf of the institutions.

Here I use the terms story and narrative interchangeably, and adopt a broad definition that conceives of a story as a sequence of events to make a normative point (Labov and Waletzky 1967, Bruner 1991).[11] Plot is the structure of how explanations and causal complexity between events are integrated and organised. As "forms of discourse, vehicles of ideology and elements of collective action frames" (Polleta 2006), story distinguishes itself as a particular unit of analysis, traced and identified with beginnings and endings, while requiring the interpretive efforts of the audience to grasp the multiple meanings of its content. Stories can be extracted from a close reading of textual materials, though in practice, they are contained and implied in various forms of expression, through speeches, conversations, symbols, numbers and visual images. Growing attention has been drawn to the field of storytelling since the "narrative turn" (MacInyre 1981, Polkinhorene 1988, Bruner 1990, Chase 2005) that emphasises its cognitive role in meaning-making and the construction of individual identity, but it is only recently that stories have been studied in relation to the institutional and political contexts surrounding and reproducing them (Shenhav 2006, Riessman 2008, Polletta et al., 2011, Holstein and Gubrium 2015).

To further analyse the role of storytelling in relation to norm diffusion, I draw on two theoretical inspirations. The first is Hannah Arendt's concept of "in-between storytelling" (1958) that underlines the liminality of stories in connecting the individualised particular experience to a wider sphere of otherness and community (also see in Turner 1987). This concept is then

[11] For comparison between narrative and story, see in Mahoney 1999, Risseman 2008, Frank 2010. Charles Tilly (2006), for example, distinguishes between technical accounts and stories: the former takes a narrative form but depend on expertise, while stories are non-specialised and depend on imagination.

developed in anthropology, which perceives narrative imperative as a way of empowerment that sustains agency in the situation of adversity, and defines storytelling as sites of defilement and infringement that challenge and transcend the existing boundaries and domains (Jackson 2006). In her narrative analysis of migrants, Johnson (2016) specially questions the legitimacy of the local-global dichotomy, and illustrates how stories engage with individual voices and actions of crossing borders, which interrupt, transgress and even abolish the ostensible local-global lines.

The anthropological analysis of storytelling points out its liminal and intersubjective character, but the stories largely remain on the personal level. The second theoretical source in political sociology draws the attention to the storytelling through collective actors. Institutions depend on the actions of eliciting and reproducing stories, which turn the normative messages, formal rules, and cultural schemas into particular and accessible accounts, and construct and consolidate collective identities (Czarniawska 1997, Tilly 2002, Smith 2006, Gabriel 2016). People know how to speak and act in institutions through the learning of stories, and when and how stories are told is shaped by ideological, social and political conventions (Loseke 2007). At the same time, emotional effects of stories are often used as tools, especially in absence of material resources, to mobilise public support, justify policy choice and form an affective basis for collective actions (Polletta 2006, Mayer 2014, Feldman and Almquist 2012). The ambiguity of stories can be exploited to form coalition across difference and challenge the institutional and normative orders and routines. The power of stories situates them in a polemical position of competition, where polyphonic co-existence is accompanied by constant struggles and negotiations over the legitimacy, authenticity and meaning

(Patterson and Monroe 1998). Therefore, storytelling in institutional contexts is both canonical and transgressive, shaped by contextual restraints, and used by actors to challenge the normative orders.

Blending these theoretical arguments into the picture of norm diffusion, I argue the following points based on the study of the UNDP China. First of all, on an everyday level, norms diffuse through the practices of storytelling, which transform normative messages into narratives. More specifically, the implementation of projects in international organisations requires "norm metamorphosis", an internal socialisation process that translates the ideational packages into accessible accounts, produced and reshaped by the officials, managers and representatives in partnering institutions. These actors are referred to as the "development brokers and translators" (Bierschenk et al. 2002, Lewis and Mosse 2006) at the interfaces of local and global development apparatuses. The stories emerging out of their everyday practices are canonical, ambiguous, open to interpretations, and used as persuasion instruments to communicate and negotiate normative preferences in the contestation of meanings. Different institutions respond to stories by affirming or questioning their authenticity and appropriateness.

Secondly, the content, form and audience of the stories are shaped by the issue characteristics and underlying ideological and cultural backgrounds. In the field of human rights, personal stories are chosen as the preferred channels to convey global norms, by empowering the voices of the marginalised, exposing structural constraints on their individual personhood, and justifying the necessity for change. The particularistic and idiosyncratic features of personal stories, however, raise questions regarding their credibility and representativeness, which compels the translators to combine

other types of stories in their advocacy campaigns. In the field of rule of law and development cooperation, "lessons" from other countries are a common form of stories, which demonstrate the process of norm diffusion through social learning and emulation. The choice of which country to learn from is conditioned and filtered by local ideologies and identities – in the context of an emerging power, the dilemma is between modernisation ideology that prioritises the Western experience, and post-colonial ideology of a Southern country that resists the Western influence.

Thirdly, the actions of storytelling lead to a range of multi-dimensional and multi-directional flows of normative ideas, which not only bring the global to the local, but also link the local norms back to a broader global community. In this recursive and reciprocal relationship, local development experience is narrated and reconstructed to be relevant and sensible for international audiences, while revising the original normative package and its scope of application. Instead of reinforcing the binary opposition between local and global, normative stories are liminal, revealing the complex translation chains that reconceptualise norm diffusion as a process that disrupts, fractures, and transcends the local-global boundaries. International institutions are thus the liminal raconteur or storyteller caught in such in-between spaces in the transnational movements of norms and ideas, rather than functioning as a norm entrepreneur spreading global liberalism or as a pathological bureaucracy penetrating the development discourse to sustain its own organisational interests.

As seen above, the arguments regarding the everyday storytelling of norms are closely related to the notion of translation. Referring to the social act of transporting the ideas from one location to another and transforming their

associated meanings, translation leads to two important theoretical points: 1) the original meanings of ideas or concepts are gradually eroded and transformed in movements, replaced only by "a heterogeneous continuum of translations, a continual process of rewriting in which meaning—as well as claims of originality and purity—are made" (Tsing 1997, 253); 2) translation is a composition or assembly of ideas, persons, symbols and objects through the construction of the actor networks, producing and negotiating the interlocked and mutually enrolled meanings and interests (Latour 2005, Lewis and Mosse 2006). Applying the notion of translation to norm diffusion, it is occasionally conceived as a synonym for diffusion (Checkel 1999), though more precisely, translation imposes a particular perspective on diffusion that acknowledges the varying degree of adaptions and revisions in the travelling of norms, as well as the role of mediating actors in deliberating these changes (Krook 2006, Groß 2015, Zimmermann 2016). Merry (2006) uses the categories of "replication", "prototype" and "hybridization" to specify the extent to which local institutions and meanings merge with global practices and beliefs. Zwingle (2012) outlines three constellations of global norms as "global discourse translation", "impact translation" and "distorted translation" that in a similar vein illustrate the multiple relationships produced between gender norms and domestic regimes. Positioning norms in a translation chain that connects global and local actors in interactive dynamics, translation, as an intercultural practice, captures the in-betweeness and multi-directionality described in this dissertation.

The recent work of Berger (2017) is similar to the approach of this dissertation, by exploring the translation practices of the norm "rule of law" through an ethnographic account of a UNDP project on non-state courts in

Bangladesh. His analysis emphasises the transformations of the contents as well as the socio-political contexts receiving the ideas, and the recursive back and forth movements between local and global actors that undermine the boundaries between them. My study builds on, but differs from Berger's analysis in two aspects. Firstly, although the top-down and bottom-up movements of norms are mentioned in Berger's analytic framework, local translations circulated back to the international space are regarded as "systematically eradicated" and "lost in retranslation". The local actors translate better, though the messages are continuously neglected in the failures of international institutions. Here the conclusion falls again into the local-global dichotomy that portrays the overwhelming development discourse as resisting local innovation and agency. In my research, the focus is instead on the diffusion of multiple norms under the consistent institutional context of the UNDP, which not only reveals its internal complexity, but also the existing possibility for local ideas to be incorporated into the international regime.

The second difference relates to the analysis of translation in general, as it is gradually becoming a catch-all concept that includes various forms of adaptions and revisions along the travelling of norms. Storytelling, as emphasised in this dissertation, is a specific form of translation practiced on an everyday level. While Berger proposes to track the artefacts (including flipcharts, posters, billboards and paperwork) to reconstruct the chain of translation, I follow stories and narratives that emerge in documents, speeches, conversations and interviews as a way of identifying transformations and their respective conditions. The collection of stories thus

becomes the evidence for changes in normative messages, as well as the manifestations of the everyday agency of translators.

Outline of the Dissertation

In summary, this dissertation contributes to the current literature on norm diffusion by providing a political ethnography of the UNDP China in translating the norms on human rights, rule of law and development cooperation. On the empirical level, it offers a detailed account of everyday activities of an international development organisation in the context of China as an emerging power. The travelling of norms follows a nonlinear and multidirectional path, manifesting the back and forth movements between multiple spaces and normative orders. On a theoretical level, the dissertation uses the concept of "storytelling" to denote the everyday practices of translation, underlining the liminality that reshapes the norm diffusion as a process of neither globalisation nor localisation, but of fracturing and transgressing the local-global boundaries. To elaborate these arguments, the dissertation is divided into two parts. Part 1, including the introduction, outlines the context of this research. Chapter 2 further expands the theoretical and methodological discussion, emphasising how this work is built on the existing literature, with a choice of ethnography to explore the micro-dynamics of norm diffusion. Chapter 3 provides details on the UNDP China and uses a relatively new norm, the SDGs adopted in 2015, to explore the process of norm metamorphosis, in which the formality of a text-based global norm is gradually enmeshed with the informality of the stories around it.

Part 2 will move to the empirical analysis of three sets of norm diffusion: human rights, rule of law and development cooperation. Chapter 4 focuses on

the UNDP's LGBT project, a regional project that promotes the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities in Asia. Based on reports, workshops and interviews with the main participants, this chapter examines why personal stories are chosen as the forms of advocacy narratives, how the stories are used to attain local resonance while maintaining the universal implications of global normative language, and how norm translators address the weakness of personal stories for being subjective, individualistic and emotional. Chapter 5 shifts the attention to the spread of "rule of law", supported by long-term projects between Chinese ministries and the UNDP China. The stories here mainly draw on the experiences and models from other countries as part of the transnational emulation and learning, but their forms are also shaped and filtered by local ideologies and identities. On the one hand, the stories of Western countries contribute to a Legal Ideal under the modernisation imperative in China. On the other hand, the stories of countries with geographical proximity and ideological similarity construct a sense of post-colonial equality to lessen the resistance from governmental agencies.

While Chapter 4 and 5 discusses how the stories link global norms to the local, Chapter 6 moves to another direction of norm diffusion. It looks at how local experience and norms in China are narrated back to the global development discourse through the creation of the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China (IPRCC) and the implementation of trilateral projects. The local norm on "right to development" adopts the language of a global normative framework, while undermining its legitimacy and effectiveness. The Conclusion returns to the notion of liminal storytelling in norm diffusion, and highlights the fact that norms become neither local nor

global along the recursive translation chains. It then explores this phenomenon of liminality in relation to the role of international organisation, underlining that development agencies or intermediaries are neither the moral crusader nor the "anti-political machine", but a manifestation of the ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity of the contemporary local-global encounters.

Before moving to the main part of this dissertation, the question of representativeness and generalizability is worth mentioning here (details in Chapter 2). To what extent can the case of UNDP China illustrate or summarise the picture of norm diffusion through international actors? China is often taken as an exception, and in this case, it is a powerful local actor that not only influences the operations of international agencies within its territory, but also the global normative agenda through its regional and global outreach. Therefore, can the conclusions drawn from this case be applied to other cases?

It is true that the UNDP China is an extreme case where the leverages of host country are expressive and effective. Also, the institutional settings of the UNDP should not be seen as equal to other UN agencies or transnational actors. Nonetheless, it is exceptional not in the sense that this is a stand-alone case, but as an example with exceptional visibility to detect and examine the recursive relationship between local and global actors. The leading economic and political status of China among emerging powers and its authoritarian regime bring out the contradictions and complexities in a more pronounced manner, and compels the spectator to identify the routes of dialogue and interaction in the changing landscapes of norm diffusion.

A further argument is that the multi-directional diffusion of norms has been observed in many other emerging powers and conventionally not powerful local actors. The BRICS are active in supporting alternative development initiatives and standards through the SSC frameworks (Abdenur 2014, Kondoh 2015, Liu 2016, Kenkel and Stefan 2016). Mawdsley (2012), in her work on emerging donors, extends the role of norm maker and norm shaper to the "second-tier" emerging powers, including Central and Eastern Europe and the Gulf countries. Even for small states with limited power, there are examples in which the norms travel from their countries to the international community, in the fields of human rights (Clark 2001), arms control (Petrova 2007) and environmental protection (Clapp 2009). Therefore, the case of the UNDP China provides an example of multidirectional flows of norms when local actors are influencing the global community and deeply unsettling the existing normative structures, but by no means delimits itself to an isolated case in the complicated and intertwined frictions of this world.

Chapter 2
Theory and Method

> "Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society…narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."
>
> Barthes ([1977], 2000, 109)

> "Storytelling defines one the most vital of these crossing points, these sites of defilement and infringement. Although the stories that are approved or made canonical in any society tend to reinforce extant boundaries, storytelling also questions, blurs, transgresses, and even abolishes these boundaries."
>
> Jackson (2006, 25)

This chapter discusses in detail the theories and methods used in this dissertation. It begins with the three waves of theories regarding norm diffusion and underlines the embedded binary opposition between the local and the global domains. Building on the glocalisation perspective that highlights in-between and hybrid outcomes and recursive local-global interactions, I contend that norm diffusion is a de-boundarying process that fractures the symbolic local-global divide and builds interconnections through the mediation of norm translators. To further explore the process of deconstructing the boundaries, I draw on theories of storytelling in anthropology and political sociology, to illustrate how this "in-between action" (Ardent 1958) can be employed as a persuasion strategy to revise the normative order and establish the entanglements in local-global encounters. Storytelling at institutional levels transforms normative messages into everyday practices, while at the same time shaped by institutional conventions. Depending on the issue areas, the stories told by actors take the forms of personal narratives or experiences of other countries, embedded in a constant process of interaction, negotiation and contestation.

The final section draws on methodological implications of political ethnography used in this dissertation. In relation to the "ethnographic turn" in

political science, ethnography as a method has moved beyond the positivist and interpretivist traditions, and embraces a diversity of approaches to examine the transnational connections in a globalising world. It resonates with the empirical attention to micro-level dynamics and the theoretical emphasis on everyday narratives in this dissertation. Furthermore, it provides access to the internal workings of institutions and preferences of actors that would be not available otherwise. The perils concerning the generalisability and objectivity of ethnographic approaches are noted and addressed through application of non-deductive reasoning and empowerment of the research subjects' voice.

Globalism

The literature on norm diffusion can be perceived in terms of three waves (Cortell and Davis 2000, Acharya 2004, Wiener 2007, Groß 2015).[12] First wave "globalism" emphasizes the international and transnational level in the spread of norms, and describes the diffusion process as a one-directional flow from the global to the local. This wave of literature features three main arguments. First, norms are transnational and cosmopolitan, embedded with principles of universalism (Boli and Thomas 1998), and constructed within

[12] Here I build the theory review on Acharya's work (2004), whose summary is under the influence of Cortell and Davis (2000). The terms that he uses to describe the two waves of literature and his own theoretical proposition are "moral cosmopolitanism", "domestic fit" and "constitutive localization". It should be noted that this review focuses primarily on the constructivist literature, which is most intensively involved in the theorization on ideas and norms. Other approaches such as rationalist institutionalism or sociological institutionalism are mentioned but not discussed in detail. The distinctions between the three waves of norm diffusion literature are not clear-cut, as many of the works draw on different perspectives in combination to explain norm diffusion. The Stanford school of sociological institutionalism, for example, mainly argues for the socialization into global normative community, although they also notice the role of domestic institutions that shape such processes (Strang and Meyer 1993, Meyer et al., 1997).

the world society and polity (Meyer et al. 1997). They take the form of international conventions or movements, such as the convention on the prohibition of landmines (Price 1988) or campaign against racial discrimination (Klotz 1995), which follow a top-down pattern of travelling from transnational bodies to local networks.

Second, norm diffusion is largely shaped by international conditions and the involvement of transnational actors. Opportunity structures provided by international events (examples of the UN Conferences in Joachim 2003, 2007), alignment with great powers and successful models (Krasner 1995) or coalition between small states (Clark 2001, Petrova 2007) influence how a global norm is perceived and promoted across borders. Furthermore, transnational actors, being individual or collective "norm entrepreneurs" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), are the principal forces behind the promotion of norms. They include "epistemic communities" composed of knowledge-based experts who define normative problems and propose viable solutions (Haas 1992, Lindvall 2009), as well as "advocacy networks" bounded by the centrality of shared beliefs, that mobilize information and resources strategically in targeting transnational campaigns (Keck and Sikkink 1998, True and Mintrom 2001).

Third, transnational actors diffuse norms primarily through coercion and pressure. Although the role of persuasion is acknowledged, it is not regarded as being as dominant as the other means. Transnational actors exercise material leverage over local actors through the provision of money, goods and institutional support (Beth, Dobbin and Garrett 2007), thereby pressuring the local actors into normative change even when they are unwilling to do so (Sharman 2008). Leverage can also be derived from the ideational resources

of norm entrepreneurs (Mandelkern and Shalev 2010), whose control and monopolization over information and knowledge establish their moral and epistemic authority to legitimatize hegemonic norms and extend the effects of shaming on norm-takers (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999, Stone 2003, Orenstein 2008).[13]

Within these arguments, however, the "globalism" literature on norm diffusion has two limitations. First, the primacy of global norms and their top-down movement has neither taken into account the role of domestic economic, political and social factors, nor captured the dynamics by which local actors and norms respond to the global normative structure. Norm diffusion thus becomes "moral proselytism of transnational moral entrepreneurs" (Nadelman 1990, 483), with an emphasis on the conversion of the local into the teaching of transnational actors. The agency of local actors and the contestation between norms are of less concern in the literature, and when they are considered, resistance to global norms are often seen as morally backwards or illegitimate, and rarely understood in an equal or reciprocal relationship with its transnational counterpart (Finnmore 1993, Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999, Barnett and Finemore 1999).

Second, by marginalising and delegitimising local agency, the literature tends to establish a dichotomy between "good" global norms and "bad" local norms. It attributes a normative character to a norm depending on the place of its origin and the pattern of diffusion. This dichotomy further overlaps with

[13] A third potential source of leverage comes from the organizational characteristics of transnational actors themselves. A shared and cohesive consensus over a norm (Weaver 2010), dense networks with regular information exchange, and centralized structures that respond quickly to the external changes (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Lake and Wong 2009), influence the effectiveness of the coercion and pressure exercised by transnational actors.

the bias towards the "good and successful" norms in case selection (Legro 1997, Checkel 1999, Schmidt 2008). The global norms under research are those with identifiable and obvious outcomes, while those without visible impact or local norms that successfully change the transnational normative processes are less studied.

Localism

As a response, the second wave of literature shifts attention to the domestic and local level in norm diffusion. The "domestic fit" argument describes norm diffusion as a matchmaking process between global norms and domestic contexts. Norm diffusion is conditioned and mediated by domestic systems and political opportunity structures (Risse-Kappen 1995), including organizational culture (Legro 1997), domestic institutions and histories (Checkel 1999, 2001), national traditions and identities (Katzenstein 1996), political ideologies (Gilardi 2010), and local opportunity structures that are "consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them" (Tarrow 1996, 54; Kitschelt 1986).[14] For example, countries with material and social vulnerability or with a desire for international reputation are likely to be amendable towards global norms (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

However, domestic structures alone cannot fully explain trajectories of norm diffusion, which occur when there is a normative fit or resonance between domestic contexts and global norms (Cortell and Davis 2000, Busby

[14] The timing in which an issue is proposed (Cox 2001), generational turnover (Art 2006), number of veto players (Bulmer and Padgett 2005, Schmidt 2011) and proximity of elections (Swank 2008) contribute to the formation and transformation of opportunity structures.

2010). Institutional frameworks and opportunities act as heuristic filters and barriers that admit global norms having a "cultural match" with pre-existing beliefs or *cognitive priors* (Checkel 2001). The matchmaking process is rarely static, automatic or without interference. It often requires the active engagement of norm entrepreneurs and their employment of framing and grafting strategies that link the appeals of global norms to local beliefs (Risse 2013). Framing refers to the "conscious efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collection action" (McAdam 1996, 6), which dramatize the normative issues, attract public attention, and create linkages with local institutions that are not necessarily obvious or pre-established (Tarrow 2005). Grafting is a more specific strategy that associates the transnational norm with a pre-existing accepted norm, with the expectation that a similar outcome will follow (Price 1998).[15]

Further movements towards localism draw attention to the agency of local actors in employing these strategies, and conceptualise norm diffusion as a congruence-building process in which global norms are reconstructed in an interactive and reciprocal relationship with local beliefs, institutions and normative orders. First, local actors or the "persuadee's choices" matter more than that of external actors, shifting the "understanding of norm entrepreneurship from 'outsider proponents' committed to a transnational or universal moral agenda toward 'insider proponents' committed to a localized normative order" (Acharya 2009, 15). Second, driven by their own motivations

[15] More specific strategies of argumentation and persuasion can include the use of discourses (Fisher 2003, Schmidt 2008), narratives (Hay 1996, Blyth 2007), frames of reference (Muller 1995, see in Skogstad 2011), public debate (Art 2006), collective symbols and memories (Edelman 1988, Rothstein 2005).

and interests, local actors adapt global norms to be (or not to be) congruent with pre-existing beliefs and practices through active translation and reconstruction.

In his work on Asian regionalism, Acharya (2004, 2009) analyses the responses in Southeast Asia to international norms of non-intervention and collective security as examples of active borrowing and localisation rather than passive adoption of foreign ideas. Williams (2007) extends this line of argument to the diffusion of security norms in the African Union, whereas Shaw, Waldford and Hazan (2010) extend it to include other types of norms in areas of human rights and transitional justice. In her study of peacebuilding in post-war Kosovo, Groß (2015) shows how local interpretations and "meanings" of democracy and minority rights shape the scope and content of their diffusion. Zimmermann (2016) further distinguishes two types of localisation, "embedding", where laws and their implementation fit with the global norms while dominant frames and practices differ, and "reshaping", where global norms are reinterpreted and modified when translating into law and implementation to be in line with dominant local discourses.

Glocalism

Shifting the focus from global level to local level, the literature looks at norm diffusion through local adaptions and responses to global scripts and situates the norms in a reciprocal relationship. This describes the state of constant contestation and negotiation (Wiener 2007), as well as the interactive relationship with feedback loops connecting the local and global norms (Zwingel 2012, Zimmermann 2013). The process of norm diffusion therefore contains the possibility of a bottom-up route, in which local beliefs

and practices influence the formation and revision of global norms. Acharya (2011) develops the concept "norm subsidiarity" to analyse cases in which local and regional actors create new rules to affirm, challenge or replace global norms. In other words, actors can localise external ideas and universalise local beliefs into normative community.

Once putting the local and the global in an interactive relationship, however, it is no longer obvious to draw clear boundaries between the two. In this constant and open process of negotiation and re-negotiation, "all these actors are considered contextualized—there is no qualitative difference between local, national, or international—and seen as being part of a nonlinear dynamic of norm production" (Zwingel 2012, 116). Norm diffusion is thus likely to produce in-between and "glocalised" outcomes other than one-directional globalisation or localisation. In their research on diffusion of human rights, Levitt and Merry emphasise the processes of "vernacularisation", in which norms "take on some of the ideological and social attributes of the place, but also retain some of their original formulation" (2009, 446, also in the Merry 2006). In the studies of norm diffusion in peace and conflict contexts, terms like "hybridity" or "heterotopias" are used to describe the situations in which the international and local norms are mixed in creating new arrangements (Mac Ginty 2011, Richmond and Mitchell 2012, Björkdahl and Höglund 2013), or in which multiple forms of peace co-exist at the same time (van Leeuwen 2012).[16]

The third wave of "norm glocalisation" proposes a recursive and non-linear model on the movement of norms (Prantl and Nakano, 2018). Combining the

[16] For a detailed discussion, see in Björkdahl 2013.

concepts of localisation and subsidiarity, Acharya (2013) analyses the norm circulation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) that includes two-way and multi-step diffusion based on resistance, feedback and repatriation. Zimmermann (2019) takes the example of the rule of law in Guatemala to illustrate the cyclical translation in norm application and international norm change. The glocalisation perspective, however, reflects a deeper assumption that persists across the three waves of literature, as they continue to maintain a local-global opposition and spatial division. Levitt and Merry (2009) point out an inherent dilemma that is further discussed by Zwingel (2012) and Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (2013): one the one hand, the legitimacy and power of transnational actors are based on the universalistic appeal of the norms, while on the other hand, bringing the global norms into the local result in ideas and practices that are remote from their original forms, which in return undermines the legitimacy of global norms and actors.

The premise of this dilemma is the local/global binary opposition.[17] The "local" refers to the contextual, particular and everyday experiences with temporal and spatial details, whereas the "global" represents the broad, universal and generalizable, detached from the characteristics of particular places. The working of this binary opposition comes with the implications for the legitimacy and authority of the voices in two separate domains. In one scenario, the global is the powerful, authoritative and homogenizing force that

[17] Binary oppositions are categorically opposed domains, such as good/bad, culture/nature and us/them, whose interrelationship is regarded as a fundamental organising principle of language, society and politics in structuralism and post-structuralism (Levi-Strauss 1966, Douglas 2003). Foucault (1979) points out the boundaries between the domains can be temporarily redefined, though the dialectic negation maintains as the logic of social universe. Derrida (1978) underlines the embedded power relationship in which the culturally privileged pole of a binary opposition suppresses alternative aspects of realities. For a discussion of binary oppositions in social discourse, see in Seidman (1994).

will ultimately replace the limited and heterogeneous local. The local passively responds to the global in a marginalised, excluded and disempowered status (Spivak 1988). Johnson further suggests this marginalisation of the local as implied in the methodologies of social sciences in general, which "continue to hearken to principles of replicability and parsimony, and of objectivity…[and] a focus on grounded, local understanding…seemingly have little to offer toward a global perspective; their insights, experiences, and life stories are not understood as generalizable, which is in turn the 'goal' of political research" (2016, 386; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994).

With increasing access to the inner workings of transnational actors, another scenario emerges to demystify the mighty superiority of the global, realising that transnational actors are "not all powerful behemoths that carve up the vulnerable as they will…[and] their programs are hotly contested with the agencies themselves, and national, regional and local groups appropriate their effects for their own interests" (Buroway 2001, 150). Shifting to the other side the opposition, this perspective empowers the local voice and agency, prioritising and romanticising local practices, resistances and engagements as the creation of effective discourses that challenge and reconstruct the global frameworks (Wilk 1999, Scott 20008, Richmond 2009).

The local/global binary opposition contradicts the empirical realities about the interconnections across the two spaces. If the glocalisation already points out the recursive and circulative dynamics, can we build on arguments that de-centre the local-global spatial division? Or, can we imagine a perspective on norm diffusion that no longer treats local and global domains as homogenous and separate entities?

With the insights drawn from multi-sided and global ethnographies (Marcus 1995, 2013; Buroway 2001), an inclusive theorisation of local-global encounters portrays the two domains as mutually constitutive. They interact and shape the meanings and patterns of one another so as the locale is a manifestation of the global itself (Boellstorff 2003, Tsing 2005, Johnson 2016). In other words, localisation and globalisation unfold simultaneously. Instead of seeing the local and the global as two spatial levels in which norms traverse back-and-forth, norm diffusion can be conceptualised as a flattened network: the first move is "localising the global", that establish continuous connections from one interaction to other places and times; the second move is "redistributing the local", that dispatches the local to form assemblages and interactions elsewhere; and the third move is "connecting sites", that travel beyond the two-way circulation to broader yet instable networks of connections and transportation (Latour 2005).

Thus, moving beyond the local/global binary, a reflective perspective built on glocalisation looks at norm diffusion as a de-boundaring and de-territorialising process that disrupts and fractures the divide between the local and the global, causing the boundaries to overlap, blur and collapse. In other words, norm diffusion means not only the reshaping of boundaries between local and global norms through feedbacks and revisions, but also the disappearance and de-legitimisation of these cognitive and ontological boundaries. This perspective on norm diffusion highlights the sites of connection and practices of translation and mediation, which enable the mutual enrolment and interlocking in the juxtaposing the networks of heterogeneous elements ideas.

This further leads to the re-conceptualisation of actors participating in norm diffusion. It becomes difficult to cast them as local or global norm entrepreneurs, as they are neither entirely the spokesmen who represent the transnational community, nor the local norm takers/contesters who select and reject ideas from the outside. Instead, they are the "intermediaries", "translators" and "brokers" who are familiar with both local and global normative frameworks and practices, and therefore are capable of building the bridges between the two (Robins 2003, Lewis and Mosse 2006). They travel across different layers in normative languages and orders, and switch between the ways in framing the normative packages and collaborating with other actors along the chains of translation (Rottenburg 2009). In this dissertation, I will use the term "norm translators" to describe the individual and institutional actors involved in the interpretation and movement of normative messages. The norms, under their efforts, might accommodate local beliefs and understandings while retaining the universalistic and cosmopolitan awareness, and thus become unrecognisable and unfamiliar to local and global audience. Negotiating in the intermediary space of dialogue and contestation, norm translators are both powerful and vulnerable: they are knowledge brokers who represent and reinterpret the meanings of others, and they are subject to pressure and manipulation by transnational networks and local communities (Merry 2006). Emphasising that local and global domains are becoming blurred and indistinguishable, this dissertation will continue to use the terms "local" and "global" (norms, levels or spaces) to denote normative preferences and trace the processes of translation and transportation, making it easier to see the linkages with previous discussion and literature. The main question of this dissertation, however, is not about

the norm translators themselves but instead how they break down the boundaries and establish connectedness across local and global domains. The next part will focus on the theory in relation to the boundary-crossing practices and actions.

Storytelling as Boundary-Crossing

To analyse the process of deconstructing the local-global boundaries, I draw theoretical inspirations mainly from two sources. The first one is philosophical anthropology, and especially Hannah Arendt's concept of "in-between storytelling". In her major philosophical work *On Human Condition*, Arendt (1958, 1998) tackles the opposition between private and public realms by underlining the transformative effects of storytelling. Storytelling is regarded as a meaning-making action that connects the individual experience to a wider sphere of others. It retains the agency of the subjects while probing into a more complex web of social relationships. A "subjective in-between" (1958, 183) is created as the result, which belongs to neither private nor public realm, but transforming and mediating the political relationships between the two.

Arendt's insight on the in-betweeness of storytelling has invoked further resonances in anthropology.[18] Jackson (2006) explores Arendt's theory ethnographically in the context of political violence and expands the scope of the transcending effects of storytelling to other types of binary oppositions. What he calls the "narrative imperative" is regarded as a "human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances"

[18] Levi-Strauss (1966), from a different anthropological perspective, also argues that stories are fundamentally in-between in structure.

(2006, 15). Storytelling is transgressive in nature, moving beyond extant boundaries and empowering subjects to overcome the symbolic oppositions. It is important to notice that stories and narratives are used interchangeably here. They are defined as the "telling of a series of temporal events so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed" (Kerby 1991, 39). Unlike other forms of accounts, stories and narratives portray the causal links through the sequence of events and occurrences – the plot, instead of formal logic, is the structure.

Johnson (2016) presents a more specific analysis of the local-global opposition and its relation to the narratives. Engaging with the literature on migration studies, Johnson shares the view that narratives are a form of empowerment and authorisation of local voices. They reveal how subjects situate themselves in the world, both participating in and contesting the global dominant discourses (2016, 388). Instead of reinforcing local-global boundaries, these narratives reassert the political agency of irregular immigrants and their criss-crossing journey as disrupting and fracturing the local-global distinction embedded in the sovereign power of nation states. The acts of narrating entanglements shed light on a reconfigured understanding of the local-global relationship as it is mutually manifested and constituted.

While pointing out the effects of storytelling in transgressing binary oppositions, the anthropological works mainly view storytelling as individual meaning-making actions, and are less focused on its role in collective actors. To further conceptualise storytelling in institutional contexts, I draw a second source of inspiration from political sociology, to analyse the strategic use of storytelling as a way to achieve institutional interests and goals.[19]

[19] The current literature on storytelling in political sociology (Polletta et al. 2011) and interpretive political science (Bevir and Rhodes 2002, Bevir and Rhodes 2016) is under the

Scholars have underlined the centrality of storytelling to the sustaining of institutions (Julian 1996, Linde 2001, Polletta 2006). Institutions accomplish their work by eliciting and reproducing stories. Take the example of narrative and identity, the telling of a story makes a sense of belonging to a larger community possible, and thus mobilises and reinforces collective identities (Loseke 2007). The formation of American and English working classes (Somers 1992, Gerteis 2002), or that of national and racial groups (Smith 2007), takes place under the influence of powerful narratives. Organisational studies, on the other hand, suggest that stories are practices of management employed by leadership in order to consolidate the organisational authority, structure and core values (Gabriel 2000, 2016).

As Polletta (2006, 2011) points out, stories manifest three distinct attributes in the context of institutions: normativity, canonicity and ambiguity. First, stories by collective actors always yield a normative point or judgment. In the words of Bruner, "to tell a story is inescapably to take a moral stance, if it is a moral stance against moral stances" (1990, 51; also see in MacIntyre 1981). Institutional personnel communicate normative obligations and knowledge by telling stories to each other (Orr 1996), thereby informing what is desirable and undesirable. A story of a family, for example, indicates how a family should be like from the institutional perspective (Stone 1988). Some scholars use the term "schema" to denote the logic of action embedded in the institutions, in which storytelling becomes an effective way of conveying the normative part of schemas by turning collective beliefs into

influence of the interdisciplinary "narrative turn" in the 1980s (MacIntyre 1981, Ricoeur 1984, Bruner 1990) led by philosophers and psychologists, though directing more attention towards the aspects of social performance and interactive construction in storytelling.

particular accounts (Gerteis 2002, Polletta et al. 2011). The normative character of stories is highly relevant to the subject of norm diffusion, as norms advocated by collective actors are expressed through the circulation and reproduction of stories and narratives – a process that "storifies" the norms.

Second, stories in institutions are canonical, as they are shaped by institutional conventions, as well as by the structural political, economic and cultural conditions around the institutions. Instead of being the empowering and liberating forces discussed above, stories often follow familiar narrative structures and plot lines, which then reinforce the normative *status quo* and reproduce symbolic oppositions rather than challenge them. Institutions govern when, how, and what types of stories should be told. Personal stories, for instance, can be encouraged or discouraged depending on what the institutions deem to be effective and authentic (Loseke 2001, Andrew 2007). Institutions further evaluate narratives by demarcating the lines between appropriate and inappropriate accounts. This is commonplace in professional realms such as scientific, legal or public administrative institutions and occasions, where the formal presentation of narratives becomes the way of claiming expertise and authority by institutions (Myers 1990, Czarniawska 1997). For this reason, institutional personnel in many cases will reframe the original stories to make them more compelling accounts that accord with institutional conventions (Trinch and Berk-Seligson 2002). The stories in institutions are therefore products of representation, "reworked, reauthored, retold to different audiences in different ways, taking control away from their author" (Gilsenan 1996, 64).

Third, stories in institutions are often characterised less by their clarity than their ambiguity. The meanings of stories are not only given by the sequence of the events, but also depend on the interpretations of their audience, which opens the possibility of multiple understandings. Actors can exploit such ambiguities to reframe the stories in new ways to challenge the *status quo* (Bakhtin 1986, Ewick and Silbey 2003), being the conventions within their own institutions or dominant discourses from other institutions.[20] By transforming the existing order, this process allows the reshaping of interests and identities to empower different groups to act on a collective agenda. Polletta and Lee (2006), for example, draw on the public discussion after 9/11 to demonstrate how the ambiguity in storytelling leads to appreciation of competing views and formation of agreement across difference.

In studies of social movements and contentious political processes, how stories are told has been analysed as a persuasion strategy, especially when in the absence of other resources. Stories are used to reshape national boundaries and identities (Tilly 2002), mobilise participants and supporters (Polletta 2006) and legitimise policy agenda (Stone 1989). Meyer (2014) discusses in detail how storytelling helps explain the key puzzle of collective action in politics. Successful stories result in "engrossment", the experience of losing oneself, which changes the attitudes of participants and construct the initial interactive basis for collective action. Storytelling is thus "a tool for

[20] Stories as challenges here are two-fold. The first is the stories used by actors within or without the institution to challenge the institutional conventions (Epstein 1996). The second is the stories mobilised by personnel on behalf of the institutions to challenge the normative order of other institutions or of the society in general. Here I focus on the second type of stories and narratives.

enormous power and flexibility for constructing shared purposes…and choreographing coordinated acts of meaning" (2014, 49). Here the transgressive effect of storytelling is reasserted in the context of institutions, as it undermines the pre-existing boundaries, and serves to explain and mobilise the necessity for change.

The openness to interpretation also means that storytelling is polemical, often as the site of political and cultural contestation (Patterson 1998). Different actors tend to narrate the stories towards their own preferences, which result in the competition among multiple versions of the stories and the debate on how the stories should be told. Institutions "talk to each other" by reaffirming or delegitimising their narratives. The struggle over the authoritative voice of the narrator is uneven, implied by the distribution of resources between collective actors. Institutions are therefore both enabling and constraining for storytelling, as they allow the emergence and dissemination of stories, at the same time, delimit what actors can do with the stories through institutional conventions and unequal power relationships between institutions.[21] This puts stories in a constant process of interaction, as they are not the static products of institutional preferences, but the outcomes of dialogue and contestation within and between institutions.

One last question on storytelling in institutions informs the subject of my current research: why are stories and narratives chosen over other familiar concepts, such as frames, ideologies or discourse that often appear in studies

[21] Along a different disciplinary tradition of interpretive political science, Bevir and Rhodes (2016) argue that narratives relate actions to the beliefs and ideas that produce them and situate actions in institutional and historical contexts. In this way, narratives reflect the "situated agency" of actors, as they are simultaneously autonomous and delimited in institutions.

of social movements and contentious politics? Stories are certainly related to these concepts, being "forms of discourse, vehicles of ideology, and elements of collective action frames" (Polletta 2006, 11). However, focusing on stories has at least four advantages compared to the analysis of other conceptual frameworks. First of all, it is easier to identify the formation and transformation of stories. By following its plot, researchers can trace the beginning and end of a story, and isolate it from broader discourses and ideologies. In this way, the processes by which a story becomes canonical or ambiguous in institutions are relatively clear. The changes in multiple versions of a story can further reflect the embedded political forces and conventions that try to accommodate and reshape the story. In comparison, it is difficult to trace the beginnings and ends of an ideology or discourse.

Second, stories elicit emotions and movements, which reveal the initial cognitive and psychological stages that alter the beliefs and identities of actors and institutions. Their dynamic character explains the origin of changes in the logic of interaction, and is thus crucial to the understanding of micro-foundations of collection actions. Frames, discourses and ideologies are not as useful in explaining how they are constructed in the first place or why actors shift from one particular ideational framework to another.

Third, when it comes to the local level, it is not straightforward to associate everyday practices with a particular frame, discourse or ideology. The establishment of relationships would require interpretive efforts from the perspective of researchers, which portray the frames, discourses or ideologies as either overly encompassing or deeply limited (Scott 2008). As Olivier de Sardan (2005) points out, there is a discrepancy between public discourse and everyday practices. Stories, on the other hand, can be observed and practised

on a daily basis, and the examination of stories leaves the room for the agency of actors as narrators and respondents.

Fourth, theories on frames, discourses and ideologies emphasise the durability of symbolic oppositions, and how they are employed to shape the perceptions and actions towards specific antagonists and goals. How actors might overcome familiar oppositions is less discussed. In contrast, some stories are regarded as transgressive in moving beyond the existing borders, and thus demonstrate another side of human actions.

In summary, storytelling is a way to challenge symbolic binary oppositions by underling the connectedness, the entanglements and the state of in-between. In the context of institutions, stories are both enabled and restrained by institutional conventions, and used by actors as a strategy to persuade and mobilise for normative changes. Introducing the concept of storytelling into the discussion of norm diffusion, it underlines everyday practices employed by brokers and translators that transform normative messages into accessible accounts, which disrupt, fracture and redefine the local-global boundaries in the process of creating linkages and entanglements between heterogeneous ideational frameworks.

Political Ethnography

To fully explore the processes of norm diffusion and storytelling, this dissertation takes the form of political and institutional ethnography, which emphasises the immersion into the local place and close interaction with the people as ways of obtaining and analysing research materials (Smith 2006,

Wedeen 2010).[22] This methodology resonates with the recent "ethnographic turn" (Vrasti 2008, Gusterson 2008, Taber 2010, Schatz 2013, Leander 2015) in comparative politics and international relations – a renewed sensibility to the lived experience of the subjects and the embedded social contexts, after the discipline's earlier conversation with Geertz's "thick description" (1994). Referred to as "extended case study" (Aronoff and Kubik 2012) or "weld research" (Wood 2009), ethnographic fieldwork involves "deep hanging out" in everyday settings and lasts for an extended period of time.

The fact that the use of ethnography is called the "perestroika movement" in political sciences (Laitin 2003, Monroe 2005) implies the connotations of "rebellion" and "defiance" associated with the approach. The potential conflicts in ontological and epistemological assumptions invite questions and debates on whether and what kind of political ethnography should be employed. One of the central debates draws on the two traditions of ethnography: the positivist (realist) and the interpretivist. The positivist approach regards ethnography as a way of exploring the elusive and nuanced realities that are often hidden from the surface. It is like "peeling the onion skin" that leads the researcher closer to the context-specific truths (Allina-Pisano 2013, Wood 2009). The acknowledgement of an objective reality and the research for causal relations and rules make the positivist approach more compatible with the epistemological traditions in political science. On the other hand, following Geertz's frameworks, interpretivist ethnography differs from positivist forms by shifting the analysis focus to the production of

[22] In anthropology of development, institutional ethnography is seen as a new approach that shifts away from the traditional focus on local communities to study the makers of development programmes (Crewe and Axelby 2012).

meanings (Weeden 2010, 2013). Realities and truths are considered as intersubjective, constructed by symbols and performances of actors, and embedded in power relationships. The purpose of ethnography is thus to unravel the social meanings by relating them to the beliefs and practices of actors. The interpretive approach is less concerned with establishing causality and truth claims than demonstrating the relative and constructivist nature of such claims themselves – this forms the grounds for questioning the effectiveness of ethnography in explaining political processes.

The divide between positivist and interpretivist approaches and their "appropriateness" for politics research, nonetheless, are not as clear-cut as defined in the debate. Bevir and Rhodes (2016), for example, reconcile the interpretive approach with the demands of political science. For them, the distinction between positivist and interpretivist approaches in terms of their explanatory powers are misplaced, as interpretive political science also explains actions by relating them to "the beliefs and desires that produce them and by situating these beliefs and desires in particular historical contexts" (2016, 17). If we return to the original formulation of the interpretive enterprise of Geertz, it might be surprising to realise how Geertz emphasises the scientific orientation of interpretivism, and its ability to "draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts" (1973, 28). Therefore, interpretive ethnography does provide equally weighted explanations for the causal mechanisms in political processes. The polemical differences between the two ethnographic traditions are not supposed to overshadow their closeness in practice, with shared conceptions of world as complicated and multi-layered realities and of ethnography as a method to explore such realities (Schatz 2013).

More importantly, the positivist/interpretivist divide rests on an antiquated view of ethnography, when political scientists urgently turn to the method for generating first-hand knowledge on lived experiences of local politics. Advocates for political ethnography focus less on the recent developments in anthropology, where ethnography came under critical scrutiny and embattlement. Beginning with the "writing culture debate" (Clifford and Marcus 1986), postmodern and global ethnographies have largely disintegrated the traditional enterprise of ethnography, questioning the authoritative voice of the researcher as well as the narrowed spatial version of small and homogenous communities (Marcus 1998, Trouillot 2003). The term "ethnography", now laden with experimental proposals expanding its style and scope, refers to a wide range of diverse, disputed and dispersed practices. The insistence on the positivist and interpretivist distinction in political science is "the result of critical lag that exists between the two disciplines, a delay in cross-disciplinary reading practices" (Vrasti 2008, 280). Vrasti continues with examples in international relations to illustrate how delimiting of ethnography into a specific tradition may reduce ethnography into an "empiricist data-collection", "writing style" or "theoretical sensibility", without fulfilling the promises of ethnography.

Therefore, instead of choosing a side between two applications of ethnography to politics research, this dissertation embraces the view that ethnography is a diverse approach in itself, and adopts its sensibility to local contexts and reflectivity on researcher-subject relationships to uncovering my research puzzles. The application of ethnography is particularly relevant to this research in two respects. On a theoretical level, the analysis of storytelling requires the researcher to capture the context-specific and local experience

(Bamberg 2007). Stories are being told on an everyday basis, and it is difficult to grasp the different versions and backgrounds of them without extensive interactions with individual actors. A narrative approach, in the words of Johnson, "embraces a certain methodology…that is committed to an engaged, situated, and contextual understanding of research, led by participants themselves in a research practice strongly characterized by reflexivity" (2016, 390; Aradau el al. 2015). Ethnography fits into this description. Rhodes (2011), in his study of everyday elite politics in Britain, combines the theoretical exploration of storytelling and method of ethnography. Drawing on in-depth accounts based on his immersion in the government, Rhodes demonstrates how political-administrative elites use storytelling to facilitate communication, create meanings in governance, and shape the beliefs and actions through everyday protocols, rituals and languages.

On an empirical level, my choice of ethnography addresses the lack of attention to the local and micro-level dynamics of norm diffusion. One of the key differences between ethnography and other methods in politics research is its focus on locally produced politics. As the phrase "all politics is local" implies, the "actual" details of human interactions that construct the basis of political processes can be inconsistent with the prescriptions of abstract theories concerning the larger systems and structures (Hall 2003, Kubik 2009). The use of ethnography opens up the possibility of exploring another side of the politics. Meanwhile, attention to the local does not necessarily narrow the scope of ethnography and undermine its global perspective. Illustrated by the above discussion on global ethnography, the method has remoulded itself with a sensibility to the transnational character of political, economic and cultural changes. As Marcus points out, in a globalising world,

"the distinction between lifeworlds of subjects and the system does not hold, and the point of ethnography within the purview of its always local, close-up perspective is to discover new paths of connection and associations…on a differently configured spatial canvas" (1998, 82). This insight leads to two further implications. First, the traditional focus on the locale of ethnography provides a way of exploring how the global forces and connections manifest themselves. The global meanings and symbols need to be "situated in the intimacy of the local contexts that gave them life" (Comaroffs 2003, 161; Burawoy 2001). Second, the ethnography of local politics integrates the latter into the translocal processes, in which a multiplicity of local narrative responds to the global flows of ideas and meanings in a mutually constitutive relationship. The way that ethnography deals with local-global encounters fits into the purpose of this dissertation, as it looks at the local dynamics while situating the scenario in a larger picture of global norm diffusion.

Except for having the theoretical and empirical relevance to the research puzzle, ethnography as a method has several advantages that deserve mentioning here. First, the ethnographic approach provides exclusive and privileged access to the materials and political processes that would be unavailable otherwise (Tilly 2006, Wood 2009). Especially in a formalised institution like the United Nations, being an "insider" makes a significant difference by granting the researcher the opportunities to read internal documents, attend meetings and organise workshops. It builds one's familiarity with the internal processes of the institutions and identifies key events and actors involved. Second, the everyday and face-to-face interactions with actors tend to foster a trusted and intimate relationship between the researcher and the researched (Gusterson 2008). This is particularly helpful

when actors obscure their preferences or detailed practices in programmes under research. Close interaction and observation uncover the motives of actors and hidden processes in programmes, and is thus an effective way of "exploring the difference between the 'frontstage' and 'backstage' – between formal, idealized accounts of a culture and the messy divergences of actual practices" (Klotz and Prakash 2008, 100; Rhodes 2007). Political ethnography produces rich and nuanced details that enable a thick description of political actions. Third, the empirical robustness of ethnography leads to theoretical sensibility. It helps the researcher understand the beliefs and practices of actors by giving them voice and admitting the space for human agency. Regarding the case in this dissertation, the examination of everyday activities of norm translators poses reflective questions on how they actually perceive norm diffusion and respond to local-global relations. Research at a close range often reshapes the understanding of key concepts and reveals alternative realities embedded with heterogeneity, multi-causality, contingency and complex configuration of factors and mechanisms (Adcock and Collier 2001, Schatz 2013).

Fourth, by being there, political ethnography opens the possibility of the researcher to be surprised, when empirical knowledge or theoretical inspirations emerge out of the prefigured design (Bayard de Volo 2013). These "moments of epiphany" (Rhodes 2016, 175) are crucial for exploring the aspects of political processes unknown or unaware of in the previous literature. This virtue of political ethnography is stressed here with three exemplary moments from my fieldwork. As I firstly entered the UNDP office, I expressed my interest in looking at the project on development cooperation. However, the programme manager was reluctant to share the details on this

project with me. I was fully aware that her consent and information were essential for further investigation, yet there was no obvious way to convince her. After several failed attempts, I was considering changing the case study. Then one Sunday evening, I received a call from another colleague asking me to help with a conference on development cooperation. This gave me the chance to have some time with the previous programme manager I would like to interview. While we were waiting for the printing of conference materials in the office on a Sunday night – which took a long time – this programme manager, to break the silence, suddenly started to talk about the project details. I had to just grab a pen and a piece of A4 paper to record this unexpected informal interview. The second moment was a salsa dancing session I attended under persistent persuasion from a colleague. It was organised by the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) and open to staff from all UN branches. Before this, I had long been curious of the complicated inter-agency relationships of the UN system, but it was difficult to find any high-level official who was willing to share the relevant information with a research student. The last thing I would expect happened when a senior manager from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), who was my dancing partner at the time, began to complain about the deteriorating cooperation among the UN agencies during this salsa class. The third moment was during my second stay in the UNDP Beijing office, I obtained the opportunity to interview the Assistant Administrator of the UNDP. I never thought of interviewing an UN official at such a high managerial level. The Assistant Administrator was in a state visit, and agreed to my interview request simply because he “happened to be curious and would

like to talk to this young man in the office".[23] All of these three moments were unplanned, as they took place on occasions and venues completely out of my normal work cycle. Nonetheless, the information disclosed through these moments provided crucial insights into the processes of the UN and reshaped my research design. In this respect, the "surprises" in political ethnography link to the methodological advantages mentioned above through the provision of access and opening of new research agenda, and manifest the irreplaceable importance of "being there".

Nonetheless, the use of ethnography in politics research is associated with two potential weaknesses. One concerns the limits of generalisation and representativeness of ethnography: to what extent the idiographic descriptions and interpretations can be generalised into theoretical conclusions; and to what extent the case study represents a comprehensive picture of the political processes. A possible response is in line with Richard Rorty's conceptualisation of the research task that emphasises less on the explanation than the facilitation of "edifying conversations", which aim at finding "new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking" (1980, 360; also in Rhodes 2016, 174). In other words, the purpose of ethnography is not so much to generalise as to open new perspectives. Crewe's study of the House of Lords, for example, demonstrates how the British elite politics can be understood and interpreted very differently through the analysis of political rituals (2005).

Another way of addressing the generalisation weakness is by stressing abductive or inductive logic of reasoning in ethnography. Instead of applying

[23] This was recounted to me by the Deputy Country Director and the operation officer, 13 January 2017.

general abstractions to political phenomena, ethnography starts with observation to establish the most likely explanation or concatenated theories (Weeden 2010). Even in the strict language of political science, single case study in ethnography can produce causal inferences by developing the empirical accounts into an explanative model that defies or affirms a general theory (Wood 2009). This also partially answers the question of representativeness, as a single case is not necessarily limited in its implications. In his analysis of human rights development in Malawi, Englund (2006, 24) addresses the concerns of representativeness by clarifying that ethnography is not about representing the full picture of individual activities or particular organisations. Rather, it is about discovering the cultural disposition beyond the individual differences. In a similar vein, this dissertation is not a work that attempts to represent the activities of the UNDP. Instead, by drawing on the narratives and encounters across different periods and projects, it aims to demonstrate the dispositions or tendencies in the everyday practices of norm diffusion.

The second weakness of political ethnography concerns its objectivity. Close interaction with the subjects raises questions on the biases of the researcher, and poses greater challenges for handling the subjective judgements and maintaining the "neutrality" of the study. In my fieldwork, there is indeed a tendency to develop more interactions with the interviewees who have similar educational backgrounds and lifestyles. Those biases emerge naturally through the daily encounters with other human beings, and are treated with caution and deliberative efforts to include a more diverse group of participants in the research. Meanwhile, the qualified use of ethnography might introduce another way of understanding objectivity. If social reality is

an intersubjective construction, the ways that the researcher and the researched interact are constantly reshaping the lived experiences and thus the findings. The recognition that researched subjects and you are involved in the same on-going and meaning-making processes is a critical reflection on how knowledge claims are formed and communicated (Smith 2006, Weeden 2010). The sensitiveness to the embedment and embodiment of observations is a sign of "stronger objectivity" that challenges the simplistic perception of "neutrality" as a normative detachment (Leander 2015). Political ethnography further defines a reflective objectivity by allowing the ethnographic description to be polyvocal so that the different voices of the subjects can speak and represent themselves. Bruno Latour explores this notion of "objectivity" (2000) that is not looking from above or in distance, but achieved through the empowerment of actors to object and contest the conclusions about them (example in Mosse, 2005). In this respect, this dissertation strives to be "more objective" by creating a symmetrical interaction with the actors. I circulate my preliminary findings with the researched subjects, and situate the research in a relatively inclusive and open position to present alternative perspectives and explanations that deepen the analysis itself. The infallibility and inaccuracy of the accounts in this dissertation, however, are always possible. It is my intention that a nuanced ethnographic picture of political processes in norm diffusion will inform readers of the complex webs of encounters, conflicts and reconciliations in social realities, not only through the contestations and negotiations among the actors, but also through the equally polyvocal interactions between the researcher and the researched.

Chapter 3
Norm Metamorphosis

> "Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the joint task of all countries…Development could serve as means to address various global challenges, speed up economic transformation and upgrading, map out the course of equitable, open, all-round, innovation-driven and sustainable development and advance the well-being of mankind."
>
> - China's Position Paper on the SDGs

> "It felt right, it just felt right!"
>
> - UNDP Assistant Administrator on the SDGs

Despite their contrasting styles, the accounts above address the same question regarding the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Accepted by world leaders in the UN summit, the SDGs officially came into effect in 2016 and since then has been regarded as a global norm guiding the development activities of UN agencies and national governments (Shawki 2016). In terms of the content, the Goals is a collection of pre-existing norms, rather than entirely new ones. However, its emergence in progress provides an opportunity to trace the initial stage of norm diffusion, and how exactly the formality of a text-based norm can gradually become enmeshed with the informality of the stories around it.

The two accounts cited here reflect this dynamic. The first description of the SDGs is drawn from the official government document in China, demonstrating a rhetorical similarity and continuity with other UN documents. The second account comes from my interview with the UNDP Assistant Administrator (13 January 2017), in which he explained how member states agreed to adopt the SDGs. The comparison between the two accounts reveals the discrepancy between norms in text and norms in everyday practice, as in the latter context, virtually no one recites the official document for the targeted audience. Instead, they turn the normative content

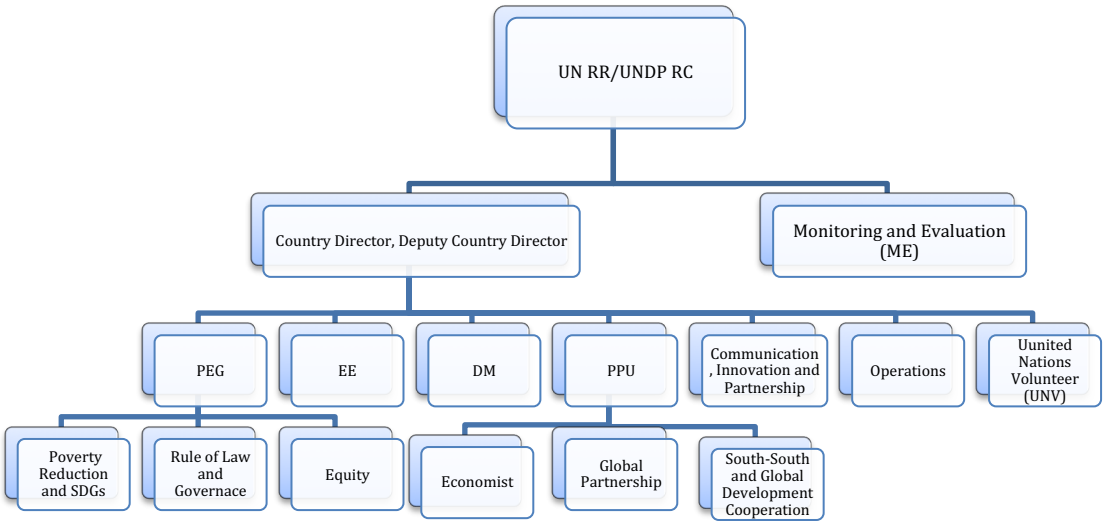
into accessible stories. Unlike the long and rationalistic justifications offered in official documents, the telegraphic justification "It felt right" portrays norm adoption as spontaneous and uncontroversial. This emphasis on spontaneity is often identified as a feature of narratives in collective actions (Polleta 2006). It signifies the transformation of normative messages into stories, which are being told and retold to capture the indefinable moment in collection action and to persuade others to participate.

Three related questions emerge further from here: How do norms turn into stories in everyday practice? What are the stories and who tells them? What impact does storytelling have on norms? These questions run through the following chapters and the answers that I attempt to provide form the main part of this dissertation. This chapter provides a general introduction to storytelling in norm diffusion, based on the example of the SDGs in the UNDP China. With a focus on the first question on the transformative process from norms to stories, this chapter lays down the basic points upon which I elaborate later. It starts by expanding the details in Chapter 1 regarding the institutional structures and activities of the UNDP China, and clarifies the issue areas and projects under focus. I then move to the SDGs with a process-tracing on norm metamorphosis, in which this global norm turns into everyday stories through a three-step transformation, firstly being inserted into documents, then incorporated into projects, and thirdly taken as part of the political and social rituals practiced on an everyday basis. Presenting the stories within a range of narrators, venues and audiences, I intend to show how these stories share the common features of being normative, canonical, ambiguous and polyvocal.

Structure, Power and Project

In accordance with relevant issue areas, there are mainly four teams in the UNDP China responsible for the planning and implementation of projects: Poverty, Equity and Governance (PEG), Environment and Energy (EE), Disaster Management (DM) and Policy and Partnership Unit (PPU), with additional support from the communications and operation teams.[24] Each team leader is at the same time an assistant country director, while the senior management team, including the resident representative, country director and deputy country director, supervises and coordinates the overall activities of each team on a higher level. The establishment and gradual expansion of PPU, as discussed above, is largely the outcome of the repositioning process of the UNDP in order to strengthen and deepen China's global engagement.

Chart 3.1 Organisational Structure of the UNDP China (2017)



[24] The organisational structure was adjusted in 2016, with the communication team now including the component of "innovation and partnership". This was a radical expansion of the communication team, making it possible for the team to implement its own development projects. With a further decline of funding in 2018, there was a further restructuring that merged domestic projects into one team under the banner of SDGs localisation.

The organisational structure establishes a bureaucratic hierarchy within the office, yet two other forms of power relationships merit attention here. The first one concerns the power asymmetry between the UNDP and the host country. The discussion on China as an emerging power in Chapter 1 demonstrates that the UNDP is facing a recipient country with an unprecedented level of power. This is more of an exceptional case in the UN system. China's own strong commitment, inputs of resources and expertise in development areas can match and surpass international actors, thus questioning the necessity of the existence of UN-supported projects within its territory. In 2015, China set up a China-UN Peace and Development Fund that will distribute 1 billion US dollars to support peace, security and development activities. In the same year, the UNDP China's budget was 67 million (actual expense about 46 million) dollars (Reuters 2016, UNDP Opendata 2017). The unequal access to resources indicates that the UNDP now urgently relies on cost-sharing and institutional support from the government. This partnership is seen as fundamental to sustain UNDP's organizational operation. This leads to an increasingly higher degree of alignment between UNDP projects and national priorities. One programme manager described the process of formulating a work plan with the governmental counterpart to me as something similar to "picking from a set menu" (Conversation, 11 January 2017), in which the governmental department provided a list of policy areas that it already planned to work on, and the UNDP would select the ones that matched with its own agenda. An earlier survey from the evaluation office suggested that almost 82 percent of the stakeholders and staff interviewed in the assessment process felt that UNDP-supported projects would be implemented even without UNDP support (Independent Evaluation Office

UNDP 2010). It affirmed the high degree of overlapping between China's priorities and UNDP planned outcomes, at the same timing reflecting the "constant existential crisis" of the UNDP China office.

This power imbalance also exists between the UNDP and private sector, with the latter recognised as the target for resource mobilisation that "has already contributed substantially to projects" (UNDP CPD 2016, 16). The UNDP fears that the UN brand will be used by the private sector to promote its own images. Here a dilemma emerges: on the one hand, the UNDP needs to engage more closely with local actors for their institutional and material resources; on the other hand, it is in a weak position to negotiate the terms and risk the development agenda. The widespread worries from individual team members to senior management are that the UNDP sits on a slippery edge of becoming a "public relations company or spokesman" for the government or private sector in China (Interview, 17 November 2016).

The second form of power relationship reveals another dimension of imbalance and inequality, despite the relative strength of local actors. Within the UNDP China, the majority of formal staff (89%, 72 out of 81) is Chinese national – at the entry level, national officials are financially more affordable in comparison to internationally recruited staff, and their language skills and networks are seen as necessary for implementing projects. However, at the management level, the officials largely remain racially white (71%, 5 out of 7). The racial inequalities within international organisations and the "whiteness of development" (Wilson 2013) are widely recognised but rarely discussed, partly due to the legitimacy crisis arising from such contradictions, between the organisational realities and the agendas of diversity and equality that define the organisational identity (Crewe and Fernando 2006, Crewe and

Axelby 2012). This power relationship extends to the project fields, as local actors, including governmental officials and representatives from private sectors, would either openly express or imply the expectations to have a presence of "white experts". The concepts of expertise and internationalisation are thus closely associated with this racial image, and national program officers from the UNDP sometimes have to "invite their white colleagues", though not directly related to the projects, to come with them on meetings and fieldtrips.

The superposition of the two power relationships poses a strange and nuanced scenario in the UNDP China. On the one hand, the local actors are powerful enough to negotiate with international organisations and influence the latter's agendas. On the other hand, this power has not been translated directly into the racial structure of development organisations and discourses, so that the authority of "the white and the West" continues to be dominant and persuasive. The co-existence and interface between these power relationships are important to this research, as we can observe in the analyses later, how they shape the storytelling of actors, on the selection of stories, narrators, venues and audience. This is not to say, however, that the power structures prescribe the behaviour of actors. Rather, the actors are situated agents who are subject to, and at the same time making use of, the power asymmetries surrounding them.

Furthermore, the interface of the power relationships challenges the local-global divide from an organisational perspective. It is difficult to distinguish local and global domains, when local actors insert their ideas and agendas into international organisations, and when international actors rely on national officials to diffuse global norms and implement projects. The answers to "who

are the local and the global" become ambiguous in practice, and the relative power assigned to the two categories is shifting and flexible rather than stable and static. In other words, the realities of power, in its intersection and overlapping, resettle the local-global boundaries rather than affirming them.

Having introduced the organisational details of the UNDP China, now I turn to organisational activities of the UNDP, with the focus on norm diffusion. Even though the discussion above points out that norm advocacy is central to the mission of the UNDP, the question remains on how norm diffusion can be observed on an everyday basis. The straightforward answer is to look for the negotiations leading up to the adoption of international treaties carrying global norms. However, this approach will lead this study to focus on diplomatic processes with the government, which occupy only a limited part of norm diffusion landscape. A pragmatic method is to relate norm diffusion to institutional change, measured through changes in institutional task, membership size, and choice of means used to achieve the new task (Acharya 2009). With regard to international organizations, especially, global norms are diffused not through their original words in treaties, but are embedded in the programmes designed by international organizations to convey normative messages. A programme is defined as "a persona of a norm, and consist of a set of policies with a legal or organizational basis that can be adopted by an actor as a means of working towards the regulative or prescriptive goals of a norm" (Berliner and Prakash 2012, 1; also see in Ostrom 1990). As the carriers and indicators of norms, programmes provide a more visible site for observing the detailed processes of norm diffusion. A programme is composed of a group of projects serving a common goal and their everyday operations demonstrate the micro-level dynamics of norm diffusion. In the context of the

UNDP, the concept of programme is too broad, referring to the general design at the country level instead of specific operations. Therefore, to examine norm diffusion activities through the UNDP China, this research focuses on the projects embedded with norms and interprets the operations of these projects as the manifestations of local-global dynamics.

Among some seventy to eighty projects under operation[25], I focus on the post-2010 ones for two reasons: firstly, they belong to the same programme cycle guided by specific objectives and frameworks; secondly, most of them are formed after or influenced by the redesigning reform in 2011, and therefore are under the same organisational structure. Three groups of projects are chosen on the basis that different types of narratives and stories have emerged out of them. The first group of projects concerns personal stories, and the embedded norms are about equality and human rights, such as the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Laws in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The second group of projects concern the stories about other countries and regions, and the embedded norms are in the field of rule of law. The third group of projects concern the stories about China in development cooperation, as they reflect the multi-dimensional dynamics of norm diffusion in which local norms feed back to the global normative frameworks.

[25] There were 83 projects under operation in 2016 and 74 projects in 2017. Though, not all the projects were in active status, and some projects exceeded their planned schedule or were renewed with partners.

The selection of projects is biased in favour of projects run by the PEG and PPU team, as the two teams are more closely associated with the UNDP mandate on rights-based development. The portfolio in equality and governance of the PEG, for example, rarely makes an appearance in other international development agencies in China, even more so after China's Foreign NGO Management Law came into effect in January 2017. The PPU team focuses on development cooperation and global partnership, addressing the complicated dynamics between the host country and international regimes.[26] Before going into the analyses of the selected projects and stories, I will take the example of the "mega norm" SDGs to illustrate the relationships between norms, projects and stories.

Norm Metamorphosis

[26] The projects in the EE and DM teams, on the other hand, are concerned with diffusion of norms on climate change, energy efficiency and disaster reduction. They are framed mainly through the introduction of technical policy solutions, such as the replacement of the chemical HCFC-141 (toxic to the ozone layer) in accordance with the Montreal Protocol, or the application of energy-efficient bricks in pilot villages to support the establishment of national standards of fired perforated bricks. In the words of a programme manager, "the issues (covered by the EE and DM teams) are simply not political, and can go on without controversy" (Interview, 12 January 2017). Although this claim was then rebuked by a member in the EE team referring to the actualities of environmental politics, she agreed that the nature of projects differed greatly among the teams (Interview, 12 January 2017). The technology transfer of the EE and DM teams brings different dynamics to the storytelling, and the local-global interactions in ideological and political terms might not be as visible as in other teams.

A further consideration for not focusing on their projects is that the size of the EE team in China is an exceptional case in the UN system. Supposedly, at the country level, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) should take the lead in environmental issues. In China, nonetheless, the advantage brought by the UNDP's early entry in the country and a close partnership with the government gave dominance to the EE team in environmental policies. It attracts the top donors to the UNDP China, such as the Global Environment Fund and the Montreal Protocol Fund, and has a high delivery rate of projects within the office. The overall predominance of the EE is an exceptional case that applies to the UNDP China office, and this research will draw on the norm diffusion activities more related to the UNDP's institutional focus. Having said that, there are cross-cutting issues and norms that connect multiple teams and projects within the office.

On a late September morning, after the official adoption of the SDGs in the 2015 UN summit, the UNDP staff at the Beijing Office received an invitation email to participate in the ceremony of raising the SDGs flag in front of the office building. Many felt reluctant to join, until the deputy country director came to almost each desk and called everyone out. After the ceremony, the staff went back to business as usual, without any explicit sign of being influenced by this new organisational agenda. A year later, in October 2016, the scenario changed completely. Posters of the SDGs were hung in the corridor and staff wore updated identity cards with SDGs logos. Each project was reframed under the banner of the SDGs and people talked about it in team meetings, programme meetings and meetings with partners. The concept of the SDGs became everyday and ubiquitous – in the original words of a programme coordinator, "SDGs is everything now" (Interview, 15 November 2016). How did this change occur?

This question addresses the mainstreaming process in which a global norm becomes the reference for and content of everyday stories. At the same time, it underpins the fact that we cannot automatically take an international organisation as a coherent norm entrepreneur or advocate as given. A norm needs to be diffused within the organisation and among its personnel. The early literature tends to perceive norm diffusion as merely international organisations exporting ideas into nation states, and global norms as the embedded and pre-established ideals of individual staff (Finnemore 1996, True and Mintrom 2001). This view is ineffective in explaining the changing identities of international organisations, or the internal flexibility and incoherence (Park 2005, 2007). Instead, equal attention should be drawn to

the internalisation of norms within international organisations, which initiates and overlaps with norm advocacy beyond organisational boundaries.

Stories, as the indicators of the everyday presence of norms, are endowed with two roles here. Firstly, the "storification" of norms within the international organisations is a process of internal diffusion and socialisation. It signifies the entrance of normative messages into the daily representations and interpretations of individuals. Secondly, the stories are used by international actors in external norm diffusion towards a wider range of audience. Through the analysis of stories, one can therefore observe both internal and external norm diffusion, and how a norm advocated at headquarters gradually turns into stories in a country office and then towards local actors.

The SDGs is chosen as the example of analysis. It is a relatively new norm, making it easier to trace the early stages of its diffusion. Containing 17 Goals, the broad and overarching SDGs represents a general picture of norm diffusion in development, not delimited to a specific issue. Moreover, the way that it is structured demonstrates that global norms are not necessarily created as new ideas or concepts – it can be a collection of pre-existing norms within an interrelated and integrated framework. The idea of "interrelation" is carefully constructed in order to distinguish the SDGs from previous normative frameworks, as repeatedly emphasised in the accounts such as "the goals are interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another" (UNDP 2016).

The emergence of the SDGs fits into Haas' description of transnational epistemic communities, when the knowledge makers articulate cause-effect relationships of the problems and frame the issues for collective actions

(1992). The logic of epistemic policy coordination, when applied to explain the formation of the SDGs, is as follows: 1) *uncertainty* – when the development problems are complex and states are dependent on each other, there is an increasing demand for new information and cooperation mechanisms; 2) *interpretation* – networks of development professionals and experts then provide their interpretations of social and natural phenomena, and argue for an integrated action plan through international platforms such as the United Nations Conferences on Environment and Development;[27] 3) *institutionalisation* – when their views are incorporated into the normative regimes, they consolidate the bureaucratic power of national and international development institutions with the new goals. Instead of expanding further to discuss how the SDGs are constructed and adopted, this chapter focuses on how they are narrated. More specifically, I argue that norms turn into everyday stories through a three-step transformation, firstly being inserted into document-based texts, then incorporated into project aims and implementations, and thirdly turned into part of the political and social rituals practiced on an everyday basis.

For entry-level staff at the UN, one needs to firstly get used to the amount of documents received. This includes orientation packages, concept notes, programme documents, delivery forms, templates and other administrative papers for arranging different types of working activities. In her ethnographic analysis of the UN, Eastwood underlines the textually mediated nature of the

[27] Several UN conferences on environment and development played crucial roles in the formation of the SDGs, including the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Development, the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Rio Summit) and the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20, as a follow-up of the 1992 conference).

organisation, and how the "UN represents a site where far more is being produced than simply sheer quantities of texts…those texts are the sites of key struggles that are currently taking place" (2006, 183). In other words, documents act as the media or the channels through which conflicts and negotiations are governed and managed within the organisation. In a politico-administrative regime, the "documentary reality" (Smith 1974) is fundamental in the sense that documents construct and legitimise what is perceived as serious and real in the context of organisational operations. In norm diffusion, the first step is to make the norm appear in organisational documents.

On 25 September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, also known as the SDGs. In the resolution, it was written that SDGs "seek to build on the MDGs and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental". Although the resolution mentioned the respecting of national policies and priorities, the SDGs presented in General Assembly put much greater emphasis on the universality of the agenda so that "all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan" (General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/1 2015).

Chairing the UN Development Group, the UNDP coordinates and harmonises UN development activities. The official discussion on the SDGs appeared as early as in the UNDP's Strategic Plan (2014-2017) published in 2013, which defines the adoption of sustainable development pathways as a major work focus. In October 2015, under the guidance of the Development

Group, an Interim Reference Guide to UN Country Teams on Mainstreaming the SDGs was circulated. Phrased slightly differently from the resolution, the guide supported "tailoring SDGs to national contexts while protecting its integrity" (2015, 5). Shifting the attention to the local level, the guide focused on the means of implementation, and adopted a common approach under the acronym MAPS: Mainstreaming (landing the SDGs into national and local plans), Acceleration (targeting resources at priority areas) and Policy Support (ensuring the expertise of the UN is available). In January 2016, the UNDP published its own strategy to support implementation of the SDGs. It clarified the UNDP's convening role and people-centred multi-stakeholder approach, to "sensitize national stakeholders — government departments, civil society, parliamentarians, the media and business — about what the new agenda means" (2016, 11). As the norm travelled from the UN summit to institutions and agencies, we can already see the reinterpretations and adaptions, as the emphasis shifted gradually towards localisation and implementation, reflecting the principle of national ownership upheld by the UNDP.

Such tendency was more visibly pronounced in the documents at the country level. In January 2016, the UNCT in China published the UNDAF, which was "informed by the priorities of the 13th Five-Year Plan and framed by the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda". It was drafted against the background that China had become a Middle-Income Country and the bilateral development assistance to China had decreased significantly. An interagency Task Team reviewed the comparative advantages of the UN system and aligned them with the reform priorities laid out by the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party. Following this, in April, the UNDP published its Country Programme Document (CPD 2016-2020), proposing

how it would achieve the outcomes in the UNDAF. The document aligned the SDGs with the existing portfolios, outlining its relationships with economic plans, climate budget, South-South cooperation and poverty reduction.

With respect to this point, it can be argued that the SDGs have achieved documentary reality at the country office – it has been written as the action plan and organisational mandate. The text-based diffusion followed a strict vertical and hieratical line, from the headquarters to country offices, in an orderly and organised manner. However, the textual commitments to the SDGs were still far from their embodiments in everyday practices. As mentioned before, most of staff were resistant to the SDGs event at the beginning. In the words of a senior official, "the SDGs are too broad, with a clear risk of becoming an empty slogan" (Interview, 10 November 2016).[28] Therefore, the relationship between the SDGs and the works of UNDP officials was not immediately established, and the norm on the textual level exercised a limited impact on changing the patterns of behaviours of the institutional personnel. To address the discrepancy between textual commitments and actualities of people's work, the UNDP office combined a mixture of organisational means to further diffuse and advocate the SDGs. It initiated trainings and workshops on the SDGs among its staff and opened SDGs knowledge exchange to share experiences and establish examples to learn from.[29]

A greater factor in diffusing the SDGs into the daily workings of the country office was the economic and financial incentives triggered by the

[28] Also see in "The 169 commandments", 26th March, 2015, Economist, 2015.
[29] UNDP Opens SDG Knowledge Exchange in Bangkok, 24 October, 2016.

decline of core funding. Traditionally, the resources of the UNDP are located through the Target for Resource Assignment from the Core (TRAC) system, in which the country office receives the funding based on the country situation, performance and impact. Once China became a Middle-Income Country, the country office was no longer a priority for the TRAC funding, and this was when the "whole dynamics changed" (Conversation, 11 November 2016). Expressions of concerns about core funding became a typical topic among the staff. Financial challenges drove the office to seek external funding and to engage more intimately with the private sector. In late 2015, a circulated rumour indicated that the office was turning into a consultancy company, but it was mostly a subject of ridicule at that time. In 2016, however, this strategy became official. The "development consultancy model" required the staff to be familiar with their "products" and to "pitch for" potential partners. As the country director explained in the office retreat,

> "development consultancy is not a McKinsey thing which is for profit. It is a service oriented to advance development, not money oriented. We are not asking others to pay for our routine work but provide development service while they cover our service cost" (6 December 2016).

Despite the distinction made between the UNDP and the private company, the introduction of corporate language did reflect the changing financial orientations of the office. The consultancy model required a presentation of the office's "products" in an integrated way, and the SDGs provided exactly such a platform. Each team was asked to align its projects with the goals in the SDGs and listed their service in a one pager – in effect, this became the package where this global norm was associated with everyone's work, "leveraging UNDP's strengths to provide services to government and private sector to achieve [the] SDGs" (UNDP China Service Package, 2016).

Meanwhile, program managers in the UNDP realised that the resources would be allocated through the frameworks of SDGs, requiring adaptions in the proposals and rationales to secure further projects and their positions. A rather unexpected driving force behind the SDGs was the enthusiasm among public and private partners. The State Council launched the proposal to establish SDGs pilot areas, and the Ministry of Science and Technology approached the UNDP for cooperation on implementing this policy. In the "pitch meetings" that I attended with private firms, they were the ones that proposed and expressed clear preferences in the alignment of future projects with the SDGs, and they also sought information and knowledge on the SDGs from the UNDP office.

Therefore, with combined pressures of fundraising, job security and partners, the SDGs quickly were rapidly diffused and adopted by the UNDP staff and aligned with the existing and pipeline projects. Take the example of the UN project on the rights of the persons with disabilities, although the majority of its implementation finished before the SDGs campaign, in the final report published in 2016, it was framed under the Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). For the LGBT project that could not identify a directly related goal in the SDGs, it was advocated under the slogan of the SDGs: leave no one behind.

The most distinct example of the diffusion into projects was the formulation of the SDGs localisation initiative. The project was set up to link the SDGs with the plans of local governments and translate the goals into specific local policies in four steps: 1) orientation, trainings to link the SDGs with the 13th Five-Year Plan; 2) consultation, identifying challenges at the local level and formulating intervention plans; 3) implantation, initiating pilot

projects; 4) certification, monitoring and measuring the achievements of local governments. The SDGs localisation initiative was not a stand-alone project. From the second step, it aligned the experts and projects across the office with the local demands, in exploring the areas for cooperation. With the identification of problems linking to the availability of solutions, the expertise and knowledge were invented in the development project (Mitchell 2002) – as the program manager formally introduced SDGs as one of his specialisations. In the most recent restructuring of the UNDP China office in 2018, all the domestic projects were merged into one team under the banner of SDGs localisation that signified the institutionalisation of the norm into the oorganisational structure.

Once diffused widely into the projects, the storytelling of the SDGs was required on a daily basis, when the UNDP staff formulated their projects, pitched for partners, and advocated their activities. “How to sell the SDGs” turned into an essential part of the staff training in explaining and interpreting the UNDP’s work. The understanding of the “everydayness” here should be not limited to oral or rhetorical aspects. Instead, it represents ubiquitous appearances of normative messages – through words, visual images and texts. When the norms first made an appearance in the documents, one can already observe the narratives or stories emerging out of texts. However, such stories are not on an everyday level. The diffusion into projects demonstrates how the norms enter the daily operations and practices of development actors.

In this sense, in the later stage of norm diffusion, the storytelling acts as an institutional ritual, defined as repeated actions through which “actors make sense of the world, link the past to present and the present to the future, allow

expression of powerful emotions, and reaffirm, contest, reverse or disguise relationships (Crewe 2010, 318; also Bevir and Rhodes 2010). Once narration of the SDGs is ritualised, the daily activities are integrated into a broader agenda to advance organisational aims, while the meanings of the SDGs are constantly being reshaped and negotiated in this process.

Nonetheless, one question might be: if the spread of the SDGs into everyday practices are motivated by financial and organisational pressures, can we say that the norm has *genuinely* diffused within the UNDP? In 2017, only two staff from the UNDP China actually participated in and finished the Massive Open Online Course on SDGs that the office developed itself.[30] In the office retreat of the same year, merely two of the eight teams mentioned the SDGs in their work presentations.[31] The continuing lack of normative commitment indicates that not all the translators in international organisations are fully socialised into global norms and adopted institutionalised ways of thinking and behaviour, and thus the equivalency of international organisations to coherent and consistent norm entrepreneurs should be reconsidered. This brings us back to the discussion on the definition of norm diffusion and further illustrates why this dissertation emphasises diffusion as a process rather than an outcome measured by the change of normative beliefs. From text-based documents to everyday stories, even when program managers speak of the SDGs performatively, a norm's movements and transformations are regarded as part of the diffusion process, as long as the norm is present, ubiquitous and relevant to the actualities of work. Having

[30] Conversation on 17 July 2017: The two participants were the program manager of the SDGs localisation and the deputy country director.
[31] Retreat on 6 November 2017, this observation came from the UN Resident Coordinator, who reminded the staff not to forget their core work.

discussed how the SDGs shifted from document-based text to projects and everyday stories, the next part draws on specific examples of these stories to analyse their contents and features.

The SDGs Stories

Among the stories about the SDGs that appear in the documents, meetings and conversations, the following examples are selected as they were narrated at different organisational positions (from the Administrator to national project official), at various venues and moments (from formal speech to informal discussion), towards a range of audience (from internal staff to local partners). The heterogeneities embedded in the stories reflect how external contexts and characteristics situating the norm translators in everyday practices might influence the normative messages and beliefs conveyed. More importantly, the common features shared by the stories across their heterogeneities define what constitutes a story in norm diffusion.

The first story was from the new UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner, appointed in April 2017. In his very first global town hall meeting – a formal internal interactive platform with global staff streamed live, Steiner introduced himself and the SDGs. As a comprehensive statement from the head of the UNDP, it is worth quoting in length here:

> [Example 1] "As some of you know, over years, I find myself [shifting] from rural development more and more to the domain of natural resources and environment. The least articulated and well-reasoned, and also at that time quite marginalised agenda was that dealing with the sustainable dimension of development, particular the vulnerability of the poor…I then found myself for the next 15 to 20 years, through the 1992 Rio process and then in 2012 in Rio+20, having a sense that the notion of sustainable development, the concept, the narrative, the paradigm has finally reached the point of maturity.
>
> The chronology of development: you remember in the late 80s and 90s, you first develop economy, then you fix your social problem, finally you get around to fix the

> environment. That was the chronology of development. The price you paid for progress. At the beginning of the 21th century, to me, it was very clear that this equation simply did not work anymore. That is why the concept of sustainable development and the role of the United Nations within it, within the science and policy, and within the implementation domain across different sectors was so central.
>
> And I *truly* believe that 2012 was a watershed, and I *truly* believe that agenda 2030 is a major departure point from where we were (emphasis in original). That is why, finding myself after 30 years in the some of you may say 'the wilderness' but I will not argue so, to be back at the centre of development agenda, now the agenda for sustainable development, the agenda 2030, that is integrated, universal, that is shared not just in a perception that development has to do with what poor people do in the South, but what actually wealthier people do in the north."

What was so distinct in the account above is the blending of his own professional experience and the formation of the SDGs. Particularly, both followed the same sequence of events or plot, shifting from the "years of wilderness" to the "centre of development", and Steiner was there from the very beginning with the concept of sustainable development. This demonstrated the close relationship between stories and temporality, as the former transformed the discordance and incoherence in the human experience of time into a meaningful and organised order (Ricoeur 2010, Rapport 2014). The sequence of the events underlined a linear and progressive logic embedded in the chronology of development, establishing the inevitability and legitimacy of the SDGs as an answer to the unsolved problems. By associating the individual development with this chronology, the Administrator also sought to consolidate his own legitimacy as the new leader of the organisation. The role of the UNDP in the SDGs was explained in the accounts that immediately followed,

> "And I know out there are still many people who believe that agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, is just another thing that we discuss in the very auspicious conference room here. I think they are entirely wrong. I am a deep believer in the vital moment that the SDGs, when they are adopted as the agenda 2030 here, represent for development, for the future of humanity, and also, the role of the UN.
>
> Among them, clearly, and very prominently, the UNDP. If there is one agenda that we have been waiting for, that we were established for, that we were created for, then it is the agenda 2030, not the sub-division and segmentation of development in either subgroups or subsectors, but the ability of one entity within the United Nations system

> to think and to advise, to support, and to walk alongside the government and all the actors in the nation, and think in a joint way what development requires…and here they are, the UNDP, more present across the planet than virtually any other entity, even the private sector, with privileged access to government, to civil society, to the private sector, but an unrivalled ability to draw best practices from literally every corner of the world" (27 June 2017)

Steiner outlined an interactive relationship between the norm (the SDGs), individual actor (himself) and the organisation (the UNDP). Confronting the scepticism directly, he expressed a strong personal commitment to the norm, and described it as if the UNDP was waiting for such an agenda to arrive. With its global coverage and expertise, the UNDP was not only the most appropriate organisation to implement the SDGs, but more importantly, it needed this norm to fulfil what it was created for and what it had not achieved before. In this way, the SDGs were interpreted as embedded in the original identities as well as contributing to the new ones of the UNDP.

The second example of the SDGs stories similarly came from a high-level official, but the audience was at the country level. In his visit to China, the Assistant Administrator of the UNDP talked about the formation and adoption of the SDGs:

> [Example 2] "[The nations] want it to be our goals. And because of that, there is a better sequence of using international conferences…and open working groups where scientists, citizens and many others [participated]. So lots of people felt this is a very interesting process, and it is a process that mixes more scientific and technical knowledge with more value-based [beliefs]…there is an understanding that this is a global agenda.
>
> What grew out of this was a relatively complex agenda, and then there were lots of discussions at the intergovernmental level: how can we translate this to something meaningful? And suddenly this idea of the 17 Goals came out of the discussion. Because every member state was an active participant, at the end, nobody wants to be left outside.
>
> Lots of concerns and interests could find themselves in the goals. As most countries were not happy with all the goals, everybody felt they were not worse off than the other countries…we heard some very strong views on inequality and things like this, but once a country has been allowed to say we don't like this, we don't agree, we are concerned and we think it is imprecise, they felt they have been heard, and the consensus was this is a good global agenda" (13 January 2017)

When narrating the SDGs to the Chinese audience, this official emphasised the legitimacy of the norm through a detailed description of its formation

process. The story gave the scenario of how countries came together and deliberated over the agenda in an open, transparent and accountable context, the result of which transcended their internal differences, maintained their sense of ownership and justified the application of the norm across countries. In other words, this story contained a plot of consensus. It highlighted a distinguished aspect of stories, as they relied not merely on reason or rationalistic accounts, but also on emotion and spontaneity. In addition to the democratic and deliberative mechanisms, the SDGs "suddenly" came out, and at the end of the conversation, the official specifically underlined how the SDGs "just felt right". In this way, the stories appealed to the spontaneous realisations in moments of collection action to advocate normative messages.

When the SDGs diffused from the global management teams to the country offices, programme managers were expected to narrate the SDGs to their partners and stakeholders. The most typical and "official" narration of the SDGs was from the standpoint of the localisation initiative, targeting county-level officials:

> [Example 3] "The 2030 Agenda can be taken as the national plan. China's five principles of development (innovation, openness, greenness, coordination, inclusiveness) overlap with the SDGs. China is at a crucial period of transition. Despite its economic growth, it faces problems with pollution and income inequality, and the government and the public have realised the problematic nature of the traditional development model. China needs the transition, and the professional and international development consultations to link local development to a global perspective" (Interview, 23 January 2017).

At the local level, the stories compared the SDGs to the national development policies and framed a natural and pre-existing alignment between the two. The elements of conflict were minimalized, as if the SDGs were originally designed for the locale, and therefore there would be few political and institutional hindrances for accepting the norm among governmental agencies. The story here followed a rigorous logic of syllogisms,

consisting of major and minor premises and a conclusion: the *SDGs overlapped with the national plan on the new model of development*; *China needed the new development model*; *therefore, China needed the SDGs and its international perspective*. The syllogistic logic is unusual in everyday speeches for its pedantic nature (Feldman and Almquist 2012), yet in the communications with Chinese officials, it was used to emphasise the logical rationality behind the adoption of the SDGs.

The quest for rationality was further reflected in the SDGs stories emerging out the reports and discussion papers in the country office, which turned the SDGs into measurable targets and yardsticks to monitor the progress of China's implementation (see Graph 3.2).

Graph 3.2. UNDP Discussion Paper, "Sustainable Development Goals in Motion: China's Progress and the 13th Five-Year Plan". June 2016.

ANNEX I The Summary of Results for SDGs Targets Analyses

SDGs	Is the target quantifiable?	Indicators	Data Availability		Policy Support			
			Official data sources	Other data sources	National Objectives	Overarching Policy Guidance	Concrete Policy Initiatives	Overall Assessment[3]
Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere								
Target 1.1	√	Population Living under Poverty Line (World Bank Standard and National Poverty Line)	√	√	√	√	√	3
Target 1.2	√	Proportion of Population Living below National Poverty Line (Disaggregated by Sex and Age Group)		√		√		1
Target 1.3		Percentage of The Population Covered by Social Protection Systems	√		√	√	√	3
Target 1.4		The Number of Bank Branches per 10,000 People; Mobile Coverage Rate	√		√	√		1
Target 1.5		Number of Deaths Due to Accidents of Productive Activities per 100,000 People	√			√		1
Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all								
Target 4.1 Target 4.6	√	Primary School Enrolment Rate; Literacy Rate		√	√	√		1
Target 4.2		Pre-school Education Enrolment Rate	√		√			1
Target 4.3		Percent of Population who attained tertiary education (Disaggregated by Sex)		√	√	√		1
Target 4.4		-	√			√	√	2
Target 4.5		Net Enrolment Rate of Primary Schools (Disaggregated by Sex)		√		√	√	2
Target 4.7		No Data Available						0

[3] Overall policy assessment is measured on a scale of 0-3, where 0 = week policy support (neither national objectives nor any policy interventions exist), 1 = not sure (when a. either national objectives or policy guidance exist, but no concrete policy initiatives observed; b. both national objectives and policy guidance exist, but no concrete policy initiatives observed; c. neither national objectives nor policy guidance exist, but concrete policy initiatives observed), 2 = relatively strong policy support (either national objectives or policy guidance exist, together with the presence of concrete policy initiatives), 3 = strong policy support (all exist, including national objectives, policy guidance and concrete policy initiatives).

The extraordinary nature of this paper by the UNDP Economist was that, despite the researcher's awareness of the limits on data availability, the quantifiability of targets and indicators, and the "rather arbitrary" matching between SDGs and national policies, an assessment form with quantitative measurements was still the format of presentation. The assessment and index were produced under the pressure of local partners and international organisations to make the SDGs "concrete" and "less abstract", when the audience expanded from Chinese officials to include general development practitioners. It demonstrated that normative stories emerged not only from rhetorical acts, but also from numbers, charts and graphs, which established and reinforced the norm's legitimacy on a statistical and visualised basis. Numbers were regarded as the mathematical *lingua franca* in the development field, with rigorous rules of collection and analysis that claimed the transportation and transcendence across different contexts, and thus the possibility of universal application of normative scripts (Porter 1995, Berger 2017). The feasibility of being measured and quantified was associated with a greater degree of objectivity and rationality, resonating with global audit culture and "rituals of verification" (Power 1997, Strathern 2000) that rendered the SDGs increasingly visible and clear.

Under this spectacle, the SDGs story took another shape. With the same beginning of the "full alignment" between global norm and the 13th Five-Year Plan, "a closer look", however, "may lead to concerns about the varied levels of support…15% of targets are strongly supported and another 32% of targets are provided with relatively strong policy support…for 45% of the targets, it is difficult to discern the level of policy support" (UNDP Working Paper 2016, 38). In other words, with the normative fit in principle, there were numerical

gaps to be fulfilled, and the SDGs provided a technical solution, with measurable standards turning the targets into something tangible and achievable, and monitoring "integration with policy-making" and degree of implementation. Furthermore, linking the local policies to the SDGs demonstrated merely one direction of norm travelling. In the discussion paper, it also stated that,

> "The world is closely anticipating the actions and commitments of China to further its development endeavour into the Post-2015 era…In any case, any new global initiative or the set of new global goals will require the active support and participation of China. In addition, the international community as a whole can draw on China's wealth of experiences in development, as China possesses characteristics of both developing and developed countries" (UNDP Working Paper 2016, 6).

Strategically appealing to the international status desired by Chinese actors, the author advocated the norm from the standpoint of how the local might influence the global, arguing that China should adopt the SDGs, not entirely because of its own domestic agenda, but due to its impact on the global society. Within this narrative, the principles and implementation frameworks on the SDGs remained undefined, therefore leaving the space and incentives for the experience of China to influence how the norm should develop in other localities.

What Stories Share in Common

The above accounts of stories draw from a variety of sources, in terms of their contents, contexts and positions of narrators, to illustrate how the stories about a specific norm is formatted and circulated within institutions. These cases, of course, have not exhausted the scope of everyday stories about the SDGs. When the audience changed to, for example, the private sector, who "held a different mind-set in comparison" (Interview, 19 August 2017), the

plot of stories transformed again to accommodate the standpoints of the business market, defining the SDGs as the pre-condition of any "deals", and as the method of moralising the commercial activities and public relations for private firms. Notwithstanding the varieties of those stories, the remainder of this chapter focuses on their common features: what do stories in norm diffusion share in common? Based on amendments to Polleta's analysis of stories (2006), I outline the following four basic aspects.

Firstly, stories are embedded with normative messages that they transform from a set of collective beliefs and values into a particular chronology of events. This feature is not delimited to the specific stories narrated in norm diffusion, but refers to a general definition of story as it always contains the expression of a normative point. In the context of this dissertation, the normative points of stories are the global or local norms. With the intention of advocating the norms, the stories take the form of what Rainer Forst (2013) called the "narratives of justifications", that bind power and authority, and attach historical significance and emotional appeals to ideas and values.

In the narratives that justify the SDGs above, the sources of legitimacy are particularly underlined through the descriptions of its formation process, its promising outcomes or its measurable feasibility, to generate a desirable normative order. Even without explicit statement, the messages are clear in terms of the adoption and implementation of the SDGs as the norm to guide and monitor the national and global development. The message is embedded within multiple layers of normative stories and orders. The SDGs can be associated with the recognition of personal reputation and leadership, or with the local normative agendas and existing policy frameworks. The differences and conflicts between these messages are omitted in the accounts, while a

mutually reinforcing relationship emerges out of the sequence of events and arguments.

Secondly, stories in institutional contexts are canonical, as they are shaped by institutional conventions and the surrounding structural conditions. Stories are told to make sense of the unfamiliar, by assimilating the events into familiar frameworks or plots. Therefore they follow institutional rules and schemas in shaping how the stories should be told. The accounts above are the stories made in an international development organisation, which underpin its own authority, field of expertise and institutional identity (Czarniawska 1997). According to Tania Li (2007) the development agencies translate "the will to improve" through "problematization" that identifies the deficiencies, and then "rendering technical" that defines the knowledge and techniques to fulfil the gaps, thereby crafting the space for their interventions. The two-step logic is generalised as conventions for development institutions, and the stories of the SDGs display the repetition of such a plot, when the norm constantly addresses the urgent challenges, be it the lack of expertise in sustainable development or the need for cooperation mechanisms, and provides the adopters with available and tangible solutions.

The stories also take into account of the conventions and routines of the audience, adapting the vocabulary in conforming to the institutional habitus of the listeners. The linkage between the SDGs and the Five-Year Plan uses the familiar institutional symbols to transform the unfamiliar global norm into comparable equivalent in local contexts – which downplays the differences in institutional histories and longevity of these goals, and stresses that the UNDP and the Chinese government are following the similar top-down routines that implement centralised planning through sub-level agencies. Incorporating

conventions and contextual requirements, the principal convention of the stories always portrays the involvement and intervention of the UNDP as a necessity, and the SDGs, despite its novelty, is an expression of the historical continuity in the UNDP practices rather than an abrupt departure from the past.

Thirdly, normative stories in institutions contain more ambiguities than clarities. The SDGs stories argue for the norm's leading role in global development and its alignment with local normative frameworks, but they do not explain in detail how this dynamic operates in practice: such as which sustainable development goals should come first, what are the relationships between the goals, or how this global norm informs local practices. Instead of specifying the underlying mechanisms, the stories retain a sense of spontaneity, through the expressions like "it felt right" or "this vital moment", that capture the emotional and affective dimensions of the normative messages. Therefore, the stories create missing links in events or processes, which function as a "narrative ellipsis" (Polletta 2006) that encourages the engagement of the audience to participate in the recursive process of storytelling. In the cases of human rights and rule of law discussed later, the stories of personal suffering and experiences of other countries contain ideational and policy preferences – even though, the details of which practices should be learned and changed remain ambiguous and leave the space for multiple actors to fill in the missing links.

The power of stories thus rely on such ambiguity and affective impacts: it implies rather than clarifies. Norm translators precisely exploit such ambiguities to challenge the normative *status quo* (Bakhtin 1986, Ewick and Silbey 2003). When the SDGs stories are told along the institutional

conventions at local and global levels, they simultaneously infringe and transgress these conventions by erasing the boundaries between the two domains, and establish new interests and coalitions coalesced around the norm. In the second story on the deliberative process of the SDGs, it is the ambiguity and unspecification on the priorities of the goals that open the possibility for states to accept the norm and adapt it according to their own national agendas, thereby creating a coalition for further international cooperation.

The openness to interpretation pertains to the fourth aspect of stories: they are multipolar, multivocal and polemical. The above accounts demonstrated how a normative package is selected, framed and fragmented depending on the actor's capacities and positions, and how the meanings of the SDGs alter in its diffusion. Each story represents a different translation of the norm, and the ideas, actors and institutions are linked through the chains of translation into a common network, where there is no original of the norm but a heterogeneous continuum of translations. The multivocality of stories explains the internal divergence and complexity of international organisations, when the imagined singular narrative or fixed identity is replaced by a multiplicity of understandings and meanings.

This feature largely challenges the bureaucratic approach to international organisations that analyse them as pathological through the imposition of standards and routines and the "fixing of meanings" (Barnett and Finnermore 1999, 711). When internal institutional consistency is unsettled by stories, the actions of storytelling are polemical as they form the sites of contestation and negotiation between institutions. Institutional actors communicate to each other through affirming or deconstructing their stories, as in the example of

the SDGs, the local and global institutions negotiate the domains for international intervention and cooperation by reshaping the stories of the meanings and measurements of the SDGs.

The constant processes of interaction in the making and metamorphosis of stories reflect the distribution of resources among the narrators and thus their relative power. However, there is a distinction between material-based and ideational power, and the use of stories is often associated with the latter as a means of persuasion in the discussion of institutionalism. Instead of coercing other actors through the provision of economic and political resources, stories are employed to make up the lack of other resources, and rest on the "ability of idea carriers to convince other agents that a novel, even alien policy paradigms is in their interest" (Mandelkern and Shalev 2010, 460; also Blyth 2007). This is especially the case in the time of uncertainty, such as the arrival of a new norm or the transition period of local society, when normative frameworks and identities of actors are being redefined, stories are invoked to help understand the situation and construct the interactive basis for collection actions.

The stories in norm diffusion are used as means to persuade the audience into accepting a set of beliefs and values, and one of the major impacts of the storytelling is the transgression and eradication of local-global boundaries. In the narration of the SDGs, the plot was not that the global norm necessarily presented a "better paradigm" than the local, or that the domestic practices successfully "localised" the global norm – rather, it was the statement that there existed no fundamental difference or division between the local and the global. Based on this premise, the translations of the norm become *glocal* in travelling through recursive dialogues between local and global actors. The

retaining of both universal commitments and contextual knowledge make the conceptual boundaries too ambiguous and ineffective to describe norm diffusion defined in a local-global dichotomy.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces the institutional context in the UNDP China as an international development operating in parallel power relationships, recognising the local power and its donor identity, while undermining local claims to knowledge and expertise through the racial inequalities that persist in the development sector. The projects from the PEG and PPU teams are selected for further analysis due to their relevance to UNDP's focus on right-based development, and will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

After sketching the background, this chapter uses the case of the SDGs to trace the process of norm metamorphosis emerging in this institutional setting: in other words, how a norm turns into stories in the everyday practices of an international organisation. It examines the movement of the SDGs from its global epistemic community and organisational space to country offices and local actors. The norm firstly achieves documentary reality, and then, driven by materialistic incentives, becomes embedded in the implementation of UNDP's projects. The stories of the SDGs are narrated across a variety of venues and audiences, through the acts of texts, speeches, conversations and numbers. Despite their difference in content, the stories share the same features of being normative, canonical, ambiguous and polyvocal, rendering them the instruments of persuasion as well as the sites of contestation and negotiation.

Chapter 4
Personalising Human Rights

> "Replace the term human rights with basic rights!"
>
> Colleague's advice on document translation

> "We use statistics to evoke the rationality of people, and stories to touch the heart of people."
>
> Civil society activist working on the UNDP report

Opposite the UN compound in Beijing, graffiti and engravings cover the curbs, benches and pavements. They were authored by wandering petitioners, usually coming from other provinces in China, who appealed to the UN as their last resort against local and national authorities. Ignored by the UN, they left their appeals inscribed on the landscape in Beijing's diplomatic district. These appeals, read by UN workers during their lunch break or on the way home, are mostly accounts and histories of their personal sufferings and struggles. On the other side of the gate, in the human rights conferences at the UN compound, "formal representatives from the marginalised communities" discuss the issues that are allowed, legitimatised and sponsored in the UN working agenda. Despite the obvious irony and contrasting inequality here, the UN-recognised narrators also speak of personal accounts of sufferings, along strikingly similar plot lines to those of the petitioners, where everyday lives are disrupted and destroyed by structural injustices and repressions. How do personal stories, despite contrasting and different venues, become the dominant format in human rights advocacy?

This chapter looks into this question through the contested norm of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights. Drawing on debates in contemporary political philosophy, I firstly examine the relationship between human rights and storytelling, and how the latter is being used as

evidence, tools of mobilisation, and means of localising the global normative packages. Moving on to the UNDP's project on the LGBT in Asia, the first UN initiative addressing LGBT rights in the region, I trace the ways in which personal stories are chosen, and build two major arguments. First, instead of training and empowering the narrators, norm translators focus on the selection and organisation of typical stories so as to highlight structural restraints in defined areas and justify normative changes. Second, instead of replacing or reframing the local norm, the selected personal stories maintain the centrality of individuals in human rights advocacy, while redefining and shifting the meaning of individuality and personhood to include local norms such as family roles. In responses to the doubts regarding the representativeness and generalisablity of personal stories, norm translators supplement the stories based on data and lessons from other localities, which reinforce the public and universalistic character of the human rights issues beyond the impression of being emotional, subjective and individualistic voices.

Personal Storytelling in Human Rights

Personal storytelling produces accounts of individual experience. It forms a central mechanism in cognition as human beings tell stories to make sense of the world and create social meanings (Polkinghorne 1988, MacIntyre, 1991, McAdams 1995, Ewick and Sibley 1995). Shaping personal identities, stories are rarely pure products of individuals, but the result of ongoing intersubjective dialogues, in which "the very notions of selfhood and subjectivity that are brought into relief are themselves creations of a social relation between self and other" (Jackson 2006, 22). Neither are stories

restricted and refined to the private sphere: they travel from personal domain to a broader range of audiences.

So what happens when personal stories enter the public domain? The debate in political philosophy on personal storytelling concerns its role in public deliberation. As a response to the practices of privileging critical argument and disembodied reasoning in deliberative democracy, Young (1996) underlines the use of personal narratives in empowering the disadvantaged and fostering mutual understanding. She points out at least three effects of personal storytelling. First, they reveal the particular experiences of those that cannot be shared by others, therefore evoking sympathy and building a basis of social justice. Second, they reveal a source of normative and cultural meanings that cannot be justified and explained in argumentation. Third, they reveal a total and situated social knowledge from the perspective of the tellers and contribute to collective social wisdom.

Justifications regarding the normative legitimacy and practical utility of storytelling (Sander 1997, Young 2000) are confronted by the argument-based approach, questioning the representativeness or policy implications of stories (Miller 2002). The emphasis on personal storytelling in public deliberation is restricted in two ways: one is that both the opponents and proponents of storytelling agree that the personal experience should be combined with some normative principles (in Young's words, "the thinner conditions for communicative democracy", 1996), because storytelling is believed to advance differences rather than foster agreements. The second is that the discussion on storytelling mainly focuses on democratic contexts, either deliberative or communicative, but less on its general usage in social movements and contentious politics beyond the boundaries of political regimes.

Empirical studies of personal storytelling address these limits by examining the effects of narratives in creating joint preferences and agreements, and expanding the conceptual scope of personal narrative as a more general instrument in collective actions and movements. Polleta and Lee (2006), engaging closely with the philosophical debate, draw on the analysis of personal stories told online after the 9/11. They demonstrate that personal stories, while channelling marginalised views and provoking empathy, help the formulation and justification of opinions, and more importantly, allow competing views to compromise for unanticipated agreement. The reason that stories can foster agreement is due to their ambivalent and allusive nature, which invites interpretations and stories to be told in return, enabling alternative perspectives to emerge and communicate possible joint preferences without open confrontation.

The capacity of personal storytelling to forge agreement across difference does not put it in a contestation-free environment. Instead, it is used politically as a general tool in collective mobilisation (Polleta, et al 2011). Social movement studies acknowledge personal stories as building bricks in consolidating common identities and mobilising participants (Somers 1992, Tilly 2002, Loseke 2007, Stark 2007). Individual testimonies are particularly important in legitimatising public causes and galvanising support (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The ways in which personal stories mobilise support are unique as they rely less on the audience to evaluate the messages rationalistically, than the audience's attitudinal change in immersing in the "engrossing experience of losing oneself" (Polleta 2009, Mayer 2014).

To summarise, once personal storytelling enters the public domain, it stands out as politically for three reasons: the egalitarian tendency of

empowering the disadvantaged and marginalised subjects to voice their interests and concerns, the persuasive effect of evoking empathy and exposing different perspectives, and the mobilising function of formulating collective identity and rallying public support. All these three factors resonate with the issue characteristics of human rights. The emphasis on the marginalised groups creates embodied right-based individuals and exposes entrenched structural inequalities. The emotional content of stories presents an unfamiliar experience to the larger population and policy-makers in order to convince them of the necessity of normative changes. Furthermore, personal storytelling functions as the linking mechanisms in establishing and consolidating local and global networks for human rights campaigns.

The most direct use of personal stories in human rights is as testimony or evidence. Schaffer and Smith (2004) provide a systematic examination of the relationship between human rights and personal stories, and they argue that individuals initiate the human rights process by telling stories in courts, inquiries and tribunals. Through the acts of remembering, personal accounts expose the violence, abuse and atrocity, and become subversive methods of overcoming the traumatic experience (Levy 2011). A new subjectivity emerges out of personal narratives, sometimes referred to as the "rights consciousness", that can only be formed through legal and political activities to reshape the ways subjects think about themselves (Merry 2003). This subjectivity corresponds to the individual-based framework of human rights, and resonates with the norm's universalistic "commitment to narratability" in empowering all human beings to speak (Schaffer and Smith 2004, Slaughter 2007).

By creating a common subject and establishing the personhood of narrating individuals, or *homo narratus*, personal storytelling sustains the universalism embedded in human rights. When human rights begin to travel across national and regional boundaries, personal stories act as ways of contextualising and localising the global norm. This process involves the transportation and collection of stories, importing stories from elsewhere and accumulating stories of local experience. Let us focus on the production of personal stories at the local level for the moment. The suffering of a victim in human rights abuse is now no longer a parochial and isolated account. First of all, it provides a counter-history apart from the dominant discourse, actualises structural problems in local society, and provides grounds for imagining and advancing political change. Meanwhile, this account is framed in the language of human rights that is familiar to a transnational audience. Personalisation acts as a type of localisation, verifying the presence of suffering and the need for normative change at the local level. When this local account returns to the global package, it enriches its cosmopolitan appeal by putting a personal face to the human rights principle, and attaching to it the influx of local grievances and violations that constantly give life and power to global movements (Merry 2006).

Therefore, personal stories as materials of evidence, sources of subjectivity and means of localisation are regarded as effective instruments in transnational human rights advocacy. This also means that personal stories tend to be elicited, selected and framed by rights workers, activists and campaigners, shifting control over the stories away from their original narrators. Schaffer and Smith (2004, 2006) point out how activists seek out the experiences of victims, speak on their behalf and frame their stories in

human rights. This practice is enhanced by the UN's "decade strategy" that focuses on a particular marginalised group with concentrated attention for a decade, and encourages the telling of local stories across countries. The intensified translation and mediation processes of using personal stories in human rights situate translators at the centre, as they move across different "layers" in local and global languages and communities and enable the communication through intelligible stories (Merry and Stern 2005).

Integrating personal storytelling into human rights highlights the contradiction associated with the global human rights norms, which is usually termed as the tension between universalism *versus* relativism or rights *versus* cultures (Englund 2006, Crewe and Axelby 2012). The doubts cast over the universalistic application of human rights across distinct cultural entities, when reflected in the discussion of personal stories, is how personal stories can accommodate local understandings while retaining a global human rights commitment. Translators therefore need to interpret both up-and-down to frame personal stories in the language of individual rights that are compatible with cultural beliefs and symbols. In so doing, they must apply conventions and rules in which personal stories are produced and framed, that include the coaching of subjects on how they speak (Loseke 2001). Merry and Stern (2005) explore the example of the female inheritance movement in Hong Kong (also in see Chan 1995) to illustrate how social workers train women to speak in rational "rights talks", replacing the traditional kinship-related narratives, while the resident committee helps them to create dramas and songs to highlight patriarchal injustice. A unified identity as indigenous women is thus formed, while subjects who fail to generalise their experiences into stories of rights violation are marginalised.

Thus, while the deepening involvements of human rights translators accelerate the movements of stories and localisation of norms, the application of conventions and rules in personal storytelling might subvert some of its liberating effects. Some subjects are further marginalised or silenced in the formation and circulation of their own stories, and personal stories, when presented in the global surplus of images and symbols on suffering and victimhood, might no longer raise the expected responses of empathy and understanding among the public.[32] Except for these challenges to personal stories in human rights in particular, the general practice of storytelling has been questioned on its generalizability and authenticity. The phrases such as "everyone has a story" or "it's just a story" indicate the particularistic, idiosyncratic and subjective features of stories that tend to discredit their appeals. If the representativeness of personal stories is in question, then the normative change and policy implications are not as persuasive. Polleta and Lee (2006) discover that, although the participants are enthusiastic about the normative values of stories, personal stories are seen as politically unserious and less effective in policy-oriented and technical discussions. This is partly shaped by popular assumptions on the use of personal storytelling, compelling its combination with other rhetorical forms of arguments and evidence to advance claims.

Norm translators need to address these multi-fold challenges in making credible and effective use of personal stories. This chapter focuses on their

[32] The evolution in technologies, media channels and Internet companies complicates the implications of storytelling in human rights (Gregory 2006, Jørgensen 2018). The use of audio-visual media, for example, intensifies the competition between human rights organisations and the production of short victim stories meeting the requirement of the media, which lead to compassion fatigue instead of participatory empathy.

practices in transporting and repacking individual accounts in human rights advocacy. In other words, I examine the movement of stories, rather than the initial producing or final receiving ends. Building on existing studies, I advance two arguments based on the case of the LGBT rights. First, instead of coaching and training, translators are predominantly in the role of selecting, assembling and presenting the "typical" and "representative" personal stories. The power relationship between original narrators and translators is not entirely asymmetrical. In advocacy networks, especially in emerging human rights issues, there is a circulation of personnel within the disadvantaged community, the civil society, international organisations and academic institutions. The translators can be narrators of personal experiences themselves, and identities of local or global activists are porous and switch frequently. Second, when selected stories systematically expose structural inequalities and advocate normative changes, the formation of personal stories in terms of human rights language does not necessarily replace traditional and cultural narratives. They are subtly and allusively included in the stories to resonate with local norms. The centrality of individual rights might be still maintained, while the realm of the individual and personhood is being shifted and redefined.

Contesting LGBT Rights

LGBT rights are an emerging norm in the realm of human rights, described by Petchesky (2000) as "the newest kid in the block". The campaigns for LGBT communities, previously linked with concepts of privacy and liberation, entered human rights discourse in the early 1990s. The "turn toward human rights" was largely driven by transnational advocacy networks,

notably the International Lesbian and Gay Association, which connected regional and global activists as well as mainstream human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (Kollman and Waites 2009). Another force behind the expansion of the LGBT rights movement was the epidemic of HIV/AIDS that brought further stigma to sexual and gender minorities and unequal attention to different minority groups (more funding and resources to the gay community, for instance), while popularising the LGBT rights at the international level in association with the health rights (Plummer 2006).

Regional organisations like the EU turned into norm adopters and played a leading role advocating for LGBT rights, as the European Court of Human Rights became the first international institution providing legal recognition and decriminalisation rules, with horizontal networks across the region and vertical resources distributed from the top to support the LGBT campaigns among member states (Ayoub 2013, Symons and Altman 2015). Beginning in the 1990s, the UN emphasised the inclusion and protection of sexual and gender minorities in existing international treaties, and the subject made its public appearance in the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995.

In 2006, the international community of legal experts and activists produced two documents, the Declaration of Montreal at the International Conference on LGBT Rights, and the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, representing the efforts of global civil society in reaching an international normative agreement. Following the joint statements initiated by individual countries, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the resolutions 17/19 (2011) and 27/32 (2014) against violence and discrimination

targeted at the LGBT population. The two resolutions supplied legal instruments and references for transnational LGBT campaigns, although no formal treaty or global normative text has yet been passed at the UN level.

In a positive light, the integration of the LGBT agenda into the human rights discourse demonstrates the possibility of re-imagining the language of rights in realising the pluralist identities and becoming relevant to the everyday struggle of marginalised population (Chase 2016). Nonetheless, LGBT rights are an exemplary contested or "polarised" norm (Symons and Altman 2015), resisted and fractured in at least three aspects. First, global homophobia and the right wing as a "political and modular force" repudiate the LGBT movement (Weiss and Bosia, 2013). A transnational conservative network of organisations and governments advocate religious and traditional beliefs in preserving heternormative "family values" (Ayoub 2014). Mule, Khan and Mckenzie (2018), based on in-depth interviews with UN officials, describe the daily resistance posed by a global anti-LGBT coalition, including Russia and intergovernmental organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the African Group. The motivation behind such developments has sometimes been interpreted as less cultural or religious than ideological, when state actors conveniently borrow the homophobia discourse as instruments to resist the demands of human rights challenging the domestic sovereignty (Bosia 2014, Symons and Altman 2015).

The second and third polarising forces come from within. On the one hand, within the campaign itself, there are intense disagreements and contradictions on the legitimacy and effectiveness of the LGBT rights discourse. For instance, existing expressions and definitions around the LGBT communities are taken as not flexible or fluid enough to capture the diversities

and complexity within the population, and the categories of sexualities and intimate citizenship evolve in a process of "becoming" (Browne 2008). There exists a tension between "the global queer performative transnational politics involving diasporic and border-crossing subjectivities on the one hand, and liberal gay rights politics, which presumes a universal global gay subject and may develop within a homonormative and homonationalist context on the other" (Gross 2013, 125). This contradiction resonates with the postcolonial critique of human rights frameworks as "compulsory, exclusionary and impositional", failing to reflect the local conditions and the variety of sexual practices and subjectivities, and provoking conflicts and backlashes against local advocates (Kollman and Waites 2009, Bosia 2014).[33]

On the other hand, further divisions are found within the body of international actors. The mainstream human rights institutions and UN agencies are not proactively adopting LGBT norms, but largely pushed and lobbied by international civil society organisations (Chase 2016). For development institutions previously engaging in human rights and sexual rights, such as the development agencies in the UK, Netherlands or Norway, it is common to update the pre-existing programmes to include the LGBT normative demands, while in institutions with less priorities on human rights, such as the World Bank, IMF or Japan International Cooperation Agency, the inclusion of the LGBT norm is slow and partial (Bergenfield and Miller 2014).

[33] One critique on the Yogyakarta Principles given in the Bosia (2014)'s analysis is that it pre-assumed that all people had a gender and a sexual orientation, while negating the experiences of different gendered systems and sexual acts without relying on the dual system of gender and sexual orientation. In the special issue on LGBT human rights in Contemporary Politics (2009), Seckinelgin and Long provided accounts on how Western or global activists failed to recognise the non-conforming expressions of sexual minorities in Africa, India and Iran, resulting in more harm and violence inflicted on local movements.

The history of LGBT activism in China follows a similar trajectory: the reshaping of collective identity took place in urbanisation and neoliberal capitalism, gaining political space and economic resources in governmental campaigns against the HIV/AIDS, and complicated by the exploration of post-colonial and post-socialist sexuality and subjectivity (Rofel 2007, Ho, et al 2018). What makes the LGBT rights a curious case in China, however, is the state's ambiguous attitude towards this new norm, contrasting to its usual stances regarding the human rights norms. Here I focus primarily on the state's position at the international level.[34] It follows neither the "resistance route" in categorically dispelling the legitimacy of the Western or universal values, nor the "slow socialisation route" in engaging in intense persuasion and negotiation with local and international actors (Foot 2000, Kent 2007). In China, homosexuality was decriminalised in 1997 and depathologised in 2001, although it was never systematically deemed illegal. When sexual minorities were vulnerable to punishment under the "crime of hooliganism" before 1997, it was narrowly applied to male homosexuality related to sexual assault (Bian 2015, Wei 2018). The government is predominantly silent on the LGBT issues, based on a principle of "not encouraging, not opposing and not promoting".

Looking at its statements in international human rights institutions, China, in the second Universal Periodic Reviews in 2013, responded to the

[34] The state is not a unitary actor, and the attitudes on the LGBT norm differ across ministries, levels of administration, and public institutions. The governmental agencies interacting closely with the LGBT community or the "risk population", for public health or legal protection, such as the Centre for Disease Control, local governments in Yunnan or the All-China Women's Federation, were familiarised with the norm if not yet socialised into it (Wang 2015). Meetings with activists (13 January 2017) suggested that the attitudes at educational or publicity departments tended to be more conservative, reflected in the failed cases against the Ministry of Education on the homophobic contents in text books since 2015 and the controversial ban on homosexual contents in netcasting in 2017. Here I focus on China's statements on the international level in relation to human rights institutions and conventions.

recommendations on prohibiting SOGIE-based discrimination as "accepted and already implemented", in reference to the Constitution and labour laws that ensured the equality among citizens. In the formal review of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2014, the Chinese representatives stated that all Chinese citizens were protected by law regardless of sexual orientation, and the domestic social attitudes "towards homosexuality were becoming more progressive". This was followed by another comment during the fifth review of the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) that China "does not view LGBT as a mental disease…Indeed, LGBT people face some real challenges in terms of social acceptance, employment, education, health, and family life" (UNDP 2016, Tongyu 2016). In the third Universal Periodic Review in 2018, the Chinese delegates again acknowledged the LGBT issue and argued that China "protects the health rights of LGBT peoples, allows voluntary gender-affirming surgeries and respects their privacy…China only recognises marriage between male and female, not due to discrimination but based on historical, cultural and value-related factors" (Fieldwork Note, 6 November 2018).

While showing a degree of political and legal recognition in accepting the international recommendations on the protection of sexual minorities, China's position on the LGBT norm remains ambiguous and uncertain, without effective changes in policy practices. This leaves room for interpretation and speculation on the meaning and intent of official statements and decisions. For instance, its vote against an independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity at the Human Rights Council in 2016 was analysed by the LGBT activists as a move in solidarity with the African Group and an acknowledgement of the contested nature of the norm, rather than rejecting

the norm itself (Fieldwork Note, 13 January 2017). At UN meetings and workshops, the haunting question to which the participants constantly returned to was "where exactly the Chinese government stood on the LGBT issue" (Fieldwork Note, 8 August 2017).

What explains such an ambiguous and moderate attitude on the LGBT norm? It has been attributed to a lack of public pressure and the non-antagonistic character of the LGBT movement in China. Hildebrandt (2011) outlines the rationalistic arguments for China to strategically adopt progressive stances and policies on LGBT issues. Marriage, with decreasing public value, is not as institutionalised or church-sanctioned as in other places, and therefore the cultural costs for engaging with LGBT rights are relatively low. Furthermore, the mobilisation of the LGBT community poses no significant threat to the regime, considering the domestic civil society adopts an overwhelmingly non-confrontational approach to consolidate the movement's legitimacy and maintain amicable government relations (Cao and Guo 2016). Wang (2015) points out that the awareness of the political environment and the loosely connected and structurally unequal LGBT identity in China transform local movement into "everyday resistance", using cultural symbols and daily interactions to imperceptibly change the public opinion. Harassment and censorship from the government usually appear when the civil society organisations (CSOs) hold public events and activities. According to the account of a CSO representative,

> "The conflict is mainly because we are not registered and officials have very low level of trust in us. They think they are obliged to know what activities you are carrying out in China and to know all of [the details]. They want full control and transparency, but the problem is that they do not allow us to register, so we cannot fulfil their requirements. This is a contradiction in reality" (Interview, 12 September 2017).

Even so, most CSOs opt for not confronting the governmental officials in avoidance of explicit references to the human rights language. Political sensitivity being the main concern, this is also a strategic choice to exploit the ambiguous attitude, because the activists fear that if they strongly push the government or the public to express a clear stance on the LGBT issue and to acknowledge their rights, there might be an increased backlash against the community with a determined objection (Interview, 15 September 2017). Restrained assistance from transnational advocacy networks and resources are further limiting the LGBT movements in China. The institutional arrangement channelling foreign funding through governmental agencies, the competition for external resources among the NGOs, and the mistrust of the hegemonic international actors and their tactics, all result in the weak ties of domestic civil society and transnational LGBT networks and an absence of the "boomerang effect" that pressure the state actors (Hildebrandt 2012). The above local and international factors lead to instrumental tolerance and limited acceptance of the LGBT norm at the state level, as it can respond to the critique on human rights records, without undermining the regime's political legitimacy or resilience.

While the state is not the enemy, the resistance and barrier to the LGBT norm come from society, especially institutions and values associated with family. The centrality of family in China indicates the definition of ideal sexual citizen in achieving its personhood and seeking harmony within heterosexual and monogamous marriage, and the fulfilment of filial piety through offspring rearing (Liu 2011, UNDP China 2014, Ho, et al 2018). There is a lack of agreement, however, on the actual effects of the family culture on the LGBT rights. Chou (2001) suggests that the Chinese family tends to silently tolerate

sexual minority, and “coming home” instead of “coming out” describes the Chinese LGBT movement more accurately. This image of the “silently tolerant Chinese family” is, however, disputed by others who point out the confrontation and exclusion from family members and the symbolic violence imposed by silence (Engebretsen 2013). For the LGBT community, the centrality of family value has propelled them to adapt and evolve the strategies in accommodating social demand and public pressure, through, for example, the “cooperative marriages” between lesbian and gay couples, or overseas child adoption to fulfil generational reproduction and restore traditional family structures (Wei 2016).

What deserves our attention here is that in the space of family, the conservative and less tolerant dimension of state power overlaps with social attitudes. The pan-familism assumes family as the basic social and political unit, and the same governing structure extending from family to state (*jiaguo tongguo, 家国同构*) . This creates incentives for the state to restrain the destabilising effects of the LGBT movements on the institutions and beliefs in family. As part of the moral agenda in state-building, the government’s campaigns to censor sexual and violent contents have impeded the LGBT rights and expressions (Sigley 2006, Tu and Lee 2014). Such incentives, however, have not proven strong enough to motivate China in alliance with global movements and defend the traditional values or integrate this as part of the Asian Values in resisting the human rights framework (Lee 2016). Though, as manifested in the family’s position as the primary concern for the LGBT community and the following case of the UNDP China project, LGBT norm

translators are under pressure to form strategy and adaptations around the local norm of family.

The UNDP Project – Being LGBT in Asia

I use the UNDP LGBT project in China to further analyse how personal storytelling has been used in human rights norms. The stories are elicited by norm translators and referred to in reports, workshops, interviews and conversations. The UNDP project "Being LGBT in Asia" is a regional project that operated from 2013 to 2018, being the first UN initiative to support LGBT communities in Asia. Funded by governmental development agencies and the UNDP, the project aimed to address the inequality, violence and discrimination based on SOGIE, and to promote universal access to health and social services.[35] Hosting activities of "convening stakeholders" to facilitate South-South dialogues among governments, civil society and human rights institutions, and "strengthening strategic information" to address the research gaps on sexual and gender minorities for attitudinal and policy changes, the project reviewed the status of the LGBT community in South, East and Southeast Asia and focused on the country cases of China, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. It was a project that explicitly promoted

[35] Details of the project are clarified here. First, in the UNDP introduction, the project ran from 2014 to 2018, whereas the first rounds of community dialogues already took place in 2013 and the overall project might be extended to 2020. I focus on the project activities operated and recorded from 2013 to 2018. Second, the formal title of the project is "Being LGBTI in Asia", though in the introductions of other donors and conference presentations, it has also been referred as "Being LGBT in Asia" without the "I". For the unification of the term use, I will cite it as the latter. Third, the detailed funding history of the project is as follows: In 2014, the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok joined the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UNDP as funding partners. Faith in Love Foundation (Hong Kong) and The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade became donor partners in July 2017 and August 2018 respectively. In September 2018, the UNDP signed a MOU with the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality (Malta) to share information and technical assistance on laws, policy documents and initiatives concerning LGBT people.

LGBT rights through empowerment of regional advocacy networks and communities. In contrast to donor agency like USAID, however, the UNDP as implementing agency, toned down the human rights rhetoric in practice, and emphasised equal access for LGBT communities.

This did not curb the UNDP's position as one of the few, if not the only, international organisation in China that directly engages with LGBT issues using a right-based approach. In the first phase (2013-15), the project led community dialogues and research to produce the China country report that was the first UN review of LGBT persons in China. Based on the information gathered, the second phase (2015-18) launched comprehensive engagements with civil society, governmental agencies (in labour, education, legislation, judiciary and health), private sector and media, to address the problems pertaining to the rights and access of the LGBT community. A series of conferences and workshops were held, and reports on the social attitudes on SOGIE (2016), legal gender recognition (2018) and employment discrimination (2018) were published. The project was widely perceived by international organisations and the regional LGBT community as having been a successful one, especially considering its "multi-dimensional sensitivities" that touched upon the issues of civil society, free speech and human rights related to the marginalised subject of the LGBT (Interview, 26 January 2017). For the CSOs, the UNDP's engagement provided a "safe umbrella" beneath which their activities and national dialogues were enabled (Interview, 25 August 2017, 12 September 2017). It also attracted media attention and reports in the language of rights and access (Cainxin 2014, Jiemian 2016, Phoenix 2018).

Therefore, the UNDP project is suitable for the inquiry of this chapter, firstly because it addressed the LGBT issues from the human rights perspective. Secondly, its publications and advocacies met the equality standards on a regional level, and the stories and narratives were considered representative of "good practice" among international actors. Thirdly, the project played an important part in safeguarding the national networks on LGBT issues while engaging with governmental agencies. It participated in and pipelined the processes of collecting the LGBT stories and moved them into the public space through civil society and media in China. The pioneering role of the UNDP allowed me to observe how it experimented with different strategies of localising and narrating normative packages in the emergence of the LGBT rights in public attention.

The overall strategies of diffusing and localising the human rights norm in this project aimed to integrate the new demands into the existing normative and policy agendas, and reinterpret cultural and historical narratives to craft the space for acceptance and tolerance (Interview, 26 January 2017). For example, health rights were associated with the agenda on HIV/AIDS and provided the entry point with the government, specifically the Center for Disease Control and Prevention under the Ministry of Health. Technical consultation meetings had been organised with transgender and "men who had sex with men" populations to improve their access to health and public services. Since LGBT family relationships were not recognised, the problems with LGBT-related violence were put into the general category of anti-domestic violence, working with the All-China Women's Federation and the National Working Committee on Children and Women. The UNDP seek to include legal interventions on "cohabitation relationships", which in practice

could cover same-sex or other forms of relationships. As for gender diversity education, the UNDP worked with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNECO), using the latter's connection to the Ministry of Education, and framed the LGBT issues in the anti-bullying campaigns in campuses (Workshop Note, 5 July 2017; Meeting Notes, 18 October 2017).

Another strategy was the reinterpretation of cultures and histories to counter local resistance based on "traditions", a practice of "cultural hybridity" (Kapur 2017) that exploited the fluidity of Chinese cultural values. Take the example of the project's country report (UNDP China 2014): it opened with a re-selection and re-conceptualisation of tradition, using historical records detailing homoeroticism and same-sex behaviours to argue that the LGBT was "never demonised" in China. Discrimination and criminalisation were modern and "recent phenomena", caused by legal crackdowns and the one-child policy that posed greater pressure on the younger generation to sustain the family line. After constructing a "tolerant past", the report did not appeal to cultural essentialism or atavism. Instead, it turned to argue that tradition, though not a strong rejecting force, failed to recognise the normality of the LGBT population and to permit their full citizenship or social membership. In this way, norm translators created the cultural basis for accepting the LGBT rights, as they were foremost in a non-conflictual relationship with the deep-rooted and fundamental traditions, at same time requiring us to reform our minds to further acknowledgement and inclusion of the minority, along the human rights framework that was more progressive than "recent practices". This cultural narrative built a bridge between historical past and prospective

future, jumping over and undermining the present, to lessen the current resistance for normative changes.[36]

These strategies were the outcomes of communications and interactions with the government, media, private sector and particularly the CSOs, instead of being formed or implemented unitarily through the UNDP China. This is not to say that the strategies were agreed upon: they were contingent and contextual, balancing between the forces pulling them closer or farther from official policies and local cultures (Interview, 12 September 2017).

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As for the norm translators involved, it was difficult to distinguish whether they were local or global actors. Since LGBT rights was an emerging norm with expanding networks, there existed frequent personnel circulation and exchange among the stakeholders, and individual translators could carry a multiplicity of institutional identities and memories. Edmund Settle, the project manager and policy advisor of Being LBGT in Asia, previously worked with grass-roots HIV NGOs in China and as a consultant for the Ministry of Health. He was one of the first few foreign nationals employed by the Chinese ministerial agencies in the post-reform era. The UNDP project's initial engagement with the Chinese government was largely established through his *guanxi* ("networks"). Similarly, the two project managers working on the LGBT project in the UNDP China had previous experience in LGBT CSOs.

[36] This framing of tradition delivers a paradoxical message: tradition is accommodating and restraining the demands of normative change at the same time. It implies that the present practice is a deviance from tradition, yet we should not restore or go back to tradition to improve or develop. The tradition provides ideational space for new norms to replace the present frameworks in a way that is not contradictory to the tradition.

When the UNDP operated its project, it would again commission the CSOs to implement research and event activities. On the other hand, local CSOs maintained horizontal connections with regional and global civil society, and became internationalised to the extent that they did not have to turn to the UN or any specific international actors for knowledge and practices in human rights. When norm translators communicated and moved across institutional boundaries on such a regular basis, the distinction between local and global actors became porous and ambiguous, and all translators and brokers were interlinked and assembled through the networks of symbols, languages and stories.

Two key words emerged as the knots in the connected networks to orientate and coordinate the activities of norm translators in the LGBT project: *Anli* ("case") and *Dianxing* ("typical"). They were frequent references in discussions and debates that participants concentrated on and with which they were obsessed. *Anli* denotes the accounts of personal and individual experiences, and *dianxing* judges which ones would be selected and how they would be presented. The obsession with these two concepts underlined the centrality of personal storytelling and the ways of employing it in the LGBT campaign.

The first question is why norm translators emphasised *anli*. What did personal stories mean to them? The workers at the UN and the CSOs both pointed out the common desire of LGBT persons to talk, and that a reliance on stories allowed the subjects to speak. A project coordinator explained to me the importance of individual stories in terms of "private-public partnership",

> "They want to speak, but there is no chance to speak. They might think that the UN has so many projects, yet none for the public to communicate and present themselves. We talked about private-public partnerships, the private can also be individuals. Why

> don't we involve the individuals? … Our purpose is to mobilise resources and push social development, individuals are the most important elements of society. If we have this [chance to] communicate, we can show that the UN are people-centred." (Interview, 29 August 2017)

Stories were seen as instruments of empowerment for previously silent and marginalised subjects, allowing them to develop individual subjectivity and personhood. By highlighting their stories, it brought the invisible into visibility, and "letting everyone see it, even for the people in the communities, as they think this was not important. There is a lack of rights consciousness and citizen participation" (Interview, 26 January 2017). Nonetheless, the focus of personal stories was not about the formation of individual subjectivity and empowerment of narrators. As the accounts above illustrated, it was about "showing the UN as people-centred" and "letting everyone see it". The target of personal stories was the audience outside.

Personal stories presented to the audience carried the weight of authenticity and were used as evidence and testimonials. It was often required by the international human rights mechanisms to include cases in report submission and review procedures, which motivated the LGBT rights translators to collect "individual-oriented stories" in order to ensure their right to participate in these proceedings (Fieldwork Note, 8 August 2017; Conversation, 6 November 2017). Beyond the presentation of fact and evidence, high-profile cases acquired further resources and support from the UNDP to "attract the media reports in limited spaces, letting more people know that things are happening" (Interview, 26 January 2017). In China, high-profile cases tended to be mostly lawsuits, relating to employment and HIV discrimination, correction therapy, homophobic educational materials,

and media censorship.[37] These lawsuit cases firstly stated that the LGBT activism occurred within a legal framework, giving the impression of reasonableness and political correctness. Secondly, they increased public exposure, as lawsuits usually took a long time, with multiple appeals to be resolved. Personal stories were thus used as persuasion tools in the LGBT project, to support arguments, organise advocacy and raise public awareness.

What norm translators intended to achieve through personal stories was the contexualisation and localisation of the LGBT norm. Individual accounts highlighted how stigma or discrimination operated on an everyday level, linking the normative package to daily experiences. The unfamiliar and distant global movement was now attached to a national and local face, someone closer to the audience. The implied possibility that it could be you or it could be someone you knew drew the listeners into possibility state of emotional resonance. In comparison to "dry and boring" numbers, personal stories were touching, and, in the words of the UNDP report drafter, "have blood and flesh added to the bones of the report" (Interview, 15 September 2017). A CSO representative working with the UNDP explained the relationship between personal experience and norm localisation more specifically:

> "I think that localisation is about how these [normative frameworks] are related to their life experience…that they understand, not as a concept from on high over there. [The norm] should not simply be showed as a more advanced concept, as people may say: so if we're not advanced, we might just not bother…You can have a big human rights framework there, but it is not encouraging people to [participate], and being full of terminological labels makes it difficult to let ordinary people understand" (Interview, 12 September 2017).

[37] This included but was not limited to Qiubai's lawsuit against the Ministry of Education on homophobic materials in textbooks (2016), Mr C's lawsuit on employment discrimination against transgender persons (2016), Fan Popo's lawsuit against the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television on censorship of the LGBT films (2015).

Using personal stories to make the LGBT norm locally intelligible, however, did not indicate inclusion and acceptance of all stories. This led to our second point: *dianxing*, which defined what kinds of stories were collected and utilised. Rather than training the narrators to produce formula stories, project managers and activists employed criteria and standards to select the *dianxing* ("typical") or *daibiaoxing* ("representative") personal accounts. Being typical indicated the integration of new messages into canonical plot lines so that they were as unique as familiar (Polleta 2006). When prepared for policy targets, personal accounts were representative samples and "organisationally sponsored stories" designed to deliver coordinated ends (Loseke 2007).

In the LGBT project, the first step of selecting the typical was the individualisation of stories, which defined the main character in stories as individuals and their everyday experiences. Narration on behalf of a collective group without personal experiences and feelings would be discarded as "overly general" (Interview, 29 August 2017). The second step was to identify the problems and structural constraints through these personal stories. Since the normative agenda of the project was to improve the access of the LGBT community to public services, the stories were categorised according to each specific sector such as employment, education, health or family affairs. The UNDP China consistently used this format in its reports, illustrated in following extracts:

Graph 4.1. Country Report (UNDP 2014)

CASE STUDY #1

THE JOURNEY OF A TRANSGENDER SEX WORKER

After graduating from secondary school, Xiaoyun went to work in a business. Because he could not wear his preferred women's clothes, he wore gender-neutral clothes. The manager in the company talked to him several times about his clothing and asked him to dress "normally". But he did not make any changes to his attire. Finally, he was dismissed in 2005. After leaving the enterprise, he became a sex worker. Later, he grew his hair long, met some other transgender people, and continued to provide sexual services.

CASE STUDY #4

FORCED MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT IN CHANGCHUN

In November 2012, Li Hu, an official from Tianjin, posted on Weibo (the popular Chinese micro blog similar to Twitter), Ann (pseudonym) is an 18-year-old high school girl living in Changchun City. She is in a committed relationship with her female lover, Yuxuan. In August 2012, both families discovered about their relationship, and they were beaten and insulted by their respective parents. The families demanded they no longer see each other. Ann threatened to commit suicide and refused to eat until days later she needed to be hospitalized. One afternoon Ann escaped from the hospital, too afraid to go back home or to school, she called the police and went to the Women's Federation for help.

A week later, Ann's mother took her for psychological counseling at the Sixth Hospital of Changchun City, where she was regarded as a mental health patient and was admitted and forced to receive hospital treatment. Ann escaped again and met some pro bono lawyers that Yuxuan had invited from Dalian. Ann hoped the lawyers would protect her. One of the

Being LGBT in China, Social Attitudes Report (UNDP 2016)

2.4.2 At school

Homosexual man ID7:

Some classmates were not very supportive after I "come out". They kept a distance from me, ignored me and acted negatively against me. For example, some of them deliberately ran into me, tripped me, or trapped me inside a circle for fun. Some said mean words. My academic performance was affected by such an environment, but later recovered as my classmates gradually accepted me.

Homosexual woman C1:

Back in my high school days, I was once caught kissing a girl in the bathroom. Perhaps the inspector was shocked or she couldn't stand such a scene psychologically, as she really used some mean words such as "abnormal" and "pervert". I didn't really care about it, but she later informed my father of this, which triggered symptoms of high blood pressure on my poor old man.

2.4.3 Workplace

Transgender woman S4:

The biggest difficulty, in fact, lies in the job hunt. A major problem is the difference between the gender I checked on my resume (male) and my current gender (female). Even if I checked "female" on my resume and showed up as a female, the gender problem would still emerge when they checked my ID card. This represents the no. 1 problem I have in finding a formal job.

The plot of these typical stories centred on the subject of "hindrance", emphasising how social and policy restraints had prevented the LGBT persons from pursuing their needs and activities in everyday life, and from exercising the same status of living as equal human beings as others. The individual experience had to correspond to the structural inequality to make it meaningful. As explained by the UNDP report researcher,

> "What they say needs to correspond to our data part. For example, if the data conclude in what areas they experience discrimination and stigma, their stories should reflect these areas, how others treat them or how they feel inside. Then we can put their stories in. So here the representativeness is not being representative of the whole community, but the degree of fit of what they describe to the structural observations drawn from our data. Also, we want to include stories of each gender and sexual identity…so we select our interviewees to be as diverse as possible" (Interview, 15 September 2017).

The selected stories were typical only in terms of highlighting the structural inequalities defined in the objectives of the LGBT advocacy. Another worker in the same report confirmed that the story selection was based on their revelations on the "access problems", and she further clarified what constituted a typical case:

> "Those cases should not be extreme ones, like murder or arson. At the same time, they should be typical. Like transgender persons experiencing domestic violence and being kicked out of home by their parents, this is quite typical…the stories also should be more acceptable for non-LGBT community" (Interview, 24 August 2017).

In sum, typical stories included at least three elements that were used as canonical lines in the LGBT rights: first, the main character of the narration was an individual from the marginalised community; second, the personal experience corresponded to a specific structural problem and thus justified policy intervention and normative change in that regard; third, the extreme cases were excluded to stress the familiar plot lines in relation to everyday life, making the account relevant and credible to the general audience.

A significant consequence of assembling and presenting the *dianxing* stories was the creation of a specific subjectivity to represent the LGBT

community. A person with individual agency aspired to have a normal life as other human beings, and could not achieve this plain and ordinary wish due to unfairly imposed structural barriers. Now, despite his individual agency, the only possible solution to remove these barriers was by external actors, and the individual should not be blamed or held responsible: it was "our" or the society's responsibility.

One outstanding example appeared in the UNDP country report (2014), when one of the stories was about a woman who was married to a gay man. The woman found out the truth about her husband's sexuality, and, suffering at the same time from a mental disorder, she committed suicide. The following interpretation of this tragic story did not put the blame on the gay husband, and instead argued the following: "however, the gay husbands are also a vulnerable group. Tong Qi (women married to gay men) is only the victim of gay men escaping from their families and social pressure…To free the gay man's body and mind, everyone needs to be involved. For homosexuality, perhaps we should neither be surprised [that it exists] nor should it be a taboo, let alone stigmatized and discriminated against" (UNDP China 2014, 43). What was extraordinary here was how the interpretation directed the normative point of the story again to the structural factor and excluded alternative interpretations. Here was the birth of the "innocent agency", where individuals were empowered enough to narrate their stories, though too innocent to claim any personal responsibility for their actions. Their acquired agency was quickly enmeshed in the critique of socially structured inequalities and the advocacy for broader normative transformation. Of course this is not to say that the narrators should be blamed, as in most cases, the society or the larger environment was the

repressive and restraining power. The main point was that this practice demonstrated what type of agency and subjectivity was accepted, compromised and reinforced in the use of storytelling in human rights campaigns.

Family and Relational Rights

Through collection and presentation, norm translators used personal stories as fact and evidence to raise public awareness and localise the global norm. Furthermore, the selection of typical stories targeted at specific structural problems and crafted the space for normative changes. But what were the effects of typical stories on local norms? How did they deal with the resistance of traditional cultures? The literature review above indicated that family was the primary source of social pressure and resistance (Wang 2011, Liu 2011), and this was reaffirmed in the UNDP project. All of the UN and CSO interviewees with whom I spoke reflected on the priority of the family question in the LGBT advocacy. The China country report stated that "coming out to parents has long been the main topic of discussion among LGBT community members in China, which manifests the crucial role family and parental acceptance plays in the lived experience of Chinese LGBT people" (UNDP China 2014). The survey conducted by the UNDP China (2016) concluded that, while family remained the social context where the majority of the LGBT people chose to reveal their identities, it was the place associated with the highest rate of discrimination and the lowest degree of acceptance.

With the concentrated tension, family was more than a separate category in story collection that addressed a particular problem. It was a cross-cutting theme that appeared in issues of health, employment and education, where

family members intervened. In this sense, family itself became part of the typical stories about the everyday hindrance and difficulty encountered by the LGBT persons. The overwhelming number of family stories was not intended by norm translators in advocacy strategy, but mostly driven by the LGBT narrators. The UNDP report drafter described the ubiquitous appearance of family issues,

> "Everyone would think, right, family is very important, and why did they (the LGBT people) not have any choice? The stories include family relations, struggles with parents and so on. We asked everything in the survey, including jobs and so on, but the respondents mostly talked about family, how parents dealt with their identities. The experiences of the community were concentrated on [family], and once presented in the report, it was also easier to connect with the public who were without the LGBT experience" (Interview, 15 September 2017).

The drafter carried on to argue that the family issue was common in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and in China, "if you settle the family question, this [LGBT rights] will be resolved for 70 to 80 per cent" (ibid.). The director of the CSO responsible for distributing the survey questionnaire within the community stressed a similar point in our conversation:

> "Me: So what stories are most persuasive or moving?
>
> Director: What do you think Chinese culture is, in terms of secular culture? Or, what culture do we defend most fiercely?
>
> (Pause for 3 seconds)
>
> Both: Family!
>
> Director: That's right…the ideal scenario is that despite your gender or sexual identities, we all live in a frame of a harmonious family. Family is the cutting point, at least in China. Why is the PFLAG (Friends and relatives association, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) so popular in China? It has its national and social background" (Interview, 24 August 2017).

Given the important value of family, the stories used by norm translators were not confronting the family unit by replacing it with new forms of institution or subjectivity. Neither did they follow the path of extending the concept of kinship and family to explore alternative ways of living together (Plummer 2003). Instead, the main approach was to construct the possibility for the LGBT people to "return to" their family roles. We can firstly take a look at the

family stories assembled in the UNDP Social Attitudes Report (2016) and the Legal Gender Recognition Report (2018):

Graph 4.2. Family Stories
Social Attitude Report (2016, 29)

Homosexual man TC6:
My father somehow discovered I was in a relationship with a man and he called me several times, attacking homosexuals using abusive and violent words. He regarded homosexuality as a disease, and wanted to take me to someone who was specialized in "treating" this disease. To this day, my father still ignores this issue, which in return I'm reluctant to bring up. They (my parents) still introduce girls they know through relatives or colleagues to me, and hurry me to get married and then have a baby in a couple of years.

Homosexual woman S2:
They intervened before, mainly because they found me a little too man-like I think. My mother strongly suggested that I have long hair and wear skirts.

Transgender man S5:
A deep impression from my childhood was that my father once called me a "sissy boy". He was very angry when he did that, seated in front of all his friends. It was really humiliating to me, with a clear intention of degrading me, because he saw me as a shame.

Legal Gender Recognition Report (2018, 27)[38]

Xiao Hui, a high school student, described her parents' reaction to their discovery of her cross-dressing in female clothing and when they heard her say that she wanted to undergo gender-affirming surgeries. "They were extremely alarmed and completely resisted. Every time they heard me say such things, my mother would just cry, and my father would fly into a rage and beat me so hard as though he had become my enemy." She was forced by her father to consult a psychologist who diagnosed her with gender identity disorder. Ultimately, the psychologist recommended that she and her father reach a "gentlemen's agreement", that the father will no longer use violence, and she will no longer wear female clothing or run away from home, and will temporarily set aside the notion of changing sex.[33]

These stories illustrated the discrimination and abuse experienced by LGBT people within their birth families, when "normal" family relationships were twisted and disrupted once sexual and gender identities were exposed. Family members could not accept the facts and wished their children to "go back" to

[38] Original footnote in the report regarding the story's source: Cai Limei. "Eyes on juvenile mental health (second edition): Why a 17-year-old became a 'fake girl,'" Southern Country Morning News, 7 November 2011

their previous roles. Later in the report, such an attitude of rejection was explained not as the result of individual preferences, but as "mirroring the broader social environment and social pressures" (UNDP China 2016, 34). For the LGBT persons, they were not abandoning or deserting the family either, and their disappointment and frustration precisely manifested the will to return to their families. A CSO worker cooperating with the UNDP gave the example of exploring the "coming-home stories". In a session, she invited a *lala* ("lesbian") to tell her experience in coming-out to the family, which lasted for three years:

> "People think coming-out is a sudden thing. It can be a long process. She started from personal experience, when she firstly talked with her parents while still enrolled in the university, and was not accepted. Her parents stopped paying her allowance. So while earning herself a living, she tried to restore the relationship…It is a sad story, but a resonant one. Some people in the community may not come out. They even decide not to come out for life and have a cooperative marriage to conceal. So my topic is that coming-out is another way of coming home…people may think coming-out is not going back home, but it is possible if you have dealt with it well." (Interview, 25 August 2017)

Crucially, when engaging with the family norm, personal stories demonstrated that family was not a given barrier or obstacle to LGBT rights. Rather, it was due to the social pressures and attitudes that LGBT persons and their families could not achieve or return to a normal family life. In other words, the limits on LGBT rights disrupted the rights to family, and accounted for the unfulfilled agency and personhood of LGBT people regarding their will towards family roles. In this approach, personal stories situated family values and LGBT rights in a compatible relationship, and created a common enemy of social discrimination.

Furthermore, these stories extended and redefined the concept of subjectivity and personhood in LGBT rights. The realisation of rights reached beyond the satisfaction of individual-oriented expressions and identities. The realm of personhood included the roles in family, and "coming-home"

constituted an essential part of agency and subjectivity, inseparable to LGBT individuals. It was as Chou (2001) argued, that Chinese traditions defined humans firstly as a member of a larger group, family and community, and therefore the emancipation of LGBT persons in China was about the realisation of their rights in these relationships, the possibility of participating in family lives, rather than merely the pursuit of personal freedom. The "relational rights" or right to family was against the binary distinction between the individual and the family. While maintaining the centrality of individuals as narrators and right-bearers, the selected personal stories contested the notion that human rights need to be achieved through the creation of an independent space from the local norm, and stressed the possibility of integrating the fulfilment of family subjectivity and identity in LGBT rights.

Responses to Contestation

Except for the challenges from traditional values, personal stories were susceptible to contestations on their credibility, representativeness and policy effects. After all, why should the idiosyncratic accounts be taken as representative and publically relevant? The *anli* ("cases") had the danger of turning into *ge'an* ("isolated cases"), and therefore cast doubts on their normative implications. The governmental agency working with the UNDP China, for example, discussed their concerns over the "emotional expressions" and preferred to focus on more technical discussion (Fieldwork Note, 18 November 2016).

One way of responding to the contestation on legitimacy and effectiveness of personal stories was to transfer or diversify the role of story collectors. Even when other actors, such as research institutions, had similar issues in sample

bias, they appeared more objective and neutral in convincing the audience. Another common response was to collect large-scale data to support personal stories and *vice versa*. The CSO director working on the UNDP Social Attitudes Survey recalled the event at a national CSO leadership meeting when she discussed the necessity of statistics. She was the only CSO representative from the LGBT community, and after her talk, someone came over and said that he never thought that the LGBT people were discriminated in China,

> "Then I told him stories and cases. He said, well, these were isolated events. That was when I realised that I needed to [collect data]. If I don't even have the data, how am I going to persuade others? … A problem only becomes public when everyone discusses it in China. When it is related to [each of us], it is a common community (*gongtong ti*, 共同体) and then there is a public problem. If we don't have data, people won't believe it is a public problem." (Interview, 24 August 2017)

The data and personal stories were therefore often presented together to deliver a credible normative message. This created a mutually reliant relationship between personal stories and data. Data established its legitimacy through the power of generalisation, scaling-up the individual cases to a broader and larger phenomenon. Numbers and statistics told another type and category of stories, though not as predominant as personal accounts in the issues of human rights. The personal stories put emotions and a human face to advocacy, and even when they were selected from the database, they were hardly ever an exact reflection or representative sample of the data. Instead, they tried to adjust the sample bias and tried to give equal voices to the ones underrepresented in the data. Both personal stories and data were structurally organised and followed similar canonical lines, to identify specific problems and to imply the urgency and necessity of normative solutions.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the case of the UNDP's LGBT project to examine the detailed use of personal stories in human rights norm advocacy. It revealed the blurring boundaries between local and global norm translators in a high-flow and circulation of personnel among civil society, governments and international institutions, at least in the case of an emerging norm. Instead of coaching the narrators in the marginalised LGBT community, norm translators focused on the selection and presentation of typical and representative personal stories, turning demands for rights into recognisable and familiar faces. These stories were organised systematically to highlight structural problems, creating space for individual agency and leading to policy interventions in defined areas. The choice of the individual as the basic unit of narration reflected the cosmopolitan package in the human rights language. Yet, through the engagement with the local norm on family, the meaning of the individual shifted into a relational concept, including the roles and identifies in family. It manifested the processes in which global and local actors and norms were linked and entangled, and demonstrated how personal stories retained the universalistic commitment of individual rights while negotiating and stretching the concept of subjectivity with local beliefs.

In practice, norm translators responded to the contestation around personal stories through the diversification of narrators and the provision of data. However, there were more categories of story and narrative. The UNDP project, as introduced, was a regional project that facilitated experience-sharing among Southern countries. This design aimed to counter the resistance to the LGBT rights based on the argument that it was a Western imposition (Fieldwork Note, 6 December 2016; Interview, 26 January 2017).

Therefore, the experience and lessons in other countries, such as Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand, became resources and materials for narrating the possibility of policy and structural transformations, forming another important type of normative story. Norm translators and their audience debated the application and relevance of country lessons. The "growing nationalism and expanding ego might discredit any experience from others", and when the practices from Southeast Asian countries were introduced, the more relevant lessons from Taiwan would be easily excluded due to political considerations (Interview, 24 August 2017, 15 September 2017). The next chapter, turning to the case of the rule of law, will further explore such dynamics in the narration and contestation of the stories derived from other localities.

Chapter 5
The Significant Other: Learning Rule of Law

> "Not to mention the South-South, our [Chinese] model could be exemplary for the developing and even the developed countries…we are in a leading position here."
> Phone conversation with Supreme People's Court (18 November 2016)

> "I have participated in international study tours [to EU countries]… we are still at a learning stage, learning from developed countries who encountered similar problems before."
> Roundtable discussion with National People's Congress (5 September 2017)

Walking out of a meeting with the Chinese legislative authority, a legal expert from the European Union turned to me and whispered: "I know they are going on holiday, but I still want them to see and know what they should see and know" (Conversation, 5 September 2017). Not long before, she had finished a lucid presentation on the EU's public consultation mechanisms in legislation, preparing the Chinese representatives for an overseas study tour supported by the UNDP. Study tours, often referred to as the "tourism part" informally between the UNDP colleagues, are a key component of development projects on rule of law. This form of exchange can be traced back to a long series of modernisation reforms throughout China's history, when delegates were sent abroad in order to study foreign models. Exposure to new environments and practices comprise the lessons of "significant others", where an inextricable knot of norm diffusion mechanisms including competition, emulation and socialisation take place.

These lessons are not objective, neutral or comprehensive accounts that distribute equal attention and meticulously examine each country. The provision of information and recommendation is filtered by economic, geographical and ideological proximities, constructed by international and local conduits in accordance to domestic beliefs and institutions, and later

contested in the political processes determining the feasibility and desirability of the outsider's experience. Therefore, the question is less about learning itself than it is about learning what and from whom. This chapter responds to this question by looking at the types of normative stories based on experiences of other countries in the promotion of the rule of law. It begins with a review of transnational learning in norm diffusion, and highlights the gap between rhetorical consensus and practical pluralism that intensifies the mediation of local identities and beliefs in rule of law. The paradox of modernisation and post-colonialist ideologies in China shapes the sources, interpretations and applications in the screening and appropriating of country lessons.

Using the first-hand materials of the UNDP projects on participatory legislation and the abolishment of the re-education through labour system (RETL), this chapter shows that, on the one hand, stories of Northern/Western countries are still prioritised in formal reports and study tours, framed with notions of standardisation and institutionalisation under the imperative to modernise. On the other hand, experiences with geographical and ideological similarity in Southern countries are narrated to resonate with postcolonial identity, lessening the political resistance from governments involved. The flexible movements between local ideologies are seen in the instrumental use of country lessons by the UNDP officials, as well as by the Chinese recipients who re-translate the lessons to other Chinese actors. The power of lesson-drawing is connected to the strong implication that local reforms are part of a broader global movement in converging normative principles, yet these lessons are only effective and persuasive once they attain local resonance that transform their epistemic otherness into agreeable heterogeneity.

The Art of Lesson-Drawing

Lesson-drawing describes the act of borrowing and constructing experiences from other spaces to justify and implement normative changes. The country-specific and regional lessons provide the material substance for normative packages to travel through transnational networks. Dobbins, Simmons and Garrett (2007) summarise four types of diffusion mechanism: social construction, coercion, competition and learning. This demonstrates the varied ways in which country lessons exercise influence as the infrastructure materials in framing desirable ends, imposing preferences, creating peer pressure and updating knowledge systems (Appel and Orenstein 2013). Johnston (2014), with a narrowed focus on socialisation, outlines three micro-processes of mimicking, social influence and persuasion to explain pro-group behaviour as copying the habits and behaviour in a new environment, responding to the status markers of social groups, and internalising new causal understandings respectively (see also in Prantl and Nakano 2011).

Rigorous efforts have been made to distinguish motivations from outcomes when taking inspirations from others, and to inquire on the nature of lesson-drawing: whether it is an act of mindless emulation or rationalistic learning.[39] It is hard to define the borderline between different mechanisms that overlap with each other and occur at the same time. Looking at the spread of privatisation, Weyland (2005) shows how rational learning and hierarchical

[39] Meseguer (2004) defines emulation as a result of herding on others' experience, while learning entails adoption of ideas with updates on beliefs and understandings. He further points out the features of emulation: actors often do not scrutinise all available experience with analytical capabilities, with a lack of motivation or planning on what to do, and are driven by the desire more for reputation and credibility than for the improvement of policies and practices.

pressure are at work, while Lee and Strange (2006) argue that evidence-based learning and social construction unfold side by side in the waves of downsizing the public sector. Westney's (1987) early analysis of Japanese lesson-drawing breaks the boundary between borrowing and originating, as the emulation of Western organisational structures produced unexpected innovation.

Instead of putting lesson-drawing into a specific category of norm diffusion, I regard it as a practice in the broadly defined concept of learning, that involves voluntary observation and transportation of others' experience. The focus is on the "act of drawing", shifting the analysis from the nature of lesson-drawing to its formation and application. As Gilardi (2010, 651) puts it: "who learns, and from what?"

The country lessons are conditioned by local norms, institutions and structures, in addition to the status of exemplary countries and the international discourse. Countries perceived as exemplary or advanced may lead other countries to emulate ritualistically based on the assumption that the high-status actors know better (Ikenberry 1990). Countries may also turn to peers with similar development levels, or with geographical, linguistic and historical ties (Weyland 2004, Simmons and Elkins 2004). Rose (1991) underlines "subjective identification as more important than geographical propinquity", as psychological and ideological proximities encouraged learning in post-war Eastern Europe among communist-dominated countries, despite their closeness to Western Europe. Also drawing on norm diffusion in Europe, Checkel (1999, 2001) theorises how domestic beliefs, politics and institutions shaped the in-flows of country lessons and ideas on citizenship in Germany and the Ukraine. Meseguer (2004) expands the analysis scope to

OECD and Latin American countries, highlighting the political rationale in terms of willingness and opportunities as the cognitive heuristic to process information. Furthermore, individual contacts and organisational networks play a role, as analysed in Sikkink's work (1993) on the transnational issue-networks on human rights in Latin America. International organisations, especially, are part of the transnational networks that openly define their roles in collecting and sharing lessons to facilitate the spread of normative and policy frameworks (Stone 2001, True and Mintrom 2001).

Therefore, learning from others is always bounded and channelled (Hall 1993, Weyland 2004). This does not indicate that country lessons are static and coherent accounts, mechanically filtered by structures, institutions and networks, and matching with pre-established normative orders. Local and international actors are aware of these "filters", and they strategically select and reorganise the elements of others' experiences to resonate with the contextual backgrounds (Busby 2010). This process can be described as "montage", where contents and meanings of country lessons are reconstructed as stories and used in persuasion. The actors are engaged in "argumentative persuasion" (Checkel 2001), debating and contesting whether and which parts of country lessons can be borrowed and applied, and these interactions bring about attitudinal changes in normative beliefs. Epistemic communities and expert groups are the primary narrators in framing the experiences, situated with horizontal linkages across transnational networks.

So how do they narrate the country lessons in practice? There are a number of ways. Expert groups can theorise the cause and effect of certain norms, with the expectation that abstraction and complexity can travel across social and national differences. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) use the term

"normative isomorphism" to describe the transferring of ideas and practices based on professionalised abstraction and generalisation without a specific example. The process of theorisation also takes place on the side of the adopters, when the homogeneities simplify the underlying mechanisms, and associate the effects with broader universal concepts of modernity or liberalism (Strang and Meyer 1993). In other cases, the narration of country lessons is contingent with a low degree of generalisation. These accounts emphasise the similarities with other countries and the feasibility of transferring, or reframe the new practices as home-grown and innovative solutions. In her study of candidate gender quota, Krook (2006) distinguishes two types of transnational sharing: "mythmaking" that condenses a series of multifaceted and contingent events into unified narratives around the origin and impact of a norm, and "transformation", that draws on international examples as inspirations for applying novel normative adaptions at the local level. Rose phrases the learning process more pragmatically: "because the model of a successful programme is a construct, the elements can readily be adapted, or elements mixed from programmes in two or more countries - as long as whatever is added enhances effectiveness or acceptability, and whatever is subtracted is replaced by something that is functionally equivalent" (1991, 21). He categorises five ways of lesson-drawing: copying, emulation, hybridisation, synthesis and inspiration, denoting a different degree of incorporating others' experience along the continuum that slowly moves apart from analogue to innovation.

Subject to varied degrees of negotiation and translation, lesson-drawing in the case of rule of law is particularly under the mediating effects of local ideologies and identities. International advocacy on the rule of law started in

the 1960s, when the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Ford Foundations initiated the "law and development" programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America. After a short decline, the "rule of law revival" (Carothers, 1998) took place after the Cold War, providing a global panacea for states grappling with democratic consolidation and economic transition. Together with the good governance paradigm, the rule of law was seen as a response to the failures in neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s by underpinning the institutional approaches to build accountable legal and political mechanisms.[40] Despite the difficulties in defining the concept in a precise way, the rule of law received global recognition and support, and was acknowledged in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, by developed and developing countries, as essential for economic growth and social development.[41] Unlike highly contested norms such as human rights, a universalistic consensus was assumed in rule of law, largely benefiting from its early image as a non-ideological and technocratic solution.

As Chesterman points out, however, "such a high degree of consensus on the virtues of rule of law is possible only because of dissensus as to its meaning" (2008). The overwhelming support in theory is accompanied with a divergence in practice. Scholars of legal pluralism, emerging from studies of customary laws in anthropology in the 1970s, have tried to explain the

[40] For more details on the good governance paradigm, see chapter 6.
[41] For the UN, the rule of law is defined as the "principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency." Report of the Secretary-General: The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies (S/2004/616).

divergences as shaped by historical trajectories, legal institutions and networks of beliefs across countries (Merry 1988, 2014; Tamanaha 2008, 2011). They underline the plurality of legal orders since the colonial period, and how multiple legal systems co-exist in interaction with the surrounding social relationships, moral principles and political ideologies (Kahn 2006, Menski 2006). The plurality of legal orders is further manifested among the international actors promoting them. The American/European divide, for instance, provides contradictory accounts on the functioning of a legal system. Santos (2006) uses the case of World Bank to show how internal dynamics can switch the understanding of rule of law within an institution from an instrumental one to an intrinsic one. The example of non-state courts in Berger's work (2017) pictures the divergent versions on non-state legal mechanisms and rule of law between European Union, World Bank and local NGOs.

Rule of law thus is capacious and open to different interpretations from both international actors and local society. Its universal rhetoric facilitates the entry into the reform agenda of recipient countries, whereas its pluralist interpretations make the norm susceptible to the mediation of moral, religious and ideological systems, where norm translators interpret what the rule of law actually represents. For a developing country encountering the global norm, this means that there are competing conceptions of rule of law, associated with policy packages and country models to select from. The sources of "international best practices" come from both developed and developing countries. The lessons of Northern/Western countries, often grouped as a whole in international development, imply the linear trajectory of progress and the membership of a global normative regime, but often sound too similar

to the old-time colonial ruling in implanting modern legal systems. The lessons of Southern countries acknowledge the possibility of reconciling customary traditions with the demand for legal reform, while posing a sense of ambivalence against the universal script on rule of law. Local and global actors need to balance between the two sources of lessons, strategically rejecting or absorbing their elements in accordance to with the plurality of ideologies and legal orders on the ground. In the next section I turn to the case of China and identify the local ideologies in filtering and appropriating the international lessons in rule of law.

Rule of Law in China

The history of legal reforms in China is characterised by contradictory and competing visions regarding the meaning and value of lessons drawn from the outside. Beginning in the post-imperial period in the Qing dynasty, the legal standards and systems of Western governments were slowly introduced, resisted by conservatives who questioned the superiority of foreign institutions and promoted the idea of "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application". The nationalist revolution of 1926-28 established the rule of the Kuomintang and the promulgation of modern laws based on the civil law systems in Switzerland, Germany and France. Parallel to this period, the Communists transported Russian laws and practices such as people's courts into the controlled region. Their stance against "semi-feudal and semi-colonial rule" led to a rejection of Western legal systems when the Communist Party took over. With assistance from the Soviet Union, socialist legality was implanted in China from 1953 to 1956, characterised by legal positivism, party leadership and class-based understanding of law. The newly established legal

institutions and consciousness were deeply challenged in the anti-Rightist movement in 1957, and after its short revival in early 1960s, the legal system went into turmoil during the Cultural Revolution.

For the reformist leadership in the late 1970s, the main objectives of urgent legal reform were two-fold: first, to restore political and social order through a system of rules that operated above the political level and constrained the turbulences created by personal rule; second, to promote economic development and particularly foreign trade and investment through an effective legal framework in compatibility with the market economy (Chen 2011). The long-standing question remained: from whence could elites draw lessons for the reconstruction of the legal system? Menski summarised the dilemma in finding the appropriate sources: "having rejected virtually every single element of the indigenous legal armoury, China had forced itself onto a path of legal modernisation that seemed to necessitate use of foreign models and yet, at the same time, a recognition that those foreign models and ideas might not be entirely suitable" (2006, 579).

The Chinese leadership took a pragmatic and eclectic approach in reforming the post-Mao legal system, drawing lessons from advanced industrial countries as well as communist countries in transition. The basic principles of equality and governance based on the law were reaffirmed in the 1982 Constitution. Disrupted in the aftermath of the Tiananmen tragedy, the march towards rule of law was consolidated again in the 1990s under Jiang Zemin, who endorsed the banner "rule of the country according to the law" (*yifa zhiguo,* 依法治国). Incorporated into the 1999 Constitution, the concept of a socialist rule of law implied the supremacy of the law above the state. This

constitutional development was accompanied by a wave of codification. When the NPC proclaimed the completion of the "socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics" in 2011, there were 236 laws, 690 administration regulations and more than 8,600 local regulations in China, most of which were formulated and passed after 1978 (Chen 2011).

The progress in legislative, judicial and administrative professionalism in China has been recognised as a rapid and effective institutionalisation of legal mechanisms (Lubman 1995, Peerenboom 2002), while there was also the emergence or revival of alternative legal beliefs and practices. Socialist legality was restored to the extent that the laws were still treated as instrumental in protecting the interests of the people and maintaining the dominance of the Party rule. The revival of mediation and informal social control mechanisms stressing individual self-control and communal harmony manifested the re-emergence of traditional Confucian morality. Instead of "rule of law", the Asian development states were said to embrace "rule by law", associated with the Asian Values or East Asian legal tradition prioritising collective interests over individual rights or privileges (Ruskola 2012, Carothers 2013).

It thus raised divisive perspectives on whether China was actually moving towards rule of law (Minzner 2011, Peerenboom 2014). Distinguishing thin and thick versions of rule of law, Peerenboom argued that China was progressing along the formalised, procedural and instrumental rational-legal system, but not necessarily leading to substantive and thick rule of law embedded within a liberal democratic framework. Minzner, on the contrary, pointed to the unchanged nature of the relationship between the Party and the law, and interpreted the recent de-emphasis of formal law and court adjudication as akin to turning political levers in response to social protest

and conflicts. The debate intensified with the escalation of the anti-corruption campaigns and the adoption of the Decision on Several Important Questions Relating to the Full Promotion of Ruling the Country According to the Law in 2014 (Peerenboom 2015, Pils 2015, Chen 2016). It was the first time that the plenary meeting of Party's Central Committee specifically focused on legal development. While reaffirming the necessity for further legal reform, the decision was made in the context of China's growing determination to follow its own path and avoid wholesale Westernisation, in the light of the democratisation movements in the Middle East and North Africa. The constitutional change to remove the presidential term limit in 2018 was interpreted in radically contrasting ways. It was regarded as part of the measures to centralise the power and control of the Party and individual leadership, whereas as Zhang and Ginsburg (2018) pointed out, it has done this in a "highly legalistic way…through harnessing the organizational and legitimizing capacities of law, rather than circumventing it".

A simultaneous debate carried inside China throughout the reform era focused on China's paradigm regarding its legal system, between groups following the Western frameworks, and those insisting on home-grown and indigenous resources in establishing a distinct legal order (Pan 2003, Zhu 2004). These dividing views centred on questions surrounding the "international best practices", and more specifically, whether China was supposed to continue its transplant and mimicry based on the Western models.

These contrasting views cannot be seen simply as normative variation on the question of legality. Different legal traditions, such as the Confucian and the socialist, might converge over scepticism towards the Western experience

in its incompatibility with the local situation, either based on traditional morality or class structure. Even within one legal vision, there are factions holding opposite opinions on the inception of Euro-American ideas, as illustrated through the welcoming attitude of the neo-Confucian philosopher Mou Zongshan towards democracy and rule of law. Neither is it fully satisfactory to explain the adaptions of international lessons in terms of technical feasibility.

This is why I turn to the broader ideological contexts and discourses filtering and framing the Other's experience in China that are not limited to the case of legal reform, and manifest themselves most widely in debates in political and economic reforms. Based on the justifications given by norm translators, I identify two underlying ideologies in shaping the competing and contradictory perspectives on the international legal lessons: the ideology of modernisation that underlines the universalist and linear development, associated with lessons in the high-level income Northern/Western countries; and the ideology of postcolonialism that questions the transplant of Western standards and their applicability to local societies, which finds the experience of Southern countries with historical and political proximity more agreeable. The co-existence of two ideologies accounts for the paradoxical and contradictory attitudes on international lessons in legal reform. Ayoob (1989) terms such conflicts as the "schizophrenia" of Third World states, referring to a general mentality of the developing countries, who simultaneously challenge and adapt to the international norms and systems constructed by colonial powers.

On the one hand, legal reform in China serves foremost as an instrument for socio-economic development, and therefore is always framed as a

modernisation project with increased specialisation and differentiation of social institutions (Gregg 1993, Lanteigne 2005). As Strange and Meyer point out, the concept of modernity underlines the very essence of norm diffusion: universalised notions of progress and development, with rationalised organisations and autonomous individuals, advocate a "more universalistic moral order, a more scientific and standardized analysis of nature and means-ends relationship" (1993, 501). This means that, under the modernisation paradigm, China's legal progress is measured with universalistic standards as it is catching up with the modern world. Driving the discourse of modernisation, the West is associated with these standards and measurements, forming an "Ideal Western Legal Order" (Clarke 2003) into which non-Western systems aspire (Chen 2010). The experience of Western countries projects their charismatic effects by representing the linear direction of modernity, whereas the beliefs, institutions and practices of latecomers are portrayed as imperfect, insufficient and deficient.

Meanwhile, postcolonial ideological thought counters the supremacy of the modernisation paradigm, questioning the universalistic singularity of the Western development trajectory and propelling alternative paradigms. The postcolonial critique of the rule of law package is common in comparative law and studies of legal pluralism (Tamanaha 2008, Salomon 2011), which exposes the orientalism (Ruskola 2010) and imperialism (Gardner 1980) in imposing ethnocentric and hegemonic legal orders and policies. The question prompted by postcolonial ideology is: what would the basis of our legality become if faith in Western modernity, liberalism and rule of law is eroded and invalidated (Kapur 2013)? In China, this leads to cautious and eclectic

attitudes towards transplanting foreign laws and institutions, and distortions of international practices to national characteristics and local circumstances.

Using the modernisation/postcolonial categorisation brings two clear advantages to this research. First, it restates the historical continuity of China's legal reforms by highlighting the consistent presence of a modernisation imperative that imports foreign models of modernity, from both the Soviet Union and Western countries across different time periods. The modernity paradigm thus does not always represent Westernisation, but more generally refers to the universalistic and linear prescription of development that previously included socialist legality. Second, the rejection and critique of the Western lessons are understood not simply as the expression of nationalist, anti-Western or relativist thought. By describing them as postcolonial ideology, it explains why the scepticism against the Western universal model does not necessarily cause the retreat to local tradition or completely close the possibilities of learning from the Other. Instead, it could stress the shared historical and political identities among developing countries, and thus craft the space for SSC and experience-sharing. In the case of China, the experiences of former communist countries and Asian countries stand out as useful references.

These two parallel and competing ideologies filter international best practices in legal systems. For international actors, the modernisation and postcolonial paradigms are the boundaries, road signs and frames of references around which they carefully manoeuvre when promoting the rule of law. Contrary to the belief that development donors treat the international lessons as an exogenous variable "out there" (Gillespie 2012), advocacy

networks are mostly aware of the restraining and empowering effects of local ideologies, and adjust the forms and contents of lessons strategically.

The participation of international actors in China's legal reforms has been noted in the literature, although with limited thematic studies. The bilateral initiatives on rule of law with the US and the EU formally began in late 1990s, accompanied by the activities of international development agencies and donors (Peerenboom 2002, 2). The participation of the American philanthropic sector was prominent during this period, including the exchange programs of legal scholars and practitioners funded by the American Bar Association and the Ford Foundation (Chen 2010, Minzner 2011).

The international aid on rule of law focuses on legal education and the areas of commercial and later environmental laws in China, motivated by the consideration that these programs would encounter less political resistance and eventually have spillover effects of improvement in the broader legal system (Carothers 2003). Dowdle (2008) and Erie (2009) review the legal education reform in China inspired by the sponsorship and transfers from the US, drawing on the observation that the rule of law projects are more "the alchemy of well-intended U.S. expertise mixed with Chinese reformers' goal to accumulate global social capital" (2009, 96). Zeng (2006), Zhang (2014) and Yang (2017) analyse the histories and practices of EU rule of law promotion in China. The intention of "giving practical support for a reformed public management system in China based on civil society and the rule of law" is stated in the first EU Communication on the EU-China relationship, and integrated into the Country Strategic Papers and Multi-annual Indicative Programmes guiding the EU assistance. The EU-China Legal and Judicial Programme (2000-2005) supported the reforms in legislation,

implementation in legal and judicial institutions and public access to the legal system, through the programs of conferences, training, study visits and research initiatives. Based on the programme, the China-EU School of Law was established for joint education of students, trainings of jurists, and legal research. During the same period, a collaborative project between the EU and the UNDP titled "Governance for Equitable Development" (GED) went into operation, with emphasis on the transparency and accountability of legal institutions in China. This is also the project that I will return to analyse later. From 2011, the funds in the EU's National Indicative Programme declined to about one-third compared to the last cycle (Zhang 2014), and priorities were adjusted to cross-cutting issues where the EU experience could provide added value. This led to an emphasis on environmental governance programmes to expand the reach in rule of law projects (Barnes and Song 2014, Yang 2017). The EU-China Environmental Governance Programme, Environmental Sustainability Programme and the China-Europe Water Platform have then been launched to enhance the capacity-building of law enforcement agencies, and to raise the public awareness and participation in environmental rights and litigation.

At the same time, China initiated its own training and exchange programs on lawyers, judges and prosecutors with other developing countries (Eri 2009). Gillespie and Chen (2010)'s edited volume on legal reforms in China and Vietnam draws an overall comparison of the two communist regimes. Despite the stir in China caused by Vietnam's electoral reform, the primary focus is on Vietnam's one-directional borrowing of policies and practices from China. The case of Vietnam and China has deeper implications as the two countries are geopolitically close, inherited socialist legacies, and share the

same modernising vision in achieving rapid economic development with the dominance of the party system and concerns about political pluralism, and facing similar groups of multilateral institutions and development agencies. In the analysis later, I will demonstrate how the experience drawn from this neighbouring socialist country is more important than it appears, and how the UNDP narrates it as a viable and feasible lesson for China's legal reform.

The Legal Conundrum at the UNDP China

Having reviewed the participation of international actors in rule of law promotion in China, I turn to the case of the UNDP. When I first arrived at the Poverty, Equity and Governance (PEG) team in 2015, the office was filled with excitement. This was less than one year after the Fourth Plenum launching a new round of legal reform, and the office's direct access to state institutions like the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Supreme People's Court (SPC) at this historical opportunity escalated the expectations for the rule of law projects. Such hopes of critical junctures were nonetheless left unfulfilled. Within the next three years, projects on rule of law experienced funding restraint, personnel turnover and governmental resistance, leading to its final demise in 2018, formalised by the termination of all related projects, and merging of the PEG with other domestic projects.

From the documents that I collected, the rule of law projects began in the late 1990s, primarily under the Governance and HIV team, where legal intervention was included in the overall strategy to improve civil services, fiscal and tax policy and urban governance in China (ADR, 2000-2005). The UNDP assisted in legislation in promoting small and medium-sized enterprises and the revision of customs law in alignment with the regulations

of the World Trade Organisation. It organised training for judges, prosecutors and police officers to deliver professional administration of justice. When HIV-related legislation and legal aid ceased to be a separate portfolio, a merging process began between governance and poverty reduction teams, rebranded as the PEG (Interview, 25 September 2017).

2007 was a defining year for the rule of law portfolio. As noted above, the UNDP received financial and technical support from the European Commission under the framework of the GED. The project implemented by the UNDP was an umbrella programme specifically focused on strengthening rule of law and civil society participation in China (Project Document 2007). With a budget of 10.7 million dollars over the course of four years, it was one the most extensive and well-resourced rule of law programmes in China in terms of multilateral institutions, and the flagship governance project at the UNDP. With partnership with the NPC, SPC and Ministry of Civil Affairs, its objective was to improve governance by encouraging more transparency and accountability, and strengthening the emerging institutions of the judiciary, the legislature and civil society, through the methods of institutional reform, democratic law-making, participation, communication and piloting. The assessment and evaluation reported "improvement in the overall capacity of the participating authorities": in the legislature, procedures of public hearing, draft publicisation and post-legislative reviews were institutionalised; in the judiciary, national training programmes were rolled out for practitioners at court and legal departments, with piloting in state compensation for victims of crime and the People's Assessors system; in civil society, a civil society organisation (CSO)-government communication channel was established to broaden the participation of grassroots organisations in policy-making, and

the UNDP also followed the bottom-up approach that scaled up the legal aid centre to migrant workers (ADR 2005-2010, GED Evaluation 2012).

The GED project largely shaped the structures and approaches in the rule of law interventions at the UNDP, with the ideal design of combining research, workshops, trainings, international tours and local piloting to influence the decision-makers at key governmental agencies. After 2012, the rule of law portfolio maintained the three components outlined in the GED project, though the scale decreased significantly without EU funding. At the time, the Resident Coordinator and Country Director "understood the fundraising difficulty, but they valued the involvement in public administration and rule of law, and perceived the UNDP as the only UN agency suitable to keep up the involvement" (Interview, 25 September 2017). The decision was to use a small amount of the office's core funding to strike deals with the governmental agencies that were willing to make a cost-sharing agreement. In this way, the UNDP was able to maintain relationships with the NPC and the SPC through annual projects that primarily implemented the international tours.

In 2013, an *ad hoc* project between the UNDP and the government-affiliated think tank China Law Society was launched as a follow-up arrangement after the termination of the "re-education through labour" (RETL) system, in order to facilitate experience-sharing between Vietnam and China, with the consultation reports directly submitted to the policy-makers. From 2011 to 2015, the UNDP further provided technical support to the drafting of China's first Anti-Domestic Violence Law under a joint UN task force, and to the social assistance legal framework. It piloted the practices of public consultation in accordance with the Law on Legislation and the

representation of CSOs for victims in public interest litigation (ADR 2010-2015, Country Programme Performance Summary 2011-2015).

With the Fourth Plenum centring on rule of law in 2014, the UNDP negotiated new multiannual projects with the NPC and the SPC, based on the priorities set out in the legal reform plans. The primary content of the projects remained "largely unchanged with the GED project", emphasising "democratic and scientific legislation through participatory approach" and "judicial transparency through standardised mechanisms and systems governing court judgments, management and proceedings" (Project Document 2015; Interview, 24 October 2017). Despite the engagement with this momentum associated with new waves of legal reforms, a sense of disempowerment and frustration was widely felt among the UNDP officials on the legal agenda. The projects were restrained by a shrunken budget (the UNDP contributed around 75,000 dollars per year), the already existing expertise of the Chinese counterparts, and the dominance of governmental agencies in cherry-picking the focus areas and countries for international study tours. The UNDP "had almost no say in the matter", and using the example of the SPC project, a programme coordinator concluded the intervention "impotent, as the transparency issue highlighted in the project document was irrelevant for the SPC's priority on environmental justice and smart court" (Interview, 21 January 2017; Interview, 24 October 2017). The leadership change at the UN management level also brought less interest and support for the projects. After the resignations of two programme managers in successive years, the team leader who joined and oversaw the rule of law portfolio since 2009 also left the office in May 2018. Some minor components in legal aid still existed in the

HIV-related and LGBT projects, but there was no longer a stand-alone rule of law project at the UNDP China at the time of this writing in early 2019.

The projects in rule of law were policy-driven, focused on researching, touring, capacity building and piloting. The overall objective and normative message remained unchanged, embedding the rule of law and principles of transparency, accountability and democracy. The UNDP translators noticed the paradoxical ideologies within Chinese institutions, and followed a pragmatic approach to select international lessons, depending on the audience and the legal issues. One programme assistant described the strategy of the UNDP was as "leveraging China's two-fold identities, helping it to form a Southern identity, and pushing it to set an example in southern countries…at the same time, telling China that you cannot always follow the Chinese way, there are the international standards [from Northern countries]" (Interview, 24 January 2017). So there were two distinct ways of narrating the Northern and Southern experiences, with the former associated with international and universal standards, and the latter implying China's ability to improve the existing Southern practice and lead by example. An account of a group discussion between two UNDP officials and myself on the effectiveness of country lessons might reflect the strategic choices in a broader light, as the topic was not limited to rule of law but also to development cooperation discussed in the next chapter:

> "Me: Given an example of India or Brazil, why should the Chinese government buy in?
>
> Official A: You never know. Like any term and terminology, you do not know the trigger, [It could be] anything done before it, case, theory or advocacy, you never know what persuades the actor until the trigger finally appears.
>
> Official B: It is too micro. In China, where personal rule still prevails, many decisions are simply not rational.
>
> Official A: South-South talks succeed in a way because China says that we are all Southern countries, that any experience from the Northern countries is bullshit, as they

happen to have dominated a unique historical stage in achieving those developments, while experience-sharing between Southern countries makes more sense.

Me: In practice, how would you choose a country lesson?

Official A: China might learn from Euro-American standards, Australian standards or African standards, it is up to how they choose their approach *at that moment*. That decides how you persuade the policy-makers. If they prefer the African case, then use the African experience, while some people just fawn on the 'examples of advanced countries'.

Official B: In the project we did with the SPC, we proposed another tour to Vietnam. They responded, 'Uh huh, Vietnam, if we learn, we learn from the developed countries'.

Official A: Chinese officials often thought they were so developed. In the development cooperation case, they said they were part of the Southern country alliance in discussion, but once we moved to the case study, they said 'tell us how the OECD countries do this'. We were surprised and asked if they would consider the experience from Southern countries. They said, 'oh, then add one case or two'. Even so, they still prioritised the experience-sharing with "richer developing countries". The experience of Mexico, for example, was not considered as equally relevant as that of India.

Official B: Chinese actors have a very complicated sentiments regarding the developed countries. It's like playing a game of cat and mouse, simultaneously resistant and enchanted.

Official A: It is really up to the preferences of policy-makers, there is not a better experience in nature.

Official B: And people are very selective, they take over one case, and it is already obvious what is useful and what is not…some want to learn from the West, as it represents the direction of progress. So in the end, 'you talk the human language to humans, and devil language to devils'. " (Group Discussion, 21 January 2017)

In everyday practices, the UNDP officials encountered such paradoxical ideologies and "complicated sentiments" of Chinese actors and institutions: there was a persistent obsession with the Northern countries and their advanced experience in terms of modernity and progress, yet it contradicted the pursuit of Chinese characteristics and the solidarity of the developing world; the Southern countries shared a common identity against the Western hegemony, but China was somewhat unique in a position of leading powers. For the UNDP narrators, country lessons, either from the North or the South, did not imply pre-established normative supremacy. They were employed in a highly instrumental way, depending on the preferences of Chinese audience, to achieve better results in negotiation and persuasion. The country lessons were therefore reframed according to the two ideological lines of modernisation and post-colonialism. In the next part, based on the project

documents and publications gathered and the conference and seminars attended, I further explore the projects on participatory legislation and RETL to analyse the contrasting narration of the international experience from the EU and Vietnam respectively.

Stories on Modernity and Deficiency

The projects on the public participation in legislation, in partnership with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC, was a component implemented consistently in the rule of law portfolio, with the international lessons in research and tours consistently being from Northern/Western countries. The selection of Northern countries, in the words of the UNDP officials implementing these projects, was "mainly if not entirely subject to the choice of Chinese officials" (Interview, 25 September 2017). The international tours in governmental agencies were under a strict rotating quota system, and after waiting two years for their turn the Chinese officials preferred the developed countries rather than "hardship countries". Proposals to visit Southern countries were usually rejected and resisted, even though it "would seem to make sense to visit other countries at a similar level of development or with a similar political system" (GED Evaluation 2012, 21; also in Interview, 10 July 2017). Local actors thus decided the selection of country lessons in this case. Not all UNDP officials saw this as a signal of the powerlessness of international organisations. As a programme coordinator pointed out, it was completely acceptable to prioritise practices from the Northern countries: "you cannot choose any other cases in rule of law…China largely inherited the civil law tradition, if not going to Europe [for study tour], then where?" She continued with examples from other development agencies

such as the German Corporation for International Cooperation to argue that study tours effectively produced policy changes if fully prepared and issue-targeted on both sides (Interview, 24 October 2017).

What is relevant to my research here was not who selected the countries and whether international best practices actually transferred, but the specific ways that the experience of Northern countries were repeatedly narrated in connection with the ideology of modernisation. It started with the outline of the project document that framed the project as improving "democratic and scientific legislation" through "institutionalisation of public participation and standardisation of consultation mechanisms" (Project Document 2007, 2015). The emphasis on standardisation suggested the presence of a universalistic yardstick in evaluating the linear progress of legal development. This resonated with the legal reform discourses of the Chinese government to improve the legislation towards institutionalisation, standardisation and routinisation (*zhiduhua, guifanhua* and *chengxuhua*, 制度化/规范化/程序化), while the practices of Northern countries exactly represented these standards.

Contrary to the arguments that modernity and rule of law were often presented as ahistorical (Strange and Meyer 1993, Zurn and Peerenboom 2012, Peerenboom 2014), the legal stories of Northern countries were historicised or "hyper-historical". The introduction of public participation in legislation in workshops and publications entailed a "genealogy of the practices" that would, for example, trace the public notice and comment system back to its implementation in 1946 in the US (GED-NPC Internal Publication, 2009). The practices were framed as a long and established legal tradition regardless of radical changes wrought by recent reforms, such as the

EU's intervention to create a unified legal framework. The inconsistency and difference among member states and the OECD countries were minimalised to suggest pre-established legal harmonisation and a common legal culture.

More importantly, the legal stories in participatory legislation were integrated into broader accounts of the political and legal system. In the preparatory roundtable discussion for trips to the UK and Spain, the legal practices were presented within a detailed introduction to the electoral and parliamentary institutions in the two countries. The advanced experience based on transparency, accountability and participation were seen as derived from a deep and fundamental democratic institution and tradition. The system was holistic and structural, to be understood as a whole rather than separately in a technical analysis. The Northern countries were also treated as a single group inheriting the spirit and tradition of democracy, while the relatively recent democratisation in Spain was omitted.

The accounts, regarding either democratic systems or legislative practices, were highly formalised descriptions of the institutions and their functions, including the logic of design and supposed proceedings with parliament, committees and sector representatives. The EU experience on participatory legislation in the roundtable discussion was told in ten organised and rigid steps: set consultation objective, identify the stakeholders, determine the consultation method, create a consultation webpage, announce and communicate, run consultation, inform on contributions, analyse content, synopsis of the results and presentation of the results (Fieldnotes, 5 September 2017). Exceptions, weaknesses and flaws in design were rarely discussed, giving the assumption underneath that the system would follow the procedures in a coherent and objective way. During the tours, the knowledge

obtained was added further clarification on the function and division of tasks between institutions and departments – the key learning from the UK trip, for example, was cited as the contemporary function of the Law Commission (Interview, 24 October 2017). The accounts of practice or legal stories of Northern countries were thus told in terms of what would happen *de jure*.

As a result, these formalised and historicised stories supported the constant creation and mythmaking of the Western Legal Ideal, a well-functioning, coherent and comprehensive legal system that act as the cornerstone of consolidated democratic regimes. This in turn highlighted the China's legal deficiencies in the process of standardisation and institutionalisation. By framing the experience of Northern countries in such formalised language, it became a representation of objectivity and signalled the direction of modernisation. On the other hand, because this legal practice was deeply rooted in a broader political tradition, China would never fully achieve it with its current regime. Therefore, after the summary of the Legal Ideal, there were always gaps to be addressed and further targets to be filled.

By comparison, the lessons of Southern countries were narrated in a nearly opposite fashion. The project with the China Law Society on the follow-up arrangements after abolishing the RETL system focused entirely on studying the experience of Vietnam, which terminated a similar system earlier. The one-year project was launched shortly after the Chinese central government had already decided to suspend the practice of sending suspects with minor offences to labour camps without formal trials in 2013. The research-oriented project aimed to formulate "policy recommendations on the institutional and legal implications of suspending the RETL, especially the revisions of existing laws and administrative regulations, based on "UNDP's

technical expertise and policy work in the area of reforming administrative sanctions in other Asia-Pacific Countries (such as Vietnam)" (Concept Note, 2013). The selection of the Vietnam case benefited from the personal networks of the country director at the UNDP China, who previously worked as the country director in the Vietnam office (Interview, 5 September 2017; Interview, 25 September 2017). The research project involved an expert consultation seminar with representatives from Vietnam's Ministry of Justice in Beijing, and later on a study tour of Chinese experts to the Ho Chi Minh City. The policy reports that summarised the seminar and study tour results were not publicly circulated, but directly submitted to the Judicial Reform Office of the CPC Commission of Political and Legal Affairs to inform policy decisions. Leveraging the impact of the China Law Society and engaging the Chinese government at a critical juncture, this project was seen as one of the UNDP's "success stories" in rule of law (UNDP China Press Release 2013).

Based on internal policy reports and the personal accounts of the participants, the experience of Vietnam's reform was mainly the transfer of power from public security departments to judicial courts, the limited scope of punishments that exempted sex workers, and the enhancement of protection for juvenile offenders. A glimpse of the materials did show phrases such as "progress towards standardisation and regularisation" in Vietnam's case, yet this was not the predominant message. The experience of Vietnam was portrayed following the post-colonial ideology, as a home-grown solution compatible with the socialist system and party leadership. It demonstrated the possibility of contextualising rule of law in alternative institutional arrangements that differed from the models of Northern countries. Vietnam and China were summarised as politically and ideologically similar, and

therefore justified the applicability of the country experience. However, in contrast to the legal stories of Northern countries, the legal reforms were not positioned in a broader background – there was no introduction to Vietnam's political system and institutional design. The homogeneity between Vietnam and China was unelaborated.

Instead, the introduction of the Vietnamese experience technicalised the problem and its solution. The reform of administrative penalties was a recent and novel change, in response to the "growing demands of the socialist market economy" and the "conflict and overlapping of laws and regulations" (Policy Report 2013, 119). It was therefore an evolving practice, neither historical nor traditional, and addressed a specific aspect of the legal framework. The experience, in this light, could not represent or be used to inform a standard. It was not necessarily a move towards institutionalisation. On the contrary, the revised measure not to enforce segregated detainment for sex workers was concluded as "de-institutionalisation", relying on means of social assistance instead of a confined institutional facility (ibid. 9).

Neither was the Vietnam experience coherent and consolidated. The Vietnamese representatives pointed out the key points of debates and the contradictory views concerning the number of administrative penalties, realm of authority by court and the use of medical institutions (21 October 2013). The UNDP included its comments in 2011 on Vietnam's reform, and recommended further revisions on the measures against drug users and the procedural recognition of rights of detainees. Seminars and study tours focused on the problems emerging in practice. The major part of the study tour report detailed the gaps between the formal design and actual implementation, or what happened *de facto*. It pointed out that, despite the

new law coming into effect, not a single case had been transferred from the traditional prosecutor on minor offences (public administration) to the courts in 2014. The conflicts between the public security bureau and judicial departments tempered the transition of power, whereas the impact of social assistance and programmes was severely limited (Policy Report 2014, 6).

In comparison to the stories of Northern countries, the Vietnamese experience was positioned in a relatively equal status, rather than by constructing an Ideal toward which to strive. It contained as many deficiencies as China's legal system, which could be avoided and improved in China's reform. The lessons drawn from Vietnam did not aim at promoting a similar framework, while the recipient country was expected to innovate, revise and invent something differently. The recommended measures for the Chinese authority out of experience-sharing demonstrated a sort of willingness to delimit the governmental intervention, but also to integrate the punishment of RETL into existing laws and to expand the laws on administrative penalty allowing detention, education, and compulsory rehabilitation. This was argued as means to avoid insufficient governance and ineffective community assistance for sex workers and drug users, after abolishing the previous practice and before legal consciousness and institutional reform were in place (Policy Report 2014, 13).

The narration of the Vietnamese case as contextualised, technical, incoherent and deficient was not limited to this project. It applied as a general pattern of describing and transferring the lessons of Southern countries at the UNDP. In a following project with the China Law Society on women's land rights in 2015 or the UNDP-supported publication on the successful experience in judicial reforms in Asia-Pacific in 2009, the lessons of

developing countries were told as exploring new practices yet leaving unsatisfactory deficiencies. Furthermore, each country was selected only for its success in one specific and technical field of legal reform, such as the Philippines for its court case management or Cambodia for its judicial education (UNDP 2009). No country could export its experience as an integrated legal and political unity. For their peer countries, these lessons and their scope of application should be treated cautiously, as deficient and incomplete.

The proximity, familiarity and the sense of equality brought by these country experiences, however, did not mean that they were politically uncontroversial and unassailable. Particularly revealing in the project on RETL was the re-translation of the Vietnamese experience when the Chinese experts digested and summarised it to the Party commission. Within China's own political and institutional environment, the two paradoxical ideological filters were still in operation, managed and exploited by the Chinese actors. In analysing their legal reform in the international environment, the Vietnamese representatives stressed the adherence to the ratified international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the factor of international treaty bodies was not mentioned at all in the briefing of the Chinese experts. Instead, they described Vietnamese legal reform as having taken place "under great influence of UNDP and international institutions, the policy-makers and theorists accepted the Western concepts of due process and judicial review". In this way, the experts were able to discredit and exclude selected components. In the following paragraphs, the power transfer from public security to judicial departments was considered as "wrongly treating the judiciary as omnipotent" and "running the danger of

drifting away from the national conditions". The clear message was to dissuade policymakers from learning this institutional design (Policy Report 2014).

On the contrary, the parts of the experience that the Vietnamese representatives admitted had been revised to accord with global norms, such as the protection of juvenile offenders, was accepted and submitted to the Party Commission by the Chinese officials without reference to Western influences. This demonstrated how a Southern country's lesson, narrated along post-colonial ideological lines by the international organisation, had to go through the post-colonial ideological filter again in the next stage of translation when local actors were communicating the messages among themselves. It accurately manifested the mediation of ideologies in lesson-drawing, and the strategic use of ideological backgrounds: in the end, the descriptions and analyses of the country experience, the Chinese actors did not refer to technical details or institutional compatibility between China and Vietnam to dispel certain elements that they contested and questioned, but chose to label them as "Western" to discount the possibility and scope of the lesson transfer.

Conclusion

This chapter shifted the attention to the practices of lesson-drawing in transnational learning, and particularly the stories of other countries in rule of law. The capacious nature of this norm crafted the space for mediation and interpretation by local ideologies, constraining and empowering the norm entrepreneurs at the same time as they reframed the country lessons in accordance to their ideological backgrounds and preferences. Exploring the

cases in participatory legislation and follow-up arrangements on RETL, I further traced, in publications, workshops and study tours, how country lessons have been selected and narrated contrastingly when associated with different ideologies.

The modernisation paradigm produced the accounts of Northern/Western countries as hyper-historical, coherent and progressive, creating a Legal Ideal for the developing countries to catch up. The lessons of Southern countries, narrated along a post-colonial paradigm, constructed a sense of equality between the provider and the recipient, while the experience is inconsistent and deficient, demanding the peer countries to improve and upgrade the existing practices. This created a front-stage and back-stage dynamic in lesson-drawing, where the *de jure* Northern/Western experience appeared formalised and institutionalised, assuming the consistence between institutional prescription and everyday practice, and the Southern experience focused on the *de facto*, telling the problems and conflicts in what happened actually on the ground. The continuation of the translation chain indicated the strategic employment of ideologies by both global and local actors. The Chinese actors again made use of the ideological weapons to debate and contest the country lessons proposed by international organisations, when delivering the normative message to other local institutions.

This did not, however, fully answer why the stories of other countries were used in the first place. Their appeal and strength lay in the implications of universality, the construction of a sense of progress and direction that could be achieved though the planned steps towards standardisation and institutionalisation, and this construction was only rendered concrete through the living examples of others. The country lessons verified the possibility of

localising the global norms. The power of universality was nonetheless fragile and languid, constantly being challenged and conditioned by local beliefs and structures. This might have placed the discussion within the common debate of universalism *versus* relativism. What the norm translators did, instead, was to invoke another group of countries, and the Southern experience that led the rejection of the universalistic and linear trajectory to the emergence of another form of non-hegemonic solidarity. In this way, it prevented the doubts over the homogenising effects of global norms from retreating into localism and nativism, and pointed out the alternative transnational linkages that rendered local practices among the countries as flawed and incomplete in implementation and thus requiring further learning. "The Other" was always there to remind of the presence of normative universes beyond the local.

My discussion thus has rested on the travelling of global norms to the local in a variety of contexts, although this chapter has already touched on the reverse movements of local beliefs to other countries and their impact on international packages, especially the experience of China through South-South dialogue. The next chapter extends this line of inquiry, by looking at what happens when the local becomes the "significant other" and part of the global.

Chapter 6
When the Local Returns: Translating China's Development

"Whom would [the developing countries] like to hear from? Denmark, which has not seen poverty in one hundred and twenty years, with social governance, health care, whatever systems way out of proportion from what Mozambique can manage right now. Or, would you rather speak to *you*, China, a country that still faces lots of issues. In *your* (China's) own words, contradictions, which mean inequality, people living in poverty or close to poverty. Honestly, the developing countries would like to speak with *you*. (emphasis in original)"

Team leader in South-South Cooperation (26 October 2017)

"In a broader sense, we have different social institutions. Some of the countries have democratic regimes, following the Western models, and here I do not need to comment on the pros and cons of that. The question is, in those places, [the China Model] cannot be learned, even with top-level agreement, the policies are not going to be implemented without a centralised governance structure."

Policy Associate in South-South Cooperation (1 November 2017)

The preceding chapters have described what take place when global norms arrive at the local, the ways in which they turn into vernacular stories and attain meanings in resonance with socio-cultural and ideological backgrounds. Nonetheless, the paths and routes through which norms travel are rarely one-directional but always myriad, divergent and overlapping. This chapter continues the discussion, except that the subject of the "international lesson" now becomes China. The emphasis shifts to alternative directions of norm diffusion: when and how local ideas return to the global, reshape transnational normative packages, and travel to other localities. Norm diffusion is thus presented as a multidirectional process, when local and global norms are situated in recursive feedback loops, with back-and-forth movements and linkages forged through multiple acts of translation.

The narration of China's development experience to the international community represents a vibrant example of such dynamics. It has been regarded as a normative resource in China's pursuit for soft power and global status, most recently driven by the propaganda campaign to "tell the China

story well". The organisational change of the UNDP China to expand South-South Cooperation (SSC) and global partnership in 2010 reflects the government's intention of engaging with international organisations and promoting the Chinese experience, despite the ambiguities of what that actually entails. Meanwhile, narrating China's model fits into the UNDP's mandate to facilitate experience sharing and exchange, in which the UNDP dilutes China's state power to interpret the meanings of local norms and exploits the opportunities to influence Chinese actors.

Built on the preliminary observations from the narration of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the UNDP, I use the case studies of trilateral cooperation projects and the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China (IPRCC) in order to explain how local development norms are translated back to the global and in other localities. The two cases represent different institutional designs and motivations in narrating the Chinese stories: trilateral projects involve traditional donors and place China as the intermediate supplier for technologies and policy tools under the Development Assistance Cooperation (DAC) framework of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), while the establishment of the IRPCC is primarily driven by the government's motive to share experiences with other developing countries through the South-South channel. Instead of simply consolidating or challenging the global norms, different versions of China's development experience containing its universality and particularity are formed at the same time. Elements and contents that do not stand out locally, such as notions of democracy and community participation, are added beneath the canopy of the "Chinese experience" and therefore reinforce the global normative *status quo*, while

local preferences on prioritising state-led economic growth are absorbed into the international development discourse. Both local and global normative messages are transformed and redefined in this process of norm entanglement, blurring the boundaries between the two. Rhetorically committed to the ideological identity of the Global South, the translation of China's development lesson in effect brings closer the DAC and South-South standards, crafting the liminal spaces and accelerating convergences between the two normative frameworks.

When Local Returns to Global

A strand of studies perceives norms as fluid and evolving entities and has employed concepts like "cycles", "movements" or "linkages" with the intention of capturing their changing dynamics (Finnmore and Sikkink 1998, Krook and True 2012). Keck and Sikkink (1998) use the concept of "boomerang effect" to describe the transnational networks between actors that exercise pressures on domestic institutions for normative changes, a model that is further elaborated to specify the mechanisms that link the actors through multiple levels (Risse 2013). While these studies involve both local and global actors in an integrated framework, they perpetuate a particular spatial imagination of diffusion, in which norms flow from global level to local level, and assume a cause-effect relationship between the two. This view, however, only presents one dimension of norm diffusion, and neglects the fact that ideas travel and change in reverse patterns. Local norms return to the global level, shape their own meanings as well as the meanings of global normative packages. Such dynamics require a rethinking of space and de-centring of the global, making space for a transnational perspective that "conceptualises global norm

creation and appropriation as an open process of negotiation in which various actors are involved. All these actors are considered contextualized – there is no qualitative difference between the local, national and international – and seen as being part of a non-linear dynamic of norm production" (Zwingel 2012, 116).

The non-linearity of norm diffusion presents itself as a multidimensional and multidirectional process in which actors participate in back-and-forth contestation and translation in recursive feedback loops. This means that local adaptions and understandings have been fed back to global frameworks, similar to what Kearney calls "implosion" (1995), when the ostensible peripheries return to the centres. This recursive relationship presents a more complex model in explaining the emergence and evolution of norms, as Merry attributes the source of global ideas and institutions to "usually another locality that has developed an idea or practice into a form that circulates globally and is then transplanted into another locality" (2006, 39). The evolvement of Responsibility to Protect in China and Japan provides an example of how local actors reconstruct global norms, which not only influences how it is played out in domestic policy-making, but also shifts the original norm towards the softer end of the continuum (Prantl and Nakano 2011).

The multidirectional perspective opens up possibilities for local norms to influence the global agenda through trickle-up and bottom-up diffusion. Emerging powers, particularly, are the group of local actors with strong incentives and resources to make use of such possibilities, pursue the status of norm maker and shaper, and amplify their political presence (Pu 2012, Reilly 2012, Abdenur 2014, Garwood-Gowers 2016). So what is the impact of their

local ideational preferences on global normative packages? In general terms, there are two forms of outcomes: *stabilising*, which occurs when an emerging power provides affirmative feedback and minor adjustments to global norms that reinforce their legitimacy and expand their scope of implementation; or *reshaping*, when an emerging power challenges the normative *status quo* and seeks to replace existing global norms with alternative formulas. Acharya (2011) coins the term "norm subsidiarity" to conceptualise bottom-up processes of norm creation, whereby local actors construct rules to preserve their autonomy and resist the discursive hegemony imposed by dominant actors in international security. Berger (2017), on the other hand, presents a comparatively pessimistic picture in his study on Bangladesh, in which he argues that the innovative local translations of "rule of law", once returned to the global domain and mediated by international organisations, lose their original meanings and turn into evidence that consolidates the existing normative frameworks.

Instead of being contradictory and mutually exclusive, the stabilising and reshaping effects of local norms can take place at the same time. Local actors carry a multiplicity of identities, and, when narrating in their own rules and beliefs, deliver a combination of ambiguous messages that maintain and challenge the global norms throughout different periods. More importantly, local actors do not monopolise the creation, explanation and elaboration of their own norms. In many cases they actively seek multilateral approaches to legitimise and promote their own agendas. For example, international organisations can repackage local norms in the language that incorporates messages and contents unintended by domestic institutions, or absorb local demands and revisions to ensure support from a wider range of countries.

This eventually becomes a process of norm entanglement, in which local and global norms are both redefined and mutually constituted in the back-and-forth movements of translation, taking in and throwing out elements in the composition of new normative scripts.

"Tell the China Story Well"

This chapter looks at the return of local norms to the global level through the narration of China's development experience. One important aspect regarding the rise of China is its normative power to participate in and exercise influence on the global order. The presence of this power is not always intended or deliberated by Chinese actors, as the local experience can be interpreted and narrated by other states and international actors without the country's involvement.[42] Having said that, the advocacy of its normative scripts has been part of China's foreign policy, externalising propaganda campaigns to promote its international image. Since its entry into the United Nations in 1971, China has been engaged with international institutions under such a mandate. It marked the strategic transformation from the use of "exit" (withdrawing from international system) to the use of "voice" (participating in international bodies), which also distinguished China from many previous powers, as its emergence took place in a highly institutionalised international order (Lanteigne 2005, Ikenberry 2017).

[42] The narration and learning of the China model in other countries focuses on its reform success and economic growth. The term "China Model" itself originated in Romania's commentaries on China's post-communist transition, and was picked up by the Chinese official newspaper People's Daily in 1991 (Bandurski 2010). More recently, China serves as the example for alternative development paths by developing countries, especially among African states, see in Kernen's ongoing project on the socialization of the China Model at the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development at http://www.r4d.ch/modules/thematically-open-research/new-global-powers-in-africa.

The use of international organisations is mixed with rationalistic and normative concerns. One perspective on China's engagement with the international system, drawing on its early activities, focuses on its pragmatic "maxi/mini" approach that maximises rights and minimises responsibilities (Kim 1979, 1992; Fullilove 2011). China's use of international organisations is thus defined as inward-looking, leveraging resources for its national development, prestige and legitimacy. The narration of the Chinese experience through international platforms is exemplary of the forms of outreach employed by its state propaganda machines, which reinforces the regime legitimacy (Ednery 2012). Through a different perspective, Kent (2002, 2007) point out that, except for its domestic concerns, China uses international organisations as vehicles for global reform, reshaping agendas in international law and promoting the status of developing countries. In other words, the promotion of its own stories is outward-looking, reflecting the stance of a "reformist revisionist" power (Buzan 2010) and the Global South identity (Shambaugh 2013).

Regardless of the inward-facing or outward-facing directionality of its approach, the primary source of China's narratives steadily comes from its development experience. Dubbed as the "China Model" or "China Road", the country's lessons in economic growth have been the main subject of peer interest and learning, which reached a peak with Ramo's publication of the "Beijing Consensus" in 2004 and the global financial crisis in 2008. This has been noticed and strategically employed by the Chinese government. As the deputy director of the State Council Information Office Wang Guoqing put it, the strengthening of soft power was directly associated with "the international influence of China's concept of development, and the attraction of the Chinese

development model" (Meng and Qian 2007). Shifting away from the previous reservations about the term "China Model", Xi Jinping formally recognised it and stressed the sharing of China's practices with other countries, though still refraining from "exporting the model".[43]

The China Model concept was often characterised by controversy and incoherence, as the scattered analysis struggled to distinguish it from the Western histories of state capitalism or Asian developmental states (Kennedy 2010, Breslin 2011).[44] Despite its questionable originality, the concept continues to provide normative inspirations for state-led economic development or the discourse on the "right to development". The right to development was firstly promoted in the New International Economic Order in the 1970s and formally endorsed in the UN Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986. The Chinese government began to engage with this language since 1991, when the rights to subsistence and development were continuously underpinned in white papers on human rights in response to international pressure (Ibhawoh 2011). In recent years, the right to development became an integral part of the framing of the China Model, and was seen as a localised norm to advocate the preferences of state actors at the international level.

Drawing from the white paper published by the State Council titled "The Right to Development: China's Philosophy, Practice and Contribution" in 2016, and the previous works on the China Model (Kennedy 2010, Zhao 2010,

[43] This was mentioned in Xi Jinping's speech at the opening ceremony of the Communist Party of China in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting in Beijing on Dec 1, 2017, titled "Xieshou Jianshe Gengjia Meihaode Shijie" ["Building a Better World Hand-in-Hand"].

[44] The difficulties in summarising a unique China Model were also stressed by UNDP officials, as "there is no difference from East Asian countries, with their strong and technical governments, and result-based and top-down approach" (Interview, 27 November 2017).

Naughton 2010), three main tenets can be identified in this development norm. First, the objective of development is primarily economic growth, as measured through poverty reduction, employment rates and living standards. It lays the foundation and safeguard for the achievements of other forms of rights. Second, the implementation of development is overseen by the state, driven by infrastructure investment and control over key industries. The statist approach can be further reflected in the pragmatic gradualism characterised by the extensive use of policy experiments. Third, the outcomes of development are not exclusive to one country, but mutually beneficial through win-win partnerships. The development partnership underlines the principle of national ownership for countries to choose their own paths and enhance the voice of developing countries in building an equal and just international system. These normative elements are found not only in China's narration of its own development model, but also in its stance on foreign policy. Comparing to the Western framework, Zhao Lei (2010) analyses China's perception on peacebuilding as characterised by priorities on economic development, state institutions and the principle of non-intervention, which is reflected in its security policies in Africa (Wang 2014, Alden and Large 2015). According to He Yin (2014), this norm of developmental peace, in contrast to the liberal peace paradigm, shifts the attention to statist approaches in economic security as the precondition of long-lasting peace.[45]

[45] For detailed discussion on China's norm in peace and development, see Lei, Xue. *China as a Permanent Member of the United Nation Security Council*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Global Policy and Development, 2014. He Yin. 2017. *Developmental Peace: Chinese Approach to UN Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding*. The Journal of International Studies. Li Dongyan. 2018. *International Peacekeeping Operations: Chinese Concept and Framework*, World Economies and Politics, April 2018. It should be noted that in He Xin's original formulation, the norm developmental peace is not in a replacement role for the liberal peace paradigm, yet

Here I highlight the latest advocacy of China's development norm, manifested in the campaigns to "tell the China story well" ("*jianghao zhongguo gushi*", 讲好中国故事), which reflects the inherent ambiguity of the China Model that requires the interpretive power of stories. Appearing in Wang Guoqing's talk at the World Economic Forum in 2010, the term gained popularity after Xi's "8.19 speech" at the National Publicity and Ideology Work Meeting in 2013, and has since been repeated in official policies and documents. In Xi's words, the changing situation in the world required the government to "innovate international publicity methods, emphasise the making of new and intercultural concepts, categories and sayings, tell the China story and spread the Chinese voice". Following a logic of self-justification that conceptualised the party-dominated system as having emerged from history, traditional culture and social reality, these stories contained the elements of the success in poverty reduction that changed the livelihood of people and contributed to the world economy; the launch of the 13th Five-Year Plan and the Five Major Development Concepts that transformed the economy to be equitable and ecologically sustainable; and the peaceful rise of China that would not provoke conflicts and confrontations.[46]

As efforts to consolidate regime legitimacy based on past achievements of modernisation and the capacity to reorient the reform continued, these stories expressed the normative beliefs of governmental actors in the right to development, which prioritises economic development, state-led planning and

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the mutually supplementary relationship of the two norms becomes weakened in the discussion that follows.

[46] Lim and Bergin (2018) explored the campaign to "tell China's story well" through the world-wide purchases of media outlets and journalist training programs by state-run actors, that show another layer of this political campaign.

win-win developmental partnerships. However, in stressing that the Chinese experience is supposed to be shared instead of being exported, it is unclear how this local norm should be presented and promoted to international actors, or what parts of the norm are potentially universalisable and what parts are highly contextualised. Such questions are then left to the translation and reconstruction of international actors.

The Third Floor

As discussed in previous chapters, the UNDP country office responded to the changing economic status of China as a Middle Income Country and its strategic emphasis on SSC through an organisational repositioning starting in 2011. At the same time, a new UN programme cycle opened to plan the priorities for next five years with governmental representatives. Consultation meetings were held both within and between the two parties to discuss the institutional arrangement and mission of the UN office in China (UNDAF 2016-2020). This readjustment overlapped with the period of strategic shift in China's foreign policies, characterised by more proactive activities in "pushing for change in some Intergovernmental Organisations to reflect Beijing's long-stated commitments to multipolarity and enhancing the influence of developing countries" (Shambaugh 2013, 136).

The outcome of this repositioning process was manifested in the rise of the third floor where the teams on SSC and Global Partnership were based. The UNDP staff generally equated the "third floor" to "outward-looking projects". The establishment of the third floor was perceived as a manifestation of the UN's comparative advantage in facilitating the exchanges of global experience and expertise, and of the governmental request to utilise the UNDP's global

presence and network (Review of CPD 2011–15, 6; Interview with former Country Director, 5 September 2017). Prior to the signing of an MOU between UNDP and China for strengthening SSC in 2010, the office had no formal SSC strategies or programme linkages. After the repositioning process, SSC and international partnership took off, "embedded as a key pillar of UNDP's cooperation with the government" (Review of CPD 2011–15, 23).

The motivation for active engagement came from the concerns regarding funding difficulties and institutional sustainability. The office experienced an unexpected core funding cut during the 2011–2015 programme cycle, from the promised 5.5 millions U.S. dollars per annum to 2.5 million per annum, with a further cut in 2017–18, from 1.2 million to approximately 150,000 dollars (Fieldwork Note, 23 October 2017). This meant that the office financially depended on cost-sharing from the government and its own fundraising, which pushed for a close alignment with the government.

Nonetheless, a materialist rationale was not the only driver behind the institutional readjustment. The UNDP office was aware of the power inequalities between host country and international organisation, and the risks of turning into a spokesperson for the government. Instead of being a passive respondent, it perceived China's further globalisation as a window of opportunity for socialising local actors into "international norms and standards ranging from climate change mitigation to human rights to health service reform – [which] will underpin China' success in addressing its national development challenges" (CPD 2011–15). The office exploited the weakness in the ambiguity and incoherence around the China Model, and argued for the capacity of the UN to help with a "more systematic evaluation of its own development experience, which is more easily accessible to other

developing countries" (UNDAF 2011–15, 19). In the account of one program manager, "it is the internationalisation of local practices. Some of them already have international features, yet without comprehensive and systematic summary and analysis" (Interview, 17 January 2017). Focusing on the "soft" aspects of development, the UNDP leveraged its impact on the overseas behaviour of Chinese actors in commercial activity and development cooperation, with a long-term intention of ensuring China's support for the global post-2015 development agenda.

Driven by these two motivations, the UNDP China office engaged with the campaign to tell the China story, particularly with an emphasis on poverty reduction and development partnership. China's experience in stimulating economic growth while dealing with rapid industrialisation and urbanisation were well recognised, seen as a major contributor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Regarding the channels for disseminating the Chinese experience, the office in the period of 2011–15 prioritised trilateral projects to facilitate exchanges of policies and technologies, as they were in alignment with the rhetoric on SSC yet enabled the UN's participation as the third party under a multilateral framework. From the 2015–2020 programme cycle, the narration of the Chinese experience was further expanded and SSC became an essential component of project design. The country office followed the headquarters' move to engage with initiatives such as the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and explicitly defined the UNDP as "a knowledge broker, assist[ing] China to document and publicize its development cooperation experience" (CPD 2016–2020). "The mentality of the third floor" dispersed into other teams with a more domestic focus, and

the sharing of China's lessons became a strategic emphasis "exceptional to this office" (Meeting with UNDP Associate Administrator, 10 October 2017).

In practice, however, the sharing of Chinese experience was met with confusion and frustration, as officials frequently complained about the ambiguity of the normative messages proposed by Chinese actors, or how these positions were related to the existing global norms. An example of the project on development cooperation frameworks illustrated such confusion: the team leader specifically asked project managers to cautiously avoid the use of terms like "foreign aid", as China was committed to SSC and would not want to be associated with the framework of the Global North. However, in formal meetings and publications of white papers, it was the Chinese officials who employed the term "foreign aid", seemingly contradicting the rhetorical commitments of local norms.

Therefore, speculation, discrepancies and misunderstandings became everyday occurrences in the narration of Chinese experience. The undefinedness and uncertainty of local norms, however, also made room for agency of international actors to initiate "capacity building" for local actors, and to repackage the Chinese experience in accordance with global norms. In what follows, I use the narration of the BRI through the UNDP as an example to draw preliminary observations on how the engagement with local norms unfolds in practice, how actors make strategic decisions, and how the normative messages move around and change their meanings.

Belt and Road Initiative

The BRI is China's regional strategy to stimulate economic growth and integration through infrastructure connectivity, aiming to enhance new

investment and trade opportunities that link national and regional development. Signing a MOU with the government in September 2016, the UNDP was the first international organisation to engage with this initiative. At a country level, the projects on BRI were under the Global Partnership team, in cooperation with the China Centre for International Economic Exchange (CCIEE), a government-affiliated think tank. China Development Bank (CBD), as a major financial institution for BRI, became a partner and project sponsor in 2017. The outputs of the projects were mainly in the form of international forums and reports. With the premise that "the BRI is a blurry idea", the actors, in the first step, narrated its linkages to global norms by "cutting down the government's ego" (Interview, 29 November 2017). Most content applauding the national government was taken out in UNDP reports (Interview, 7 November 2017). The general strategy was to align the BRI with the SDGs, framing the former as an "accelerator and an effective vehicle for achieving the SDGs" (Associate Administrator Speech, 10 November 2016).

Repackaging the BRI as a stabilising factor in global norms, the UNDP selectively amplified and inserted concepts and principles that were originally not present or emphasised. On the relationship with other countries, the BRI broadly advocated for collaboration, consultation and policy coordination. In the storytelling of the UNDP, however, the BRI "strategically targeted recipient countries' development gaps" (UN RC Speech, 10 November 2016) and engaged with local actors on its implementation. The principle of national ownership was thus added into and emphasised in the BRI.

Furthermore, the UNDP actors portrayed the BRI as a democratic contribution to the international system. The notion of democracy reflected an interesting dynamic here: it was mostly absent in domestic projects, yet when

mentioning the global aspect of China's initiative, there was a pro-democracy impact (Interview, 29 November 2017). The underlying logic was that, as a leader in developing countries, China's normative input and participation would enhance the voice of the Global South, therefore making the distribution of decision-making power and agenda-setting in international development more democratic and accountable. Nonetheless, this resonance with global democracy and SSC was not mentioned at all in the original statement of the BRI, which underlined the connections between strong economies between East Asia and Europe.

UNDP actors exploited the ambiguity and openness of the BRI, and used the power of redefinition and reinterpretation to influence not only its meanings at the international level, but also how local actors understood it. A significant change was the gradual incorporation of sustainability– a briefly mentioned notion in the BRI expanded itself in the recent "Green BRI initiative" launched by the four Ministries in China, advocating "ecological civilisation, green development and environmental protection" (2017), and restated in Xi's speech by aligning the BRI and SDGs.[47] In the UNDP office, this was seen as a possibility for intervening in the local norm, and "pushing the government" to transform the BRI into a platform for green trade and investment (Interview, 27 November 2017).

With the transformations of the BRI, did the meanings of the global norm SDGs remain intact? As the global norm returned back and forth between Chinese and international actors, entangled with normative messages of the BRI, it did not come out of these recursive conversations intact. As the UN

[47] Xi Jinping's speech at the BRI Forum for International Cooperation, 14 May 2017.

China RC put it, the BRI "represents a move away from standard development models that emphasize policy and institutional issues (and often accompanying conditionalities), towards a more investment-driven approach focusing on infrastructure, trade and jobs creation." (Speech, 6 July 2017).

As a result, economic development in the SDGs was emphasised, sidelining the goals on equality and justice and depoliticising the sustainable development agenda. In BRI narratives, the end-instrument relationship was slowly reversed, treating the social and environmental goals not as parallel ends to economic development, but as instruments to guarantee its long-term growth. They were perceived as "risks" to be managed in the implementation of infrastructure projects, especially needed in developing countries.[48] This reshaping process shifted the emphasis in the Sustainable Goal 9 on building resilient infrastructure, where the original focus on "affordable and equitable access for all" was marginalised, driving the non-binding norm of the SDGs towards an even softer end, with weak compliance and regulation. A project consultant described the writing of the BRI reports as "removing any words in relation to standards, regulations or rules", which explained why the initial proposal to monitor the BRI under the SDGs national framework at a high-level forum was quickly dropped and did not make an appearance in formal conference reports. A growth-oriented deregulated perspective was added to the SDGs, a development paradigm that the SDGs aimed to replace in the first place.

[48] When the BRI was first mentioned in the UN Security Council in the resolution to extend the assistance mission in Afghanistan, for instance, peace and security were taken as means to ensure a secure environment for connectivity cooperation and trade agreements along the BRI region (UN Resolution 2344, 2017).

The reshaping process was also manifested in the changes of how the SDGs were narrated internally. “Development finance” in the BRI was disseminated into the language of the SDGs, in which “innovative financial modalities” and “blended approaches involving public-private finance” were valued (UNDP CDB Report 2017, RC 2017). This was obvious when comparing the internal and external speeches and communications of UN officials: the prioritisation of finance hinted at on formal occasions was made explicit and outright in closed-door meetings. As a senior figure from the UNDP leadership stated in an internal seminar, “the key point is how we are financing not funding the sustainable development projects globally” (Meeting Notes, 12 January 2017). The term “innovation” turned into a reference for flexibility in financing tools and deregulations in global competition (Meeting Notes, 10 October 2017). The BRI galvanised and accelerated this movement towards development finance, and it should not come as a surprise that the SDG Impact Finance initiative, established in late 2016, was based at the Asia-Pacific office, was heavily involved with Chinese capital and personnel, and organised a series of trainings and workshops on impact finance with the China office.

The narration of the BRI through the UNDP, therefore, illustrated the parallel stabilising and reshaping processes that redefine local and global normative packages. The notions of national ownership and democracy were incorporated into the contents of the BRI that reinforced the legitimacy of the SDGs, while the scope of the BRI was extended to convey the commitment of sustainability. On the other hand, the reliance of emerging donors and regional cooperation leveraged the impact of the BRI on the UN development agenda, allowing the local norm to selectively highlight the goal of

infrastructure-led economic growth and underplay the political and social outcomes as "risk management" in safeguarding long-term development finance. This has driven the SDGs towards a softer norm with weakened mechanisms of compliance and regulation.

Such recursive movements and recreations are not unique to the BRI, but more of a regular occurrence when the narratives of Chinese norms and experiences travel to the global level. I will further demonstrate the stabilising and reshaping process through the projects of trilateral cooperation and poverty reduction centre. Both projects have operated for a much longer period in the UNDP office, and represented two types of outcomes: in trilateral projects, the statist arguments are weakened and replaced by the emphasis on community and participation, stabilising the global normative framework on good governance; yet in the poverty reduction centre project, the prominent role of the state is recognised and pushed through, reshaping the evolution of the international development paradigm.

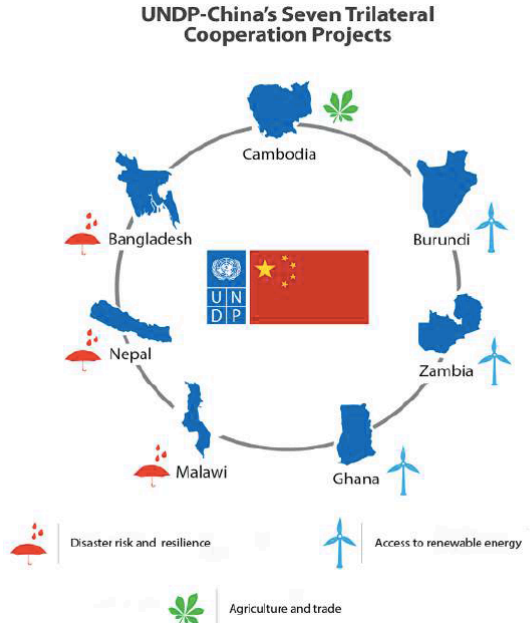
Case I: Trilateral Cooperation in Ghana and Zambia

Trilateral or triangular cooperation builds on the partnership between traditional donors (DAC countries and multilateral agencies) who provide financial resources, emerging donors who supply services and goods, and the third countries who receive development assistance. As a relatively new modality in international development recognised in the 2010 Bogota Statement and 2011 Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, trilateral cooperation is expected to bridge the North-South divide, introducing international standards and requirements, more suitable and transferable

technologies and experience, and greater national ownership for the beneficiaries (Ashoff 2010, Mawdsley 2012, Abdenur and Da Fonseca 2013).

The UNDP China office initiated trilateral projects with the upsurge in SSC in 2010, and rapidly expanded into sectors in agriculture (Cambodia), renewable energy (Ghana and Zambia), and disaster management (Nepal, Bangladesh, Malawi; see graph 6.1). With funding largely coming from DAC donors, such as Denmark and Britain, traditional donors perceived the projects as means to engage with the Chinese governmental counterparts (UNDP 2017). Instead of collaborating with Chinese actors directly, the choice of the UNDP as the intermediary organisation was based on the belief that the UNDP maintained closer and direct access to the government, without raising the concerns of imposing the preferences of Western countries. For the Chinese actors, as stated in its White Paper on Foreign Aid in 2014, trilateral cooperation demonstrated its willingness to work with different partners and enhance its own effectiveness and image-building. The demands from recipient countries, in comparison, played a limited role in establishing these projects.

Graph 6.1. UNDP China's Trilateral Projects[49]



To unpack the dynamics and mechanisms of trilateral cooperation in detail, I focus on the China-Zambia-Ghana renewable energy project. Regarded as a flagship project, it received considerable funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Denmark, with a budget of over 5 million dollars across the span of five years (2014-18). Its implementing partners included the Administrative Centre for China's Agenda 21 (ACCA21) under the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) in China, the Energy Commission in Ghana, and the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Water Development in Zambia. The purpose of this project was to "show concrete solutions for providing access to renewable energy", through the "creation of an enabling environment for technology transfer" at the upstream level, and the "actual transfer and demonstration of technologies with potential up-scaling by the private sector" at the downstream level (UNDP Project Document 2014).

[49] Source: UNDP-China Partnership on South-South and Global Cooperation, 2014 Highlights.

While introducing China's experience and technology to Zambia and Ghana, this project also sought to invigorate the management capacities and approaches of Chinese actors, with the plan of establishing a pilot South-South centre at MOST. The project scale and its potential demonstrating effects made it a popular case in communication, given the numerous visits to the project site by UN leadership. During his visit, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon singled out the UNDP trilateral project on renewable energy and its partners were "good examples of South-South Cooperation" (8 August 2016).

Despite its well-articulated rationale and acclaim, the Ghana-Zambia project encountered several of the difficulties common to trilateral cooperation, in which the involvement of multiple actors brings in new layers of conflicts over the administrative structure, procedures and normative standards (Carbone 2011). These conflicts resulted in transactional costs and operational ineffectiveness. The Danish government struggled to justify the project when the public perceived the project as expanding the energy market for its Chinese competitors. The donor agency was inextricably swamped with internal political conflicts, and the new director expressed much less enthusiasm than its predecessor and aimed to close the funding in 2018. The Chinese side was eager to take lead in the project, although without commitment to cost-sharing or other forms of financial contribution. The SSC unit in MOST was yet to be established after four years of project implementation.

There was a lack of traceable impacts on the knowledge and skills among the Zambian and Ghanaian officials, whereas their complaints focused on the arrogant attitudes of the Chinese participants (Interview, 28 November 2017). There existed an apparent variation in the project outcomes, as Ghana

adopted the recommended policy framework based on Chinese guidelines, while Zambia rejected the framework and used the project resources to build a small hydro power station, changing the project from "blood-making" (*zaoxue*, 造血) to "blood-transfusion" (*shuxue*, 输血). The hydro power station was a failure, according to the account of the programme coordinator visiting the site, as "it was originally designed for off-grid population, and only realized now this is not financially sustainable, even if connected to the grid" (Interview, 8 August 2018). The Zambian government stated that, if the project failed, it would become a political crisis. In the words of the program manager, "each partner does not know what they really want, they all want to claim ownership. In the end, interests and demands are all messed up and collided" (Interview, 28 November 2017).

The actual success or failure of the project, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter, which focuses instead on the normative stories that drove it. How were the stories of Chinese experience translated, categorised and mobilised? Instead of stressing the normative framework of state-led development, the lessons summarised by the UNDP underpinned how the "good" regulating environment could automatically unleash the potential of the private sector and market forces, and thus provided bottom-up solutions to energy access for off-grid communities. A decentralised, market-driven and community-based model was drawn from the "experience of China", which reinforced the idealised development trajectories offered by the DAC donors in the "good governance" paradigm. The following part identifies how this narrative of China's development achieved its dominance in the Zambia-Ghana trilateral project.

Let us turn to the Chinese actors first. Recommended by the Ministry of Commerce to be the partner of this project, the ACCA21 and MOST did not show particular interest at the beginning. The ACCA21 preferred to distance the project from any implications of exporting China's model or experience, which was seen as a form of intervention against the formal policy line. It emphasised hardware and technology transfer, turning the project activities more into an "exhibition fair" for Chinese companies, which deeply troubled the UNDP who anticipated more openness in the selection of service provider. This was when the UNDP, as the coordination agency in the project, took over the role of narrating the Chinese experience in the field of renewable energy. It formulated documents, policy papers, training seminars and pilot centres to identify the Chinese experience and the institutional gaps in recipient countries. The rhetoric of "development memory" emerged among the UNDP officials to clarify what could be learned and not be learned from China. According to the account of a policy associate:

> "China still has the memory of development. Say my parents or grandparents, the generation that still lives, they know how poor and underdeveloped they were, and how they have slowly developed, how to make the customised solutions. The experience of highly developed Western countries might not fit into the conditions of developing countries, retrained by human-related factors.
>
> China's success in poverty reduction is because of the strong government, strong governance and policy enforcement. Some policies might not be inclusive, we criticised them for lacking attention to human rights, but in the long run, they can massively address [the problems of] collective action. Many developing countries are exactly in lack of such institutions" (Interview, 1 November 2017).

The UNDP staff have often used the same expressions of "development memory" in explaining why the Chinese experience was relevant, feasible and implementable in the context of developing countries. This was central to the construction of the China Model in building its historical and ideological linkages with the targeted countries. A mechanism of difference and distinction made some experience transferrable and others not, marking off

the technologies and policies that could be learned, and the state system to implement them as something with Chinese uniqueness that could not be transported. If the state-led model can be filtered out as non-transferrable, then what were the normative messages or frameworks that did go through?

Taking a closer look at the Chinese experience as narrated by the UNDP in this project, we can ascertain how "development memories" were selectively and temporally skewed in order to consolidate and deliver certain normative messages. This rewriting of history reflects a common practice of expert knowledge and brokerage in international development, which obscures historical contingencies, struggles and experiments behind a façade of institutional solutions (Pritchett and Woolcock 2004). The lesson of China in promoting electricity access and renewable energy was stated as follows in the project document (2014):

> "In 1992, when Agenda 21 took its initial steps into China, the government was just starting to promote renewable energy. Since then, there has been a steep progression in policies, laws, regulations and investments linked to the national agenda of sustainable development, which have supported the establishment and subsequent growth of the renewable energy market.
>
> Diversification of energy resources, especially transitioning to renewables, is a critical aspect of China's continued development. As concerns over environmental degradation increase, balancing growth with the achievement of environmental objectives has become a priority, and investments in renewable energies have grown with an average of 80% per annum since 2004."

The document proceeded to introduce recent rural electrification initiatives such as the Brightness Program, Township Electrification Program and the China Renewable Energy Development Project as examples of promoting electricity access through renewable energy. The "Chinese lesson" was thus situated in the post-reform era, starting from the 1990s, and achieved its outcomes when a friendly policy environment led to the expansion of the market and investment. What was missing here, however, was the link between the wave of renewable energy and access to electricity. Electricity

access in China was 92% in 1990, much higher than Zambia (27.9%, 2014) and Ghana (78.3%, 2014). In this respect, the pre-reform experience of China would have been more relevant for promoting electricity access. In the UNDP project document, it also recognised that the overall generation of electricity from renewable energies in China has increased from nearly 0% of the total energy produced in 1993 to 0.3 % in 2013, making little contribution to national electricity access. "This nominally small increase", the document nonetheless insisted, "has made China a global leader in several sectors of green technology production". Despite the lack of evidence in renewable energy accelerating electricity access, the successful story of China's favourable policy regulation and robust renewable energy market prevailed, even when the research within the project suggested otherwise.

For the purposes of producing a set of detailed guidelines elaborating China's energy development, the project team commissioned energy experts to produce in-depth reports on the historical and institutional developments of China's renewable energy and rural electricity. This policy research series traced the experience as deeply rooted in the socialist period with strong influence of state planning and intervention, and questioned the effectiveness of market mechanisms.

Far from declaring China's experience in renewable energy a success, it adopted a more cautious and realistic stance. "The solar-thermal power generation", for example, "is still in trial and exploration stage…As China has not promulgated the relevant subsidies for solar thermal power station and the standard system management measures, development is relatively slow". The hydropower projects were largely built or planned before the 1980s, dating back to the *Symposium on Small Water Conservancy and*

Hydropower in Southern Mountainous Areas by the State Council in 1969, which signified the acceleration of small hydropower development. As for biomass energy, it was largely attributed to the biogas campaigns from the 1950s, with two intensive promotions during 1957-1961 and 1967-1979. In summary, "the absence of governmental direction will mean that a 'market' dedicated to the least-cost principle will select proven fossil-fuel technologies…although support for renewable energy has grown, there are no compulsory market security policies, stable market demand or market drive. Consequently, renewable energy technology develops slowly in China" (UNDP Project Policy Research Series, 82).

Therefore, instead of celebrating market-friendly regulation, Chinese energy experts stressed the role of state intervention and subsidies in promoting rural electrification and renewable energy since the socialist period, and presented China as a case that lacked the requisite market drive rather than enabled it. This narrative of the Chinese experience, however, was mostly ignored in the UNDP project implementation, which continued to advocate for policy frameworks that would eventually cultivate a market of renewable energy production capable of increasing access for rural populations. As summarised in 2017, recipient countries learned "China's experiences in creating the right forms of pricing mechanisms, subsidies and taxation policies on renewable energy in order to facilitate private sector investment in off-grid solutions" (UNDP, 26 April 2017).

The transformation of the Chinese experience into normative stories regarding favourable policy practices and market mechanisms fit well into the good governance paradigm of the DAC framework. As a response to the neoliberal economic policies, the good governance paradigm emerged in the

1990s to emphasise the institutional preconditions for development. It treated state policies as instrumental, in need of reforms to ensure transparency and accountability for market growth and socio-economic development (UNDP 1997, Weiss 2000, Stantiso 2001). The good governance paradigm did not fundamentally challenge the market model, and had been criticised for directing development assistance to pro-market and trade-oriented regimes (Hout 2004). This was the contextual knowledge in which trilateral projects were designed with the preference of the DAC donor – the Danish Government in this case, and thus the Ghana-Zambia projects focused on the formulation of policies, laws and strategies to promote investment, financing mechanisms and business models.

China's development experience contained a paradoxical message for the good governance paradigm, as it was not an example of democratic and participatory politics, and yet it led to unprecedented market growth (Grindle 2007). To sustain the legitimacy of the paradigm, China's lessons had to be edited, framed and transformed into a market-driven model with essential policy tools, whereas the party system, historical legacy and statist ideology surrounding these developmental policies were consistently left out. In the field visit to Ghana, the program manager discovered that the handbook provided was almost identical to the one produced in the previous bilateral cooperation with the DAC donor, which demonstrated little change in the normative contents in the projects, although now repackaged with reference to the Chinese experience (Interview, 28 November 2017).

Another crucial component of the good governance paradigm was participation, calling for involvement of communities, civil society and other non-state actors in the decision-making process (UNDP 1997, 2014). It

assumed that the active participation of communities would steer the projects towards local needs and produce better outcomes in holding the government accountable. The decentralised communitarian view, together with the preference for the involvement of market forces, represented a different approach in comparison to the state-led development model. In the Zambia-Ghana project, the communitarian view gave rise to a strategic focus on off-grid decentralised energy solution, the capacity of local private sector, and the formation of a "community of practice" (Project Document 2014).

To demonstrate that this is not a singular case but a common feature among trilateral projects, the role of community participation was afforded a similarly central position in other projects. The disaster reduction project with Malawi piloted the small grant scheme to support community-based organisations, and the experience-sharing project between Bangladesh, Nepal and China stressed the local-level initiative on disaster management. One UNDP official blatantly pointed out the schizophrenic irony here: "how can you expect a state, not accountable to its own community, to export and share experiences with community-based governance?" (Interview, 4 November 2017). In practice, the methods of community participation proved ineffective: as the report on the Zambia-Ghana project pointed out, because most unsuccessful pilot projects "had weak ownership structure and were mainly community based" (Project Annual Report 2015). The new program manager noticed the problem, and tried to argue for greater ownership on energy planning with key government institutions, but the normative undertone remained unchanged.

The underlying motivation and justification, offered by program managers and donor agencies with the aim of upholding the community-

driven elements, was to socialise the Chinese actors into the norms of participation and inclusion. In a project on disaster management, the program staff took the Chinese counterpart to the field site, explaining the participatory design, community engagement and local ownership. The Chinese actors expressed confusion, thought that the "participatory method" represented an example of fundraising jargon, and preferred to contract a Chinese company to finish the building work quickly. The UNDP official then went to some lengths to demonstrate why the lack of local engagement easily led to the failure of project, standing in front of the "unused and deserted building by the United States Agency for International Development" (Interview, 28 November). The trilateral project and SSC thus became a way of delivering the normative messages to Chinese actors, as the team leader put it,

> "We cannot influence China, not in the conventional way [of enforcing new standards]. We are offering to share the experience in development, particularly around what the countries need, how you engage with the right types of government counterparts, how do you engage with non-government partners and communities…by doing that, we are sharing our experience, hoping that the Chinese also find them appealing, and may adopt or work along the same lines" (Interview, 16 November 2016).

In sum, combining the incentives to assist the recipient countries effectively and to persuade Chinese actors into adopting the DAC normative framework, trilateral projects in the UNDP translated the state-led development of China into a market-friendly and community-based development model. This narrative selectively chose those historical memories and policy practices of China that reflected the normative preferences of DAC donors, which further stabilised the good governance paradigm and promoted transparent, accountable and participatory development in developing countries.

Case II: The International Poverty Reduction Centre in China

The statist version of the story, however, did not evaporate. In the project of the IPRCC, the state-led development model posed no difficulty of demonstrating its compatibility with the good governance paradigm, and was taken as the evidence of "evolved governance" (China-DAC Study Group 2011). The local norm travelled through the UNDP framework and participated in shaping the turn of the international development discourse towards economic growth, which in the eyes of some observers constituted the "southernisation of development" (Mawdsley 2018). How was the narrative of state-led growth formed and sustained in this particular project?

The initiative of the IPRCC emerged as a follow-up of the UNDP Asia and Pacific Regional Programme and China's national workshop on macroeconomics and poverty reduction in November 2013. It was formally conceived during the Shanghai Global Conference on Scaling up Poverty Reduction in May 2004, when the Chinese State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Reduction and Development (LGOP), the Ministry of Commerce and the UNDP signed a MOU. The high-profile international engagement and the institutional learning from the UNDP thematic facility in Brazil resulted in the unique governance structure of the IPRCC, with its affiliation with the State Council, joint ownership with the UNDP, and a board of trustees including international organisations, government ministries and non-governmental agencies (UNDP Conceptual Paper 2003). Its stated mission included "research, exchange, training and cooperation…to optimize poverty reduction policies and strategies, facilitating and strengthening international exchange and collaboration, and promoting knowledge sharing and South-South learning" (IPRCC website).

Despite a minor component of China's learning from other developing countries in microfinance or community-driven development, the mandate of the centre was to disseminate the Chinese experience of poverty reduction, particularly to African countries. The centre provided seminars and training services to government officials and project managers in developing countries, and until 2015, it had hosted 1906 participants from 104 countries (IPRCC Booklet). Its first director, Wu Zhong, used to meet foreign delegations almost every week (Task Team on South-South Cooperation 2011). The centre held high-level dialogues and conferences on SSC, including the annual International Poverty Reduction Forum, the China-ASEAN Forum for Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and the China-Africa Poverty Reduction and Development Conference. Moreover, it established pilot projects abroad, exemplified by the village-level poverty reduction centre in Peapea Village in the Morogoro District of Tanzania.

The UNDP-IPRCC project has run three phases so far. The first phase (2005-09) initiated the institutional preparation and establishment of the centre, with the second phase (2010-14, extended to 2016) focused on capacity building of modalities and mechanisms for SSC with international standards. Facing a sharp budget cut from 4 million US dollars to about 800,000 US dollars as well as a leadership turnover at the IPRCC, the design of the third phase (2017-20) went through a lengthy discussion, and in the end dropped the proposal of expanding development projects "on the ground", whilst continuing to focus on "experience sharing and platform building" (Interview, 15 November 2017; Project Document 2017).

As the narration of China's poverty reduction experience at the international level was principal to the IPRCC, Chinese officials were explicit

and active in the advocacy of development experience. According to the summary of the IPRCC deputy director Tan Weiping, poverty reduction was an "essential requirement of socialism and an important historical mission of the Communist Party of China", which followed five specific measures (Tan, 9 October 2017, 18 April 2018):

1. Adopt the policy of reform and opening-up to ensure sustained, stable economic growth while continuously unveiling social policies conducive to the development of poor areas and the impoverished population;
2. Uphold government leadership, incorporate poverty alleviation and development into China's overall development strategy and advance it as a strategic task;
3. Implement the plan of development and regard development as the fundamental way to address poverty;
4. Engage social forces in poverty alleviation and make full use of the socialist system;
5. Combine universal and special preferential policies and integrate the development-oriented poverty reduction system with the social security system.

The Chinese experience presented here depicted direct and immediate relationships between development, economic growth and poverty reduction. The leadership of the Party and government was central to the achievement of the growth-led model, with its strong capacity to formulate and implement comprehensive and long-term planning. Chinese actors did not shy away from the top-down system, and in fact regarded it as an institutional advantage in mobilising economic and political resources from party organs, developed provinces and cities, enterprises, the army and social organisations in addressing poverty. This "five points narrative" was accurately aligned with the official position of the LGOP, and when it returned to international organisations, the normative messages were not significantly revised or reconstructed.

Take the example of the China-DAC Study Group: formed in 2009 as a joint venture of IPRCC and DAC, it organised a series of international conferences on sharing experience in growth and poverty reduction. The outcomes of these events were presented at a policy symposium in Beijing in

June 2011 in a two-volume report, entitled *Economic Transformation and Poverty Reduction: How it happened in China, helping it happen in Africa.* The report openly endorsed the state-led development model, whereby "the state shapes the overall economic policy framework and the human and institutional incentives and capacities to absorb and spread ideas and organisational processes…[and] plays an active role in supplying 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructure at each stage, generating large externalities which are essential to the growth process" (2011, 6). The report continued with a further recognition of governmental leadership, and summarised the lessons of China as follows: policy making that avoided state capture by elites and special interests, capacity for policy analysis and performance review, and more crucially, " the governance system [evolving] from a command economy to a networked economy with a high degree of decentralisation coupled with various feedback and accountability systems substituting for open political competition" (2011, 25). This statement was provocative and unusual from the standpoint of DAC, as it not only recognised China's capacity in policy-making, but also bought into the argument that China was a "responsible developmental state" providing a legitimate and effective governance alternative to the existing paradigm.

The recognition of the statist model was seen in other joint publications by the UNDP and IPRCC, demonstrating the impact of this local norm. The comparative study on Special Economic Zones between China and Africa underlined the top-down approach and the essential support of "high-level political commitment" (2015). A discussion paper on China and the post-2015 development agenda put in more explicitly: "achieving national-level development goals requires the active support of a strong government that

focuses on growth and development" (2015, 1). Here the ideal political authority was a big state, with an "extensive government apparatus reaching from central to local governments, as well as progressive taxation [making] the implementation, monitoring, and realization of clearly defined development goals possible" (ibid. 7). A key figure promoting the Chinese model was Khalid Malik, a Pakistan-born economist and senior UN official. Malik was the UN RC in China for several years (2003-10) and then served as Special Advisor with the UNDP Partnership Bureau and Director of the Human Development Report, who exercised wide-ranging influence over the development policy of the UNDP. In his speech at the 2010 China-Africa Poverty Reduction and Development Conference, he commented that China's growth had not followed a traditional model or the Washington consensus, but instead benefited from a socialist system that allowed the government to implement economic and social policies under a cohesive leadership committed to reform and development (Conference Memo, 1 November 2010).

Through advocacy and translation, the local normative preference on state-led development spilled over the scope of IPRCC and returned to the UNDP and the broader global development discourse. The outstanding case was Mawdesley, Savage and Kim's account of the 2011 Busan High Level Forum (2014), in which the central debate was whether China would agree to sign the final agreement. The forum signified the importance of re-centring on economic growth in development, wherein the views of China, first and foremost among the emerging donors, were considered important drivers behind the shift to the post-aid paradigm. Now the puzzling question is, why in the sub-field of poverty reduction such as renewable energy, the Chinese

experience was translated into a market-driven and community-based model, whereas in the narratives of poverty reduction in general, the role of state intervention and centralised leadership was recognised both locally and globally?

The most direct answer, perhaps, is the credibility of China's experience and successes in poverty reduction. The estimate that over 635 million people in China were lifted out of poverty from 1981 to 2005 was commonly accepted in documents and analyses of multilateral agencies (Chen and Ravallion 2008, World Bank 2010), indicating that China alone contributed to more than 70 per cent of the decrease in global population living in poverty, and its robust outcomes in poverty reduction was regarded the main factor behind the achievements of the MDGs (MDGs Report 2015). The resilience of the state-led model drew its power from solid and data-supported evidence, and produced a power dynamic among international development professionals who tried to understand China's poverty reduction and made their explanative and policy framework accountable to the Chinese experience. The authoritative leverage of the Chinese experience was illustrated during a meeting at the New York headquarters, in which the experts lobbied the Chinese delegates to endorse the multidimensional poverty measurement based on the argument that "it would show greater successes of China's poverty reduction policies" (Interview, 8 August 2018). In other words, the legitimacy of China's model in poverty reduction was so established that it was the international normative framework that needed to fit in.

When introducing the Chinese experience in poverty reduction, there was a subtle change in the framing of the question: it was not simply how to achieve development, but how to achieve development *quickly*. Rapid

development was about “a national project for economic transformation within a generation” (China-DAC Study Group 2011). This temporal condition amplified the appeal of the China model, perceived not as a long-term historical process but a short-path modernisation miracle. In so doing, it excluded the possible comparison with previous industrialised countries, and made the case of China in a way unique to other developing countries. The state-led model thus stood on a strong, special and parallel position against other alternative models. This is not to say that market-driven or state-led models were inherently contradictory, but they were simply answering different questions: if you would like a rapid and fast development like China, then the statist top-down approach proved most appealing in terms of relevance and usefulness.

A second important factor was the attitude of the DAC countries and their motivation in introducing the Chinese experience. Unlike the previous trilateral projects where the case of China was used to popularise specific policy change complying with the DAC standards, the narration of China’s poverty reduction was situated in the broader context of a paradigm shift in development assistance. As briefly mentioned above, the DAC countries were going through reforms of “aid effectiveness” that gradually moved away from the good governance and poverty reduction agenda emphasising the ethical impetus and political conditionality for aid. The development assistance modalities began to converge with the preference of the Southern partners on the principles of state ownership, mutual benefit and infrastructure-based economic development (Hulme and Fukuda-Parr 2009). This turn toward economic growth was partially due to the competing pressure from emerging donors (Woods 2008). More deeply, however, it was driven by financial

instability, public scrutiny within the DAC countries, and learning from failed development interventions in the absence of strong local leadership and an effective state. Therefore, from the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) to the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), there was a tendency to bring back state-centred and growth-based development, which culminated in the Busan Forum (2011). The Chinese experience was exactly the living reality for this normative script, and therefore the DAC donors had strong incentives to retain the state-led model, in justifying their re-orientation to infrastructure and agriculture in development assistance (China-DAC Study Group 2011, 12). In other words, the DAC countries used the state-led model drawing from the Chinese experience to legitimatise their own paradigm shift, although this shift was as voluntary as influenced by emerging donors.

Thirdly, from the perspective of local actors, poverty reduction was not a matter of development policy. Far more crucially, it was a political task. The strategy of poverty reduction occupied a primary place in five-year plans and government papers. Most recently in November 2015, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued its decision on "winning the tough battle against poverty" to take targeted measures to lift the 70 million rural population out of poverty. Poverty reduction was taken as the symbol of the socialist system, the means to sustain economic growth and a significant political mission: "poverty must be eliminated to achieve moderate prosperity" (LGOP Document 2017, 28). The statement extended an already encompassing system, in which poverty reduction acted as a key factor in evaluating the performance and responsibility of local governments and party organs, subject to the inspection of internal party committees. Thus, instead of depoliticising development, the poverty reduction agenda in China was

intensively politicised, and therefore its associated state-led model was so resistant to and incommensurable with other normative frameworks. This also explained why the insertion or connection of alternative normative elements to the Chinese experience proved difficult in this case. The UN officials tried to introduce the multi-dimensional measurement and gender perspective highlighting the social aspects of poverty, which failed to enter the dominant narratives of China's experience. "It is very understandable", in the account of an UNDP project manager, "that if eliminating poverty is a political agenda, why would local actors want another system that allows poverty continue to exist?" (Conversation, 29 August 2017). The politicalised nature of poverty reduction turned local actors sensitive and defensive, insistently holding on to the concept of the China Model that prioritised economic growth and state capacity.

Conclusion

Following the myriad narratives of China's development experience is like tracing footprints on shifting sand dunes. This chapter hopes to illustrate how it gradually becomes an impossible task to draw clear normative lines between the local and the global. Indeed, who are the local or global actors here? Identity, ideology or interest does not confine actors to one certain category of normative beliefs and positions. The role of narrating the local development model shifts between UN officials, development experts, Chinese ministries and other agencies. For each individual or institutional actor, this involves a multiplicity of conflicting norms and narratives. In the case of the trilateral project, for instance, the passive inertia of the MOST gave UNDP the space to select historical fragments and policy practices as the components of the local

norm to present at the international level. While in the institutional platform of the poverty reduction centre, it was the governmental officials who took a leading role in promoting the state-led economic model, and largely excluded alternative normative options.

It is more perplexing to look through the façades of narratives to identify the factors behind the emergence or dominance of selected narratives. It depends on issue areas, the preferences of donors, the particular individuals running the projects, the relative strength of local actors, and global development discourses. The composition and interaction of these factors constantly change the power dynamics and normative contents that contributed to the travelling of narratives, which in this case shape how closely the Chinese model is associated with the statist implications and absorbed into the ideational debates on the global level. Furthermore, ideas and norms move horizontally between sites as well as vertically between institutional scales. The contrast between the two case studies demonstrates that, at the ministerial level, the experience of China in renewable energy could be treated as a technical question and thus allowed the inception of the good governance paradigm's disposition towards market and community participation. However, when moving to the general question of poverty reduction linking to regime legitimacy, the politicised advocacy of local norms consolidated its capacity to transform the existing discourse on international development. These multi-scalar movements explain why some ideas flowed smoothly at one level but their reception was disrupted and warped in a different direction at another level (Xiang 2013).

The complicated picture of traveling narratives produces an undefined and intricate impacts. From the examples of the BRI, trilateral projects and the

international poverty reduction centre, we can observe the simultaneous stabilising and reshaping effects that both integrate established normative packages into local norms and challenge the existing normative hegemony. This is not to say that one project is necessarily associated with a singular effect. The trilateral project, while translating the local norm into the good governance paradigm, raised doubts about community-based participation among the UNDP officials themselves. The poverty reduction initiative, while promoting the China Model, was fitted into the broader transition to growth-based development cooperation internationally. Such ostensible contradictions and dilemmas can be seen in China's own position on the Northern and the Southern frameworks, when it ideologically adopts the rhetoric of SSC, and attentively aligns with the North-led DAC standards and practices. Therefore, instead of deciding whether China's development norm is stabilising or reshaping the global normative landscape, it is more revealing to see the ways it entangles Northern and Southern structures. The added elements of community, participation and democracy co-exist in the same package with the original formula of state intervention, economic growth and centralised leadership. National ownership, usually perceived as a Southern norm, is instead narrated into the BRI by international actors, while the emphasis on growth and infrastructure, with its roots in the early days of development aid by Western countries, has been reframed as "Chinese characteristics" and delivered again to the developing world. Such examples are innumerable in practice, showing that the normative gaps between the South and the North are not as distant as imagined or ideologically presumed. The ways in which they overlap and interconnect allow the flexible space for local norms to move around, be revised, shortened and expanded according to

the context of arrival, creating further engagement between the hybrid, conflicting and conversing normative orders.

Conclusion
The Liminal Raconteur

"We diffuse everything…with the UNDP logo."
UN official on my research topic (Interview, 7 November 2017)
"About tomorrow? Well, I don't trust tomorrow here."
UN official on the agency's prospects (Conversation, 15 November 2016)

Precarious Entanglements

As time went by, I moved from the internship office to the team desk and mingled with formal staff on a frequent basis during the latter stages of my fieldwork. The ways that people talked about the UNDP changed. In my first round of interviews, most colleagues gave formalised and standardised accounts regarding the projects and their roles in them, but as time wore on, later accounts were mostly about feelings of insecurity and anxiety regarding the prospects of the agency. The project descriptions were replaced by complaints about bureaucratic proceedings and office politics, and there seemed to be a permanent existential crisis unfolding, replete with frequent speculation about where the UNDP might be heading next. Surprisingly, UN officials would turn to me in interviews and conversations and inquire what I thought about the future directions of the UN agencies.

This deep anxiety is understandable. It reflects a time of uncertainty and precariousness concerning the changing role and identity of international organisation. This is particularly the case for a UN office that is operating with continuous funding cuts, and in an emerging power that alternately upholds and challenges the global normative *status quo*. Fund-raising was a constant issue (Interview, 4 November 2017), and restructurings of the office became a routine practice, in response to transformations in the host country and global politics. A high level of personnel reshuffling and turnover was accompanied

by the worry that the UNDP office might follow Russia's precedent and face an eventual shutdown.

Challenges also came from the outside. The government counterpart CICETE felt perplexed about whether the UNDP was an "intermediary agency or project partner," and explored alternative channels in international cooperation without the UNDP (Interview, 28 November 2016). The CSOs questioned the UNDP's position, as the latter was no longer the only international source or authority, and it did not speak out either for civil society or marginalised populations (Interview, 12 September 2017). I, too, experienced the same sense of powerlessness as other colleagues at the office, which raised out collective doubts about the actual impact of our work and the necessity of sustaining the organisation at all.

This dissertation attempts to capture the precariousness and uncertainty that resulted under conditions of anxiety and crisis. It has chosen norms and ideas, which are central to the identity of international organisations, and documented the complicated local-global dynamics in movements, transgressions and convergences. Closely engaging with the glocalisation literature on norm diffusion, I focused on the multidirectional and multidimensional processes that disrupted, fractured and transcended the local-global opposition, creating various entanglements and interconnections through layers of normative orders and scripts. Norm translators, rather than norm entrepreneurs or advocates, were highlighted as the key actors in the processes of mediation and communication of reframing and relocating normative packages. On an empirical level, this dissertation addressed the current lack of understanding of the micro-dynamics and everyday work involved in norm diffusion, and especially how norm circulation and

contestation unfolded and intensified in the context of emerging powers. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, it adopted the methods of political ethnography to gain access to textual materials and internal working processes, and to examine the everyday interactions through "junctured" participant observation from 2015 to 2018.

What I discovered throughout my extensive fieldwork was that, on an everyday level, norms in the form of international treaties and agreements often turned into myriad stories and narratives, which then acted as the main sites of meaning-making, negotiation and contestation. Drawing on the theories of in-between storytelling and its institutional use, I argued that norms firstly went through an internalisation process within institutions, referred to as "norm metamorphosis", which translated embedded scripts into textual realities, projects and stories. The stories emerging from these practices were normative, canonical, ambiguous, open to interpretation, and used as instruments of persuasion. The second part of the dissertation further examined such dynamics in the realms of human rights, rule of law and development cooperation, which demonstrated that the content, form and audience of the stories were shaped by issue characteristics and different ideological backgrounds. Chapter 4 explored the use of personal stories in LGBT rights and how personal accounts were selected as representative and typical to expose structural restraints and justify normative changes in human rights. Chapter 5 looked at the stories of other countries in legal reform and described how country lessons were filtered by the ideologies of modernisation and postcolonialism. In Chapter 6, the subject of country experience became China's development model, which was narrated and transported by the UNDP to the global community and other localities.

The case studies displayed the multidirectional movements and translations of normative packages, in which global norms in human rights and rule of law arrived at the local, and local norms on development returned to the global. What came out of this process, however, was neither globalisation nor localisation, but "norm entanglement" that mapped the middle space and eroded the local-global boundaries. The LGBT norm retained the universalistic implications of individuals, while absorbing family values to expand the realm of personhood and autonomy. The lessons in rule of law connected the local experience to a broader global movement, associated with the progress in Western countries or the solidarity of Southern countries, depending on the preferences of local ideologies. The repackaging of China's experience in development discourse shaped both the meanings of local and global norms, adding elements and practices absent in the local while driving global frameworks towards convergences on the growth-led development paradigm.

Norm diffusion was thus re-imagined and reconstructed in two ways. First, a rethinking of space de-centralised the global as well as the local, and depicted norms travelling in a flattened network linking actors, symbols and capitals. Normative stories were constantly remoulded and adapted in accordance to the contexts and interactions to deliver a multiplicity of messages. Second, an alternative perspective on temporality proposed non-linear routes of norm movements that acknowledge the co-existence and competition of multiple temporal orders. This was especially highlighted in Chapters 5 and 6, in which norm translators distorted the concepts of time and memory, to (un)historicalise country lessons in order to construct their legitimacy and appropriateness, and to propose a different temporality with

local norms ("how to develop fast instead of how to develop", for example) in order to challenge and revise existing normative packages.

The Myth of Actors

A persistent critical aim of this dissertation has been to dispel the myth that there are clear boundaries dividing local and global actors, or that coherent and unified actors exist in norm diffusion at all. Actors are heterogeneous entities mutually enrolled and interlined through the chains of translation. Take the example of the UNDP officials: most project managers and coordinators were nationally recruited, yet the majority of them had a background in overseas education and work experience abroad. The senior staff might be seconded personnel from state institutions who later applied to become formal UN staff. Were they localised cosmopolitans or globalised natives? These dynamics were further complicated through their relationships with other institutions in which they formed coalitions or encountered resistance. The circulation and exchange of personnel among the civil society and the UN agencies in the area of emerging LGBT rights, for example, manifested the flows of human resources and the intersectionality of normative institutions.

Furthermore, actors housed one institution can and do carry a multiplicity of identities, narratives and normative packages. For instance, as noted above, serious conflicts erupted between the good governance paradigm and the growth-centred poverty reduction agenda in development agencies. This applied to international institutions as well as to local organisations and movements. The governmental ministries in legal reform held different attitudes towards country experience from the North and the South. The lack

of interest in transporting the China Model in trilateral projects might evolve into enthusiasm for a politicised scheme of poverty reduction. Local norms might be framed to either maintain or challenge the global normative framework, depending upon the venues and opportunity structures involved.

Identities, ideas or interests therefore do not restrict actors into a specific category of normative positions. The role of narrator shifts among different actors, although neither global nor local actors monopolise the construction and interpretation of their own norms. In narrating the development model, we observed the shifts of narrators between UN officials, development experts and ministerial officials. There were further changes of narrators depending on the issue areas. In human rights where personal stories were predominantly used, the narrators who prevailed were compromised of community representatives, civil society activists and UN officials within an advocacy coalition. When it moved to rule of law and development cooperation with country stories, narration became increasingly exclusive to the expert and policy-maker communities, emphasising on generalisation and technical aspects of norm implementation.

Individuals play a stronger role in narration and connection than I originally anticipated. Their contacts, preferences and networks shape the formation and strategy of development projects and the stories that they elicit. Individuals are directly involved in the conflicts and conversations between normative stories. The regional coordinator, who had previous experience with both the Chinese government and civil society organisations, largely shaped the overall strategy and partnership in the LGBT project. The projects in rule of law were maintained under a leadership that prioritised governance agenda and closed down when such support disappeared. The selection of

Vietnam as the country lesson also resulted from the personal network of a staff member at the senior management level. In the projects of trilateral cooperation and the poverty centre, we observed, similarly, how the changes in directors and project managers shift the project focus and change the p willingness of personnel and distribution of resources in the narration of Chinese development experience. It was individual leaders and champions, as illustrated through the example of Khalid Malik, who brought the translation of local norms to other localities through established connections across regional and country offices. In practice, the changes in individuals running the projects and programmes exercise a significant impact on project emergence, collapse and revival, and it was widely acknowledged that individuals could "bring in" or "take away" projects as well as the stories with them.

If not Norm Entrepreneur, then what?

If the actors in norm diffusion are heterogeneous, what is the identity and role of international organisations in this process? Scholarship invoking moral cosmopolitanism tends to construct the Ideal of norm entrepreneur, and conceptualise international organisations, especially the UN, as norm makers and norm promoters. They are supposed to be the epistemic community in knowledge-making and resource mobiliser in monitoring norm adoption and compliance (Haas 1992, Finnemore 1996, Foot, Gaddis and Hurrell 2003). When normative resources arise in interaction with other actors, international organisations can be norm consumers that socialise new norms into their organisational identities (Park 2005, 2007). However, this observation is not sufficient to capture the complexities and contradictions in heterogeneous

international organisations: they are hardly the innocent carriers of normative scripts or the formal representatives of the global community.

In response, studies in anthropology and international relations have proposed alternative models to understand these "migrant sovereignties" (Pandolfi 2003). On the one hand, international organisations are seen as the "anti-political machine" in anthropology of development. This term coined by James Ferguson (1994) still exercises theoretical influence across the discipline in understanding and analysing the "development apparatus" (Mitchell 2002, Li 2007). His perspective follows a Foucauldian view and considers international organisations as projecting and sustaining development discourse, which depoliticses and technicalises everything they touch and results in the expansion of bureaucratic power in governmentality. On the other hand, scholars of international relations take a different departure point to arrive at a similar destination. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore (1996, 2004) argue that international organisations are not simply the instruments of states. Instead, they are "pathological bureaucracies" obsessed with creating rules, exercising power and producing self-defeating outcomes unintended of their creators. International organisations construct and maintain a hierarchical structure in the global domain that operates like an elite club with an exceedingly exclusive membership (Barnett 2019).

Departing from the norm entrepreneur assumption, the "anti-political machine" and "pathological bureaucracy" perspectives treat international organisations as independent and autonomous entities, and reveal their "backstage" activities that sustain a type of normative order driven by either ideological discourse or self-interest. These observations can be verified through the accounts of UNDP officials, as they are both simultaneously

deeply embedded in and strongly frustrated with the bureaucratic system, one in which "you have to go through several people to get a single signature", and give rise to situations in which "ideas that are designed as anti-bureaucratic, like the SDGs, ultimately serve to reinforce the system" (Interview, 26 October 2017). The officials were fully aware and critical of the fact that every activity and every idea could only be achieved through bureaucracy. They further pointed out the collusion between the UNDP and private capital, when the urgency for institutional survival and funding motivated the international organization to pursue interests and projects that run counter its own stated principles.

The great disillusionment this produces, however, is not the whole story. As described in foregoing pages, there exists a multiplicity of translators and stories within a single organisation. Even when international organisations are no longer norm entrepreneurs, it is difficult to come to the conclusion that they are consistently pursuing a singular, coherent and consistent discourse or interest-based agenda. The assumption of homogenous interests and beliefs has been challenged by the messiness and complexity of real-life situations, as there is a vast difference between discourse and everyday practices (de Sardan 2005). In other words, international organisations emerge as sites of encounters and networks of actors involving the overlapping and crossover of ideas, beliefs, interests and meanings through the acts of brokerage and translation (Lewis and Mosse 2006, Crewe and Axelby 2012, Hopgood 2013). This can be seen in the contradictory and conflicting realities within the UNDP. The power relationships and inequalities between international normative regimes and emerging powers, between the UN country office and the Chinese government, and between expatriate professionals and national

staff, all co-exist within the organisation itself, and push it beyond any neat conception of local-global separation. The normative stories that the UNDP carries further reflect these inner contradictions: stories are shaped by institutional conventions and practices of norm translation, yet they do not necessarily reinforce those conventions. Their ambiguity is exploited for various interpretations and normative implications, maintaining or reshaping the local beliefs and global scripts. The in-betweeness in storytelling is connected to the in-betweeness of institutions, whereby international organisations occupy and craft the liminal space that is neither local nor global.

Towards the later phase of my fieldwork, I threw the questions raised to me back to the UNDP officials: Is the UNDP still relevant? Why do we need it? Even though the majority of them were critical of UNDP's operations and projects, they affirmed the necessary existence of the UNDP, in references to concepts such as "neutrality", "coordination" and "brokerage" (Fieldwork Note, 25 November 2016; Interview, 9 August 2017). At first, I took this as the results of socialisation at the UN office in order to justify their work. However, similar expressions have been repeated again and again, from people just entering the office and those who left the office long ago, even when they voiced the harshest criticisms of the agency. They were never taught about the brokering role of the UNDP, as the process of socialisation within the agency aims to justify its role in relation to global normative values and activities. My experience led me to take the views of officials more seriously. Being a broker shifted the UNDP away from the category of "traditional donor organisations to that of a redistributor in resource pool" (Conversation, 2 January 2017; also Conversation, 19 August 2017). The liminal space occupied by the UNDP

allowed normative stories that were neither local nor global, neither Western or indigenous, neither Northern nor Southern to take root and grow, as if the space empowered them with the capacity to repackage and travel. These normative stories were contingent, unstable and uncertain, susceptible to manipulation and conditioning, but it was through these frictions and distortions that norms evolved into multiple meanings and packages, becoming recognisable, resistable and adoptable (Tsing 2011, 2016).

The "stickiness to brokerage" (Xiang, 2013) facilitates the mobility and traveling of norms and ideas. International organisations, as the infrastructure in translation and mediation, are therefore the "liminal raconteur" that nurtures, remoulds and distributes normative stories across multi-layered temporalities and locations. In the "marginal phase" and "liminal period" that is neither there nor here, subjects become incoherent, incohesive and ambiguous, situated between established structures and cultural frameworks (Gennep 1960, Turner 1987, Dwoney, Kinane and Parker 2016). Such spaces are generative to new possibilities and imaginations in revising and replacing the past and the future; and in norm diffusion, this is precisely where stories about global ideas and local beliefs are negotiated and intersected. The results of something transitional and ambiguous lead to the "broker's anxiety" that the UNDP norm translators experienced and expressed, as it is difficult to measure, categorise and examine the impact of their work under conditions characterised by such a high degree of liminality. Contrary to the argument that brokerage is the outcome of a weak state unable to impose its governance and of the introduction of patron-client relationships (Lewis and Mosse 2006, 11), it is transnational practice that expands the liminal spaces and facilitates mobility. With its unstable and uncertain stories,

rites of passage can still manifest as institutions, demonstrated by this study of international organisations engaged in norm travelling.

Hope after Stories

The outcomes of norm diffusion through the liminal spaces are "slippery". On the one hand, norm translators acknowledge the local and global restraints and contextual conditions, and innovate and invent strategies in reframing the norms into travelling stories. On the other hand, the consequences, neither wholesale globalisation nor localisation, could easily slip out of the hands of actors, leading to unintended directions and unidentified territories. What this dissertation does not address is what happens after the norms become ambiguous and unstable stories on an everyday level. What comes out of this if we no longer have a normative script but only myriad narratives? Are we living in a global normative vacuum and negotiating on the basis of stories?

This seems to deepen our contemporary pessimism in the time of uncertainty and precarity, fearing a failure of moral globalisation and norm contestation prevailing. One way to combat pessimism is to look at the "ordinary virtues" that guide our behaviours and beliefs on the basis of local interactions and traditions, however fragile and vulnerable (Ignatieff 2017). Another way is to follow the glocal stories and to identity the new forms of hope and collaboration across difference and conflict in the rituals of storytelling. The first observation is that norm contestation and competition do not necessarily lead to anarchy. Norm entanglements expand the liminal spaces composed of fragments and disjunctures that are intimately manifesting the everyday practices in the movements of norms, without the imposition of a hegemonic and dominant normative script. This is also

different from the relativism implied in a de-centralised and pluralist imagination of the international order. The global space is “fragmented” to the extent that the state of ambiguity and uncertainty becomes the normalised condition in the flows of ideas. This leads to my second and final point, that the politics of norm translation might not be about seeking or constructing consensus to overcome uncertainty. Rather, it is a process of “dissensus” (Rancière 2015) that disrupts and transgresses the boundaries, and exposes the alternative ways of imagining and acting. Instead of de-politicising the global assemblages of networks, it returns to the very essence of politics in unsettling the ordinary order in human situations, without necessarily overturning or replacing it. The acts of mediation and translation contain the elusive political power that is effective in introducing new ideas and paradigms, rather than a self-fulfilling imagination of a unified global regime. They turn the unfamiliar into the familiar, the Other into the Us, and vice versa, which indicate and uncover the unexpected and unknown. Just like a good old story.

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Appendix

List of interviews and Conversations (Referenced in the dissertation)

Interview, 10 November 2016, U101116, with UNDP senior official, at 2016 High-level Policy Forum on Global Governance "Belt and Road": A New Path to Regional Development, Beijing.
Interview, 15 November 2016, U151116, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 16 November 2016, U101116, with UNDP Team Leader (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 17 November 2016, U161116, with UNDP Country Director, Beijing.
Interview, 12 January 2017, U120117, with UNDP Programme Manager (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 13 January 2017, U130117, with UNDP Assistant Administrator, UNDP Office Beijing.
Interview, 17 January 2017, U170117, with UNDP Programme Manager (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 21 January 2017, U210117, UNDP Programme Coordinator, Beijing.
Interview, 23 January 2017, U230117, with UNDP SDG Project Manager, UNDP Office Beijing.
Interview, 24 January 2017, U240117, with UNDP Programme Assistant (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 26 January 2017, U260117, with UNDP Project Manager (PEG), UNDP Office Beijing.
Interview, 10 July 2017, U100717, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 9 August 2017, U090817, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 19 August 2017, U190817, with UNDP Communication Officer, Beijing.
Interview, 24 August 2017, C240817, with LGBT CSO Staff, Beijing.
Interview, 25 August 2017, C250817, with LGBT CSO Staff, Beijing.
Interview, 28 August 2017, U280817, with UNDP Official (Operations), Beijing.
Interview, 29 August 2017, U290817, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PEG), UNDP Office Beijing.
Interview, 5 September 2017, U050917, with former UNDP China Country Director, Phone Call.
Interview, 12 September 2017, C120917, with LGBT CSO Staff, Beijing.
Interview, 15 September 2017, C150917, with LGBT Report Drafter (PKU), Beijing.
Interview, 25 September 2017, U250917, with UNDP Team Leader, Beijing.
Interview, 24 October 2017, U241017, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PEG), Beijing.
Interview, 26 October 2017, U261017, with UNDP Team Leader (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 1 November 2017, U011117, with UNDP Policy Associate (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 4 November 2017, U041117, with UNDP Project Manager (DM), Beijing.
Interview, 7 November 2017, U0711217, with UNDP Consultant (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 15 November 2017, U151117, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 27 November 2017, U271117, with UNDP Researcher (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 28 November 2017, U280817, with UNDP Programme Manager (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 29 November 2017, U291117, with UNDP Team Leader (PPU), Beijing.
Interview, 8 August 2018, U080818, with UNDP Programme Coordinator (PPU), Phone.

Conversation, 10 November 2016, U121116, with UNDP senior official, Beijing.
Conversation, 11 November 2016, U111116, at UNDP staff dinner, Beijing.
Conversation, 18 November 2016, U181116, conference call with Supreme People's Court, Phone.
Conversation, 2 January 2017, U020117, with UNDP Programme Coordinator on holiday, Phone.
Conversation, 11 January 2017, U110117, with UNDP Programme Manager (PEG), Beijing.
Conversation, 17 July 2017, U170717, at UNDP team meeting, Beijing.
Conversation, 19 August 2017, U190817, with UNDP Communication Officer (EE), Beijing.
Conversation, 29 August 2017, U290817, with UNDP Project Manager, Beijing.
Conversation, 5 September 2017, U050917, with EU Rule-of-Law official, Beijing.
Conversation, 6 November 2017, U061117, at UNDP office retreat, Hebei.
Conversation, 15 November 2017, U151117, with UNDP Consultant (PEG), Beijing.
Conversation, 16 November 2017, U161117, with UNDP Consultant (Communication), Beijing.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1)Name and position in UNDP/Institution?

2)What do you think about the general objective/mission of UNDP China? What impact has UNDP China made?

3)Which is programme you are involved in or managed? What is your general impression of the programme? Can you briefly introduce this programme to me (donors and partners)?

4)What are the international ideas and norms that are promoted through this programme? What is the gap between the practices in China and the international standards in terms of ideas and institutional frameworks? In what ways China needs to improve in this field?

5)Is there a conflict between international norms and local contexts? Please give examples.

6)How successful are the programmes in introducing the norms? How do you tell others about the norms? Give examples. What are the stories that you find most convincing?

7)What are the responses?

8)Do you use the experience of other countries? To what extent does the experience of one country might affect the other? Why do you choose certain cases and how do you frame and explain them to the actors?

9)What are the experiences of China being introduced? How do you frame them to international actors and other countries?