



The Politics of Urban Citizenship in Twentieth Century Shanghai and Mumbai

Speaker: Mark Frazier

Date: 16 January 2019

Venue: ICS Seminar Room

The talk opened with chair for the afternoon, T G Suresh, introducing the audience to Mark Frazier and his background in researching urban politics in China. Claiming to be eagerly awaiting the newest book written by Frazier, the chair invited the author to talk about the empirical studies undertaken in the course of researching the comparative socio-political histories of the two cities – Shanghai and Mumbai.

Frazier premised his presentation on a perspective that looks at urban political history and urban geography to understand the development of contentious politics/street politics. He found that in the case of Shanghai and Bombay, the two cities are casually compared in common parlance but actually little comparative literature exists. Differences between the two cities abound in common perception, ranging from disparity in levels of development to governance and political systems. However Frazier has found that in his pursuit of understanding the historical context of the two cities, there are interesting convergences that emerge. In the development of contentious politics, the two cities have evolved in similar phases. He defines contentious politics to include a wide range of political activities, in which actors choose to use informal civic spaces, instead of institutionalized/formalized spaces, to come together and make claims on the state. In this pursuit, Frazier evolves a concept of 'urban political geography' (UPG). UPGs as a category examines how the spatial structure of cities affects and is affected by urban forms and practices. His empirical studies in this book sought to map and compare the changes in UPGs of Shanghai and Bombay, and how these changes have influenced conceptions of urban citizenship in each city. Urban citizenship is distinguished from national citizenship, as the former revolves around the question of membership which entitles citizens to urban resources such as jobs, housing and municipal services. The conceptual basis of this study is linked to understanding the relationship that

exists between urban forms/practices, contentious politics and conception of urban citizenship while comparing the historical contexts of Shanghai and Mumbai.

Frazier postulates that the development of both cities, Shanghai and Mumbai, and their UPGs can be classified into three periods – the imperialist period (1860-1950), the Socialist-Modernist period (1950s-1980s) and the re-development period (1990s-2000s). Frazier went on to expand on the similar trends, events and circumstances that characterized the UPGs of both cities for each phase.

In the first phase, the particular form of imperialism operating in each city shaped the urban forms and practices. While Mumbai was under the unitary control of the British government in India, Shanghai was fragmented under the sovereign concessions made to various foreign powers, including Britain, France, Germany, and USA. In the second phase, the national leadership in both countries was animated by a transformative vision of breaking away from the backwardness associated with colonial history, and moving the country towards a developed, socialist vision. This often led financial urban centres like Shanghai and Mumbai to be viewed with suspicion and distrust by socialist leaders. In this phase, leadership relocated national focus, funds and resources from urban areas to the development of the country-side. In this phase, both Shanghai and Mumbai are characterized by a shortage of investments which spelled into acute scarcity in urban employment, and housing. In the face of this scarcity, a particularly virulent form of contentious politics played out on the streets of Mumbai and Shanghai. Frazier compared the chaos associated with the Cultural Revolution, and the role played by Zhang Chunqiao in Shanghai to the emergence of the Shiv Sena, and the role played by Bal Thackeray in Mumbai. The third phase begins with the advent of what Frazier calls ‘land led urbanization through commodification and financialization of land values’. In both cities, there is a marked ambition to build up ‘the metropolis’, and this is done by easing the regulations on land use. In this era, Frazier claims that private capital was allowed to move in and make profits on leased urban land. There is a parallel process of deindustrialization that characterizes this phase. While the textile industry previously constituted an important part of the urban economy, the 1990s to 2000s period sees shrinking of this industry along with retrenchment of hundreds of thousands of textile workers. Consequently the mass relocation of former textile workers follows, and the remaining workers are pushed to sign agreements that drastically limit their freedom to participate in strikes and protests. Frazier observes that such developments results in a qualitative shift in the nature of urban street protests. Instead of movements based on collective demands, the

new phase sees individuals taking to the streets for personal grievances. Examples include grievances of inadequate compensation in land acquisition, infrastructure projects that negatively affect particular plots, against the set-up of chemical factories in vicinity of residential areas etc. These are ‘bite-sized’ protests, with affected individuals coming together to make claims on the state, and Frazier describes it as a phase of ‘politics of compensation’.

Frazier concluded his presentation by stating that his motivation for this study was to explore Sino-India studies from a subnational perspective, rather than a national perspective. He added that he hopes for his work to contribute to the furthering of this approach. The Chair thanked the speaker for this fresh perspective and opened the floor for questions. Several questions were asked on whether Shanghainese counterparts existed for phenomena witnessed in Mumbai – identity politics and gangs/organized crime. A question on Frazier’s methodology was asked, to better understand how he arrived at the points of comparison. On the first set of questions, Frazier answered that there were no readily comparable Shanghainese counterparts to the type of regional identity politics that exists in Mumbai. He mentioned that in early 20th century, newly arrived rural migrants in Shanghai were severely marginalized and discriminated against as a group, but identity politics doesn’t come into play in the city today. Similarly, the 1947-1949 period in Shanghai’s history, saw a particularly malignant form of organized crime (the Green Gang) cripple the governance structures in the city. However, nothing similar to the gangs of Mumbai operates in Shanghai today. On the question of methodology, Frazier revealed that an initial fascination with the concepts of ‘land’ and ‘labor’ formed the basis of his study. Consequently, the comparative study saw him mapping the trajectory of politics associated with land and labor, the claims associated with these concepts, and how the claims fit into the theme of urban citizenship for the two cities. On this note the seminar was concluded.

About the Speaker:

Mark W. Frazier is Professor of Politics at The New School for Social Research and Academic Director of the India China Institute at The New School (New York City). His forthcoming book, *The Power of Place: Contentious Politics in Twentieth Century Shanghai and Bombay* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) examines long-term changes in political geographies and patterns of popular protest in the two cities. He is also the author of *Socialist Insecurity: Pensions and the Politics of Uneven Development in China* (Cornell University

Press, 2010) and *The Making of the Chinese Industrial Workplace* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). He is also Co-Editor of the SAGE Handbook of Contemporary China (2018, with Weiping Wu)

This report was prepared by Rashmi Muraleedhar, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.