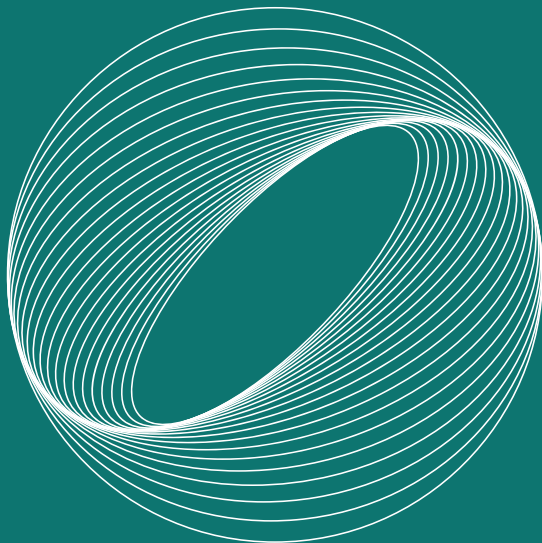




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DEPT. OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY



# ***FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW #67***

**16 MARCH – 31 MARCH 2024**

## BEHIND THE WHITE COAT: UNDERSTANDING THE SOUTH KOREAN DOCTORS' STRIKE FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

Earlier this year, on March 3rd, doctors in South Korea organized large-scale protests and went on strike to oppose the government's proposed policy to increase medical school admission. The South Korean government observed a shortage of medical personnel in their country, with a range of 2.6 doctors for every 1,000 people, compared with an average of 3.7 in the OECD countries (Jin, 2024). Nevertheless, the striking doctors-in-training considered the policy could not address the underlying issues in the unequal medical system.

Because of extended work hours and insufficient wages, numerous medical students opt for more financially rewarding specializations such as dermatology and plastic surgery, exacerbating the disparity in crucial services like pediatrics, obstetrics, and emergency departments (Min, 2024). The absence of a responsible public system or government intervention for concentrating the health workforce in critical fields amidst South Korea's profit-oriented medical environment has made this problem persist (Min, 2024). Therefore, instead of increasing medical school admission, South Korean doctors demand better working conditions, equitable pay in essential specialization areas, and healthcare system improvement (Park & Kim, 2024).

The doctors' protests and strikes in South Korea have earned worldwide attention, highlighting a significant social movement. This action demonstrates how the community can emerge as a social force in challenging the authority's policy that affects common interest through nonviolent action. By articulating their concern loudly and taking significant action, the doctors hope the government will initiate a dialogue to address the fundamental issue and reconsider the controversial program. (Rizkirana Kamilazzahra Pramono, HI UGM 2021).

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## NAVIGATING CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN THE PACIFIC

China is actively expanding its presence in the Pacific region, engaging in initial discussions with Papua New Guinea (PNG) regarding a potential security and law enforcement agreement prompted by the riots in the capital city in January 2024 (Needham, 2024). Various strategic aspects are under consideration, notably a Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) agreement. This agreement could encompass intelligence and information sharing, evidence collection, extradition, and collaborative efforts to address mutual security concerns, aligning with China's Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism (PRC State Council Information Office, 2024). In light of its foreign policy objectives, China's engagements with PNG could be seen as a strategy to extend its influence in the Pacific region and counterbalance the dominance of Western powers. This aligns with China's historical interactions guided by Tianxia (天下), portraying the world as unified with China at its core (Zhao, 2009). Within this framework, rulers are regarded as "the Son of Heaven" with universal authority, a notion China continues to embody (Zhang, 2009).

China endeavours to strengthen its ties with regional governments in the Pacific Islands by offering police force training and facilitating Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) agreements. Through these efforts, China aims to establish itself as a reliable partner in tackling mutual security concerns. Furthermore, this strategy serves China's interests by ensuring access to natural resources, fostering infrastructure development, and expanding market opportunities for Chinese enterprises. By cultivating an environment conducive to security, economic collaboration, trade, and geopolitical influence, China aims to bolster its hard and soft power capacities and diplomatic standing. Despite the potential risks and obligations associated with Chinese influence, Papua New Guinea (PNG) remains steadfast in accepting the bilateral framework. PNG has long adhered to the principle of being 'friends to all and enemies to none' since gaining independence in 1975. This stance is contingent upon the potential for strengthened ties and increased cooperation, as long as China respects PNG's sovereignty, similar to how PNG accepted Defense Cooperation Agreements from the United States and Australia in 2023. (Christopher Paller Gerale, Universitas Negeri Malang)

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## **THE TROJAN HORSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH CONTEXT**

The recent clashes in the Israeli-Palestinian social media war, followed by the recent TikTok conundrum in the Filipino and Indonesian elections, offered a stark lesson for scholars about the increasingly ever-present social media roles in the international community. While these platforms facilitate discourse on global or national issues, they also serve as Trojan horses in which the rapid spread of information also comes with an inevitable spread of misinformation or disinformation.

This issue has become increasingly relevant, as seen from the rampant spread of hoaxes utilising tools such as AI and even manufacturing fallacies and polarising identities for a diverse and unknowing demography of users (Guess & Lyons, 2020). At worst, these tactics can lead to massive and widespread protests and escalating violence, as seen in the Myanmar and Ethiopia conflict (Crystal, 2023). Both cases prove how social media can function as a disinformation tool and a polarisation of the masses. This danger is further amplified when the state actors endorse the spread of disinformation. In such cases, social media becomes a systematic weapon of the state to justify genocide and pacify an uneducated public concerning issues of human rights, evident in many cases, especially in the Global South (Khouri, 2024).

Although not wholly dismissible, for developed countries, the existence of stability, longstanding democracies, and more educated citizens acts as a deterrent from these campaigns of disinformation. However, in the context of Global South countries with significant social media presence, these problems are magnified and can bring about devastating consequences. This issue renders Global South countries more vulnerable to the effects of social media. (Ditya Rasyadiputra Avrizar, HI UGM 2021).

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