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Benjamin P. Murkison
Georgia Southern University

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**What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger: The shifting strategies of Japan's Yakuza
in response to economic globalization and securitization**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
International Studies

By

Ben Murkison

Under the Mentorship of Dr. William Biebuyck.

ABSTRACT

The Yakuza in Japan is a deeply traditional and infamous ethnic mafia, which has historically based their profits off of the protection of gambling rings and street vendors, but have developed into one of the most sophisticated and wealthy criminal institutions in the world. Reaching their peak in the 1960's with around 200,000 members, the Yakuza has been in a slow decline ever since. However, the past decade has seen the most dramatic drop in Yakuza numbers in recorded history, as a result of increasing securitization by the Japanese state. As their power has declined within Japan, they have only managed to multiply their wealth, however. The research therefore seeks to address the question of how the Yakuza's strategies have changed in response to the developments in securitization and economic globalization. The shift of focus from Japan's illicit markets to an increasing role in international criminal activities is analyzed through the conceptual lens of Social Network Analysis, and describes the trends of Transnational Organized Crime in an environment of increasing economic globalization. This paper discuss at length the specific kinds of power that is wielded by these kinds of organizations, and how the changes of power within the Yakuza can be best understood. Things are not quite as they seem. While current legislative efforts by the Japanese government have crippled them in the streets of Japan, they have also encouraged the Yakuza's shift into new, more profitable endeavors.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. William Biebuyck

Honors Dean: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

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Honors College

Georgia Southern University

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INTRODUCTION

On a particularly rainy day in September, I was walking through the streets of Nagoya, Japan. I had been in search of a famous shopping district, when I walked past an office building for a major construction company's Nagoya branch. I would never have noticed this office building had the name “山口組” not been written in large print across the building. That name in the English alphabet is “Yamaguchi Gumi”, which is the largest criminal syndicate in Japan, and is one of the largest and most powerful organizations in Asia (Adelstein 2012). The Yamaguchi Gumi Corporation, whose building I stumbled across, is also a very large construction contractor within Japan. The connection between the two is not concealed even slightly, rather being proudly bolted onto the front of the building. This was an incredibly confusing experience. The Yakuza is an ethnic mafia in Japan, meaning that it is an entity that exists primarily to commit crime in search of profits. Additionally, In the past decade, nearly 50,000 people have left the Yakuza, meaning that they have lost two thirds of their manpower. Those that remain are increasingly elderly and unable to attack people in streets as used to be the case. This is a catastrophic demographic shift for a criminal organization, and it would be expected that in the face of this, the Yakuza would collapse, and that their criminal activities would cease. And yet, it is richer than it ever has been before. Despite facing a catastrophic loss of membership over the past decade, the Yakuza is still rich and influential enough to bolt their name onto buildings in large gold lettering, without fear

of arrest or harassment. It is apparent that something has changed in the strategies of the modern day Yakuza.

The Yakuza's development within the past three decades has been marked by a significant decline in the eyes of the average Japanese person. Many small Yakuza syndicates have fully ceased their operations, and the number of Yakuza members has plummeted. The way that Japanese people interacted with Yakuza in past decades is increasingly rare. Street thugs who attack people and while this may present the façade of a death-spiral, the Yakuza today is a wealthier, and more international organization than it ever has been before. My research question for this project seeks to clarify some of this by asking: How have the contemporary trends of increased securitization and economic globalization affected the shifting trends and strategies of the Yakuza? The Yakuza's strategies and methods currently are changing to adapt both to the increasingly harsh government control of these groups, as well as to increasing globalization of the international licit and illicit markets from which they profit. The Yakuza has suffered significant loss in a short time, due to targeted legislation from the Japanese government. This research analyzes what effect this securitization has had upon the methods that the Yakuza utilize in order to profit in the contemporary global market. While it is unlikely that these organizations will be able to recover their previous numbers, and enforcement has made traditional operations more difficult, the Yakuza is in many ways even more powerful than it was before the supposed decline began.

The Yakuza is a unique case study among ethnic criminal organizations, for various reasons. Unlike other organizations, the Yakuza exists in the open, with offices

and buildings bearing their names. It is not illegal to be a Yakuza, and in Japan they have been treated as companies with employees that commit crimes (Adelstein 2012). This is an extremely unique position for an explicitly criminal organization to be in and sets the Yakuza apart from virtually every other case of ethnic organized crime in the world. However, there are things that can also be extrapolated about the trends facing the Yakuza and applied to the broader field of organized criminal research. Specifically in relation to the adaptation of hierarchical criminal organizations into the fluid globalized economy, and their response to the securitization of their society.

Until recently, the Yakuza has been excellent at utilizing existing political frameworks for their own purposes, however that has begun to change (Siniawer 2020). For centuries, the Yakuza has been an underground society that sought to dominate illicit markets in Japan, and since the end of World War 2 (WW2) they have been able to do this almost unopposed by other criminal organizations or law enforcement. The Yakuza has been on a steady decline since the signing of a 1991 bill targeting their activities, known as the “Anti-Boryokudan Act” which explicitly denounced the bōryokudan for the first time in history, as well as implementing various other policies which target organized crime, and have led to their decline (Baradel 2020). This decline has led to a desperate need to diversify, which the Yakuza has been very willing to attempt, often attempting to extend into legal markets in addition to their more traditional criminal goods, as long as they can detect profit (NPA 2020). Historically, the Yakuza have been able to use political influence gained in the chaotic years after WW2 to protect themselves from harassment from the Japanese government. They have also

been able to rely on their image as a deeply traditional Japanese institution to shield against public opinion. However these have both disappeared. So, the Yakuza has begun to spread out into various new markets and spaces within Japan where they can exercise control and authority, such as politics.

One of the mechanisms the Yakuza uses for exercising some political power within Japan today lies within small, ultra-nationalist political parties. These groups became known as Uyoku Dantai, which literally translates to “Far-Right Parties” in English. The Uyoku Dantai had a variety of beliefs, but their goals largely revolved around the ideas of anti-communism, and opposing foreign influence within Japan (Shibuichi 2007). While often extremely politically active, no Uyoku Dantai have been able to achieve political success since the end of the 1980’s (Yamaguchi 2013). These groups have developed into small, politically radicalized provocateurs in the modern day, and a significant portion of them are openly subordinate to various Yakuza groups around Japan. This is an interesting trend, which seems to point to an increasing desperation to find spaces within Japan to exist free of the harassment that they are consistently receiving from the government.

So, this research operates at two levels. Primarily, it is an analysis of the specific trends of the Yakuza in response to securitization, relating to their future within Japan domestically, and in the international setting. However, this analysis will play into a more widespread puzzle of global trends. Securitization is a trend that is increasing in virtually every society on Earth, and this analysis will serve as a case study for how it affects TOC in a vacuum. As there is very little domestic competition to the Yakuza, and

Japan is a very wealthy society, they are both a unique piece of the broader global illicit economy, as well as a microcosm of the effects of securitization and economic globalization on criminal organizations, and will demonstrate how these kinds of organizations may potentially develop in the future.

This research will have numerous benefits within the fields of Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), as well as research into globalization, specifically contributing to the research concerning its adverse effects. This research will shine a light onto the methods of these criminal syndicates, serving as a case study for other deeply embedded ethnic mafias around the globe, such as the successful Italian and Russian mafias, and how the Yakuza's decline can be understood in a modern political context. The developments resulting from this decline can both serve as a showcase of a system that has failed to adapt, as well as a cautionary tale that could be useful in understanding other similar organizations around the world.

So, this research will demonstrate the ways that this illegal enterprise can be understood in comparison to other similar groups around the world, as well as a lesson in specialization and the narrowing of suppliers within a market, that all have an impact on the trends discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This analysis seeks to formulate a coherent understanding of the shift in strategies employed by criminal organizations in Japan called *bōryokudan*, literally “violent groups”, in relation to their specific illicit markets, geographical influence, and

political embeddedness. As the institution of the Yakuza has declined in power, the methods and strategies used have shifted in order to adapt. A specific lens that will be used to analyze this trend is the Yakuza's involvement within Japanese politics, specifically in relation to far right groups, known as Uyoku Dantai. The literature can best be understood within these categories: The structure and activities of the Yakuza, the size and demographics of the Yakuza, and the theoretical concepts required to understand the Yakuza's influence in a broader scale.

The first category of sources utilized in this paper relate to the basic global trends necessary for further understanding of the concepts in question. That is to say, the concepts of globalization, and of licit vs illicit markets must be understood in order to understand this topic in any coherent way.

There are two forms of economies in every society. The formal economy is everything that occurs within the purview and reach of the state in which the economic activity is occurring. Anything that is taxed, regulated, or sold in an established business is part of the formal economy. In contrast to this is the informal economy. Anything that is illegal, or sold under the table, or generally is done outside of the framework of the formal economy, is part of the informal economy. While the informal economy does encapsulate all illicit markets, not everything within the informal economy is illegal. Simultaneously, while something may be illegal within one market, it may be completely legal within another market, blurring the lines between the distinction. As globalization increases within markets, the formal economy of one state is able to supply the informal economy of another with increasing ease, causing the most basic and obvious

opportunity for entrepreneurial criminals who seek to make a profit in the world economy. Many of the opportunities for profit in the modern world are built off of the back of globalization.

Globalization is the trend of increasing interdependence between different actors across the globe, which has had a profound impact on the globe's economy since the end of the Cold War. As Hignett (2021) describes, global markets are becoming increasingly dependent on each other for practically every good that is sold in the world today. This includes illicit markets. Just as a T-Shirt can be made in Bangladesh, from cotton grown in Argentina, packaged in Belgium, and sold in the United States, so too can a crop of Coca leaves from Peru be processed into cocaine by Nicaraguans, who work for Mexicans, who then sell that product to Italians, while storing the money in Chinese banks (Hignett 2021). Globalization has an effect on every aspect of modern life, regardless of whether you are a Yakuza in Tokyo wearing Italian clothing, or a farmer in Italy using a Japanese tractor.

The rest of the sources relate specifically to the Yakuza's history, tactics, and current realities, focusing on their strategies for maintaining power within the Japanese framework. Frameworks for understanding criminal organizations and their relationship to state power are also addressed within the literature of this section. The literature presented provides a conceptual baseline for understanding of both the Yakuza specifically going forward, as well as of the Yakuza's place within larger global network of criminal organizations, both within Japanese borders and on a transnational scale.

As described by the Japanese National Police Agency (NPA), a bōryokudan is “any organization likely to facilitate its members to collectively or habitually commit illegal acts of violence”, which can apply to a wide range of organized criminal organizations, but is only officially applied to traditional organized gangs, colloquially known as the Yakuza (Info-Communications Bureau NPA 2022). Other ethnic gangs, such as Korean and Chinese groups, and smaller and less public Yakuza groups are not included in this classification. The Ministry of Justice in Japan releases an annual report on crime known as the “White Pages on Crime”, which addresses numerous issues relating to crime in Japan, both organized and not. This document is incredibly valuable in learning about the daily realities of the Yakuza within Japan, including statistics surrounding criminal activities, as well as details about rehabilitation programs and overall trends. The collection of Japanese gangs known as bōryokudan across Japan are collectively known as the Yakuza, and are discussed at length within the White Papers. However the definition of bōryokudan does not include primarily Chinese, or Korean ethnic gangs within Japan, and these are treated as distinct issues by Japanese lawmakers (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice 2022).

Carrapico’s (2021) article “Reflections on Transnational Organized Crime as a Security Concept” helps to contextualize the trends demonstrated in the white papers as well as other articles, as he demonstrates the workings of criminal organizations on a transnational level. The primary research question of this article is whether or not “securitization” of TOC is an effective method for addressing TOC. Securitization, as described by Carrapico (2021), is the shifting perspective of sovereign entities when it

comes to TOC. When treating the problem purely as a matter of criminality, states were unable to effectively combat these organizations, however in the 1980's states began to view these actors primarily as security concerns (Carrapico 2021). The Yakuza occupies a dominant role within smuggling routes for illicit goods and services into Japan, as well as throughout Japanese diaspora communities globally, however they are increasingly involved with non-Japanese groups such as Chinese Triads and Italian Cosa Nostra groups, which is emblematic of an increasing globalization of TOC (Carrapico 2021). This literature helps to contextualize the shifts in government response to the Yakuza, as it describes "Securitization" as TOC becoming a national security issue rather than a simple criminal one, which has been done in Japan with the signing of the 1991 Anti-Bōryokudan act, as well as the establishment of numerous racketeering laws implemented in 2012 (Carrapico 2021). The Yakuza were viewed in Japan in the same light as groups like the Freemasons or rotary clubs are viewed today. That is to say, they were seen as secretive and shady, and somewhat powerful organizations, which may or may not exist in your city. They were not seen as inherently bad or detrimental, even if they were seen as inherently criminal (Carrapico 2021). This changed in the late 1980's, when a major gang war broke out across Japan, and generally soured the public's perception of these groups. Soon after the violence in the streets ended, the government decided that steps should be taken to prevent such a thing from re-occurring. Prior to the implementation of the anti-bōryokudan act of 1991, Yakuza groups were treated as companies, given all the rights and privileges associated with that, and it was common for police to use Yakuza connections for information during

investigations (Adelstein 2012). After the implementation of the anti-bōryokudan Act, Yakuza groups suddenly were placed under government surveillance, and many new restrictions were placed upon the groups. Notably, they were no longer permitted to recruit children to work for them, robbing them of their primary source of recruitment, as well as permitting Japanese Police to enter and search Yakuza offices without notice and for any reason (NPA 2022). The Japanese state explicitly declared Yakuza groups as a detrimental actor within society, which posed a threat to the public security. However the more recent criminal code adjustments from 2012 have had a more drastic effect on the Yakuza than the anti-bōryokudan Act had. Before these changes, the Yakuza and the Japanese state had a mutually beneficial relationship, in many ways. Yakuza were able to utilize their connections within the government to secure favorable legislation, or block unfavorable legislation, meanwhile politicians were able to rely on Yakuza donations, and relied on Yakuza as a tool in certain situations (Adelstein 2012). While the Yakuza's domestic strength has waned, their financial power is currently at its highest level ever, which can be understood as a failing of the securitization of TOC in Japan, or a success for the Yakuza in adapting to the increasing globalization in the world's illicit markets, or as both.

Bōryokudan have several different classifications amongst themselves, and there is significant debate as to what could count as a bōryokudan in the first place. While the Japanese government has a list of active bōryokudan, there are groups that fit the criteria but are not included, such as Korean and Chinese gangs, as well as other Japanese gangs that have avoided being classified. Despite this controversy, the

traditional idea of a bōryokudan still remains as the dominant political organization within Japan. As explained by Kaplan and Dubro (2012), Bōryokudan traditionally fell into either the categories Tekiya (salesmen, loan sharks etc.) or Bakuto (enforcers, hitmen, etc.); however, currently it is far more common for them to be a mix of both of these ideas. Kaplan and Dubro (2012) present the Yakuza's basic history and many details about the contemporary situation of the organization, which is an incredibly important document for gaining information about the structure and organization of the Yakuza. The bōryokudan today are more easily understood as a combination of both of the aforementioned categories, as the profit to be made from dominating both sales and enforcement is not easily ignored (Kaplan & Dubro 2012). In the end, this literature demonstrates the ways that the Yakuza's organization itself has begun to shift in response to the increased securitization of organized crime from the Japanese legal system, as it is no longer feasible for an organization to stand alone without also being able to adapt (Kaplan and Dubro 2012, Carrapico 2021).

While the Yakuza have existed for several centuries, it has existed in its current form only since the end of WW2. As Eiko Siniawer (2012) describes in her book *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists; The Violent Politics of Modern Japan, 1860-1960*, the contemporary existence and idea of bōryokudan is a result of post WW2 era of Japan, but began its development with the Meiji restoration of the 1860's, which began Japan's rapid industrialization. The physical and political infrastructure of Japan were completely destroyed during WW2, leaving the bōryokudan free to dominate the black markets for virtually every consumer good, from necessities like food and medicine, to

illegal drugs and sex workers, as the government was incapable of this for several years (Siniawer 2012). Siniawer's (2012) book seeks to define the relationship between the Yakuza and the state in modern Japan, by analyzing the most important century of developments between these two institutions. Siniawer (2012) uses her own personal experiences as the child of a Yakuza, as well as a detailed literature review in order to establish her thesis, which is that the Yakuza's development in the mentioned timeframe has led to an inherent link between Yakuza, and Nationalist politics, through violent tactics.

The Yakuza's power comes largely from their social embeddedness within their communities, which is a trend that is common amongst ethnic mafias across the globe. Social embeddedness can be understood as the amount of cultural integration a group has within a society, in addition to the amount of governmental/official recognition that such a group enjoys. One excellent example of this is the Italian mafia inside of the United States. It was significantly more powerful in areas with large Italian-American populations, and was able to hold onto their power due to their level of integration with the local culture, and through working with the federal government in many situations (Woodwiss, Young 2021). Social embeddedness allows ethnic mafias to operate within the communities in which they exist because of the shared culture and background of the members of the organizations. Italian American gangs were tolerated because many of the members were relatives and friends of people throughout the community, and therefore could operate relatively freely (Woodwiss, Young 2021). Without social embeddedness, ethnic mafias often can not operate effectively, as their status within

their society is so heavily dependent upon public acceptance. The Yakuza enjoys a significant level of embeddedness, as they have historically been accepted by the Japanese populace as a “lesser of two evils” group that made it so that the streets were relatively safe, and have been allowed legal status by the Japanese government. However, they have steadily lost this embeddedness due to societal changes. Unless they make dramatic changes to adapt to their environments, ethnic mafias and other criminal organizations often fail after their social embeddedness is effectively countered.

The next category of literature addresses these changes in the Yakuza’s size and demographics in response to the impacts of the anti-bōryokudan act, as well as social realities in Japan. The literature in this section relates directly to this legislation, as the decline of the Yakuza in Japan can be seen to coincide directly with the act. So, every development relating to the decline of the Yakuza must also be understood through this lens.

While every development following the 1991 anti-bōryokudan act must be viewed through that lens, it is not the only thing that should be understood. The Japanese economy has remained relatively stagnant since 1990, and despite the inherent disconnect between the formal economy and illicit markets, the Yakuza have not been able to escape the widespread stagnation suffered by the whole of the Japanese economy. Peter Hill (2003) writes about how the bōryokudan have responded to both of these developments and analyzes the impacts of both within his work. Hill (2003) specifically asks how these developments have impacted the relationship between the Yakuza and law enforcement within Japan. Hill’s (2003) thesis is that the

Yakuza has not gone away as was claimed, so much as shifted focus, and he notes the number of arrests of Yakuza had been increasingly significantly since the signing of the anti-bōryokudan act, but that these arrests rarely led to convictions. The methodology of this work was largely a literature review, consisting of many commonly circulated Yakuza magazines from Japan. Hill's (2003) conclusion on this subject was that the anti-bōryokudan act had not really uprooted the Yakuza as the government claimed, but that it had forced them to change tactics, which can also be understood under the context of TOC securitization (Carrapico 2021).

Hill (2003) was pessimistic about the claims of decline from the government and law enforcement. Andreas Schloenhardt's (2010) article "Mission Unaccomplished: Japan's Anti-bōryokudan law" uses Hill's (2003) article repeatedly throughout to demonstrate the points he is trying to make. Schloenhardt's (2010) primary thesis several years following Hill's (2003) is that the anti-bōryokudan act was largely ineffective. The methodology of this study was also primarily a literature review, and its research question was to what extent the anti-bōryokudan Act had accomplished its goals. Schloenhardt's (2010) finding was that the law had largely failed to achieve its strategic goals, due to the largely indifferent attitude of the Japanese to this culturally embedded organization. The primary benefit from these sources is to demonstrate the sudden demographic shift of the past decade of enforcement and suppression. Between 2003 and 2010, so little change had occurred in Yakuza numbers, that these writers came to the same pessimistic conclusion about the Yakuza's future. This reasoning can be understood when considering the number of Yakuza members in Japan had gone

from an estimated 85,300 in 2000, to an estimated 78,600 in 2010 (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice 2021). While this is a notable decline, the decade following saw a decrease from 78,600 to just 28,200 members, which demonstrates a much more dramatic decline. This is due to the Yakuza's cultural embeddedness being undermined by various community and legal enforcement efforts since 2010 (Schloenhardt 2010, Hill 2003, Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice 2022).

However, it is not entirely clear that the decline in the number of yakuza on the street is directly correlated with the strength or influence of the Yakuza as an organization. The Yakuza earns more money than it ever has before right now, despite consistently having lower membership every year. Adelstein (2012) explains that, rather than crushing the Yakuza, some aspects of the anti-bōryokudan Act actually hampered enforcement efforts, through disallowing police officers from using Yakuza as sources of information, and lack of racketeering criminal statutes, which would allow for higher ranking officers of the Yakuza to be arrested. However, the most important result that is discussed is that the Yakuza is becoming much more of an international organization, specifically when it comes to crimes that would be frowned upon within Japan, such as violent attacks (Adelstein 2012). The Yakuza is becoming increasingly international, and have gone from street thugs with tattoos and baseball bats, to "Goldman Sachs with Guns" in the Asian criminal markets (Adelstein 2012). Their strength may no longer need to be physical, due to the Yakuza's immense economic influence, due to economic globalization.

This uprooting of the Yakuza's cultural embeddedness has led to fewer newer people joining the organization, which has led to the average age of a yakuza to rise dramatically. Young people in Japan are less willing to join these groups, and less likely to commit crimes in general than any other generation in Japanese history (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice 2020). As a result, the idea of becoming a yakuza is less appealing with every passing generation, causing the recruitment rate to plummet. Baradel (2020) describes how the Yakuza in general is becoming invisible, while it craves attention from the public, as it has traditionally been able to capitalize off of its media coverage. Baradel's (2020) thesis is that the Yakuza has lost the primary tool that it required in order to maintain its societal position, which is its image. Its image within Japanese society and the media has been undermined by a conscious effort on behalf of many groups, such as the news, who began using euphemisms like "violent individuals" instead of "Yakuza". The primary conclusion that Baradel (2020) comes to is that the Yakuza will continue to lose public visibility, and with it power. However, their visibility has not particularly changed, and it is still common to see Yakuza buildings and tattoos, and their appearance at all within the media shows that they still have visibility. This case uses the word visibility, but really is referring to the concept of embeddedness. Baradel's (2020) argument is more that the publicity that the Yakuza gets has been shifted, so it now hurts their image, rather than bolstering it. This has contributed to the decreased social embeddedness that has had such a detrimental effect on the Yakuza. This study benefits this research because it demonstrates the most recent trends and

changes in the demographics of the Yakuza, specifically the way that the Yakuza's demographic problems are mirrored by Japan's rapidly aging society (Baradel 2020).

The third category of the literature demonstrates the political realities and philosophical narratives within Japan that have led to the Uyoku Dantai as it exists today. The Uyoku Dantai, literally "Far-Right Parties" are common, ultra-nationalistic, and sectarian political parties present within Japan. There are numerous groups across the country, however none have successfully been able to secure any form of public office since WW2. Yakuza influence within these groups is incredibly well documented, and some groups explicitly swear fealty to Yakuza groups. Some Uyoku Dantai have committed politically motivated attacks using yakuza backed resources (Hawley 2019). However it is false to say that Uyoku Dantai act entirely at the behest of Yakuza groups. Indeed, even one of the most prominent groups completely independently made the provocative move of constructing a traditional Japanese Shinto shrine on Islands officially disputed over with China (Hawley 2019). So these groups operate under the purview but outside of the control of the Yakuza. It is clear that the Uyoku Dantai stand to benefit from Yakuza relations, however it is not necessarily the case going the other way. The predominately ethnically Korean Yakuza likely does not share the political goals of these organizations, which implies other more subversive intentions (Smith 2020). The literature provides a framework for understanding the cultural ideas that lead to the rise of Uyoku Dantai within Japan, and in turn will contextualize the realities that have led to this influence developing. In doing this, the connections between the

Yakuza and the Uyoku Dantai will be more easily understood as pieces of the wider Japanese society in which they exist.

Uyoku Dantai policies and tactics can be understood with relative ease by framing them in comparison to other alt-right groups around the world. They are largely xenophobic, isolationist, historically revisionist, and ultra-nationalistic. As Hawley (2019) describes, alt-right groups around the world often have a doctrine of “us versus them” when discussing perceived “outsiders.” This mindset is known as xenophobia, or basically the fear of outsiders. While this is common among alt-right communities worldwide, it is especially pronounced in the Japanese context, considering the nation’s almost 99% ethnic homogeneity, it is much easier than elsewhere to identify the “others” within society. These groups are also very frequently eager to re-write history in favor of covering up crimes from the past (Hawley 2019). These groups have been able to use the internet to proliferate and spread their ideas, including their racist ideas about Japan’s large Korean minority (Smith 2020). As Smith (2020) explains, the members of Uyoku Dantai think that Japan’s society has lost its way, through allowing immigrants and Koreans into the country “unchecked” and suppressing nationalistic holidays and traditions, and therefore it is their responsibility to go against this system. These ideas are spread more now than ever through the internet, and although no Uyoku Dantai have yet achieved political success, their influence has been growing (Smith 2020).

Japan’s bōryokudan have been connected to various Uyoku Dantai for a very long time. It is not uncommon for Uyoku Dantai to be explicitly controlled by bōryokudan, but it is also very common for individual Yakuza to slip into these

organizations in order to mask their criminal activities (Siniawer 2012). The Yakuza has lost virtually all of its political power over mainstream politics within Japan, as is explained by Rankin (2012) in “21st Century Yakuza: Recent Trends of Organized Crime in Japan”. Rankin (2012) describes how until relatively recently, labor legitimate political parties would often hire Yakuza as enforcers for rallies or security, but in modern Japan, even being in the same room as a Yakuza can be a career-ending scandal. Rankin’s (2012) research is a broad overview of contemporary developments of the Yakuza, so this article provides excellent information regarding the shifting tactics of the Yakuza as well as their specific connections and limitations.

However, there is a common interest between the Yakuza and Uyoku Dantai, which is their self image. In his article “Uyoku Ronin Do”, Shibuichi (2007) describes the way that the Uyoku Dantai’s perception of itself has developed into romanticized depictions of a lone, masterless Samurai standing against an evil corrupt society, which is a theme that is very common among contemporary far-right groups. Within the article, Shibuichi’s (2007) research question surrounds the rise of Uyoku Dantai in consideration of these self-aggrandizing ideals. Shibuichi’s (2007) thesis is that the development of these ideas has led to bolder, and more violent demonstrations by these groups (Shibuichi 2007). This article will allow me to draw connections between the demographics of the Uyoku Dantai, and that of the Yakuza, as both organizations share several concepts in their personal self-image (Shibuichi 2007).

The Uyoku Dantai, separate from the Yakuza, have grown significantly in contemporary Japan. As Smith (2020) describes, there is a significant link between the

rise of the internet and social media, and the rise of some of these groups, most notably the Action Conservative Movement (ACM), which while unable to win any seats in any elections so far, has been the most successful of the Uyoku Dantai in terms of voter turnout. While the ACM is not known to be affiliated with the Yakuza, its growth has shown the potential for some of these organizations to spread using the internet as a tool, which in turn helps me to understand the logic behind the Yakuza's relationship with the Uyoku Dantai as it exists today.

While the sources I have used have been able to construct several frameworks in relation to the relevant phenomena, there is a notable flaw that the sources are unable to address. Unlike other organizations, the Yakuza is inherently secretive and illicit. While general trends can be documented by arrests, and keeping track of official members of bōryokudan, they do not tell people how much money they have made, or how many political connections they have, or anything of the sort. This is a significant weakness within these sources, and unfortunately there is little that could address this particular concern. As securitization has continued, the Yakuza has become more secretive. However, this work will be able to contribute to this field, as potentially the first document to be written about this aspect of the Yakuza since the implementation of enforceable anti-yakuza laws came into being in Miami (Adelstein 2019). While definitive proof of the Yakuza's income and other important information is inaccessible, other important observations can, and will be made relating to the field.

THEORY

The criminal organization known as the Yakuza have been in a steady decline for decades, and have been unable to alter this course, due to effective governance and enforcement policies implemented by the Japanese government, as well as numerous market and societal trends that have developed. However, in spite of this, they still control vast amounts of capital and control numerous illicit markets across Asia.

Therefore, I seek to answer the question of: How has the sharp decline of the Yakuza fueled their shifting strategies in relation to their political involvement, dominance of illicit markets, and their role within the formal economy? My thesis is that as Japanese organized criminal groups have been increasingly prevented from exploiting their traditional controlled markets through securitization, they are instead focusing on coordination with subversive groups abroad. It is likely that organized crime will continue to decrease in activity and visibility in the streets of Japan, but that it will become more frequent to see Yakuza involved in criminal transactions across the globe.

This entire thesis must be understood through the analytical framework of Social Network Analysis (SNA), as it directly relates to the shifting demographics and strategies of the Yakuza within a social framework. SNA is a system that incorporates a variety of techniques to analyze specific social groupings that develop. A criminal network is a concept that developed using this framework, that organizes these groups based on (Bright, Leiva 2020). Every step in a criminal market is part of the Social Network, meaning that the members of a criminal network are typically embedded within the culture and society in which they operate (Bright, Leiva 2020). Some criminal

organizations are very loosely organized and cooperative, such as with the production of certain drugs. An example of this is the development of drugs such as MDMA, where no overarching criminal group tightly controls any aspect of production. Within loosely connected organizations, hierarchies are fairly rare, and physical enforcement within the group is equally uncommon.

On the other end of the spectrum are highly structured organizations, which fulfil the traditional image of an organized criminal group. These kinds of criminal networks often have strict hierarchies with clear lines of authority, and detailed rules and strict enforcement within themselves. The Yakuza fits squarely into the latter category, being perhaps one of the most strictly regimented criminal syndicates still in existence (Adelstein 2009). However this kind of organizational structure becomes less profitable on an increasingly globalized economy. Due to the impact of globalization, it becomes much easier for independent criminal actors to enter illicit markets, which makes the rigid structure of a more hierarchical organization less profitable in certain illicit markets.

Many traditionally hierarchical organizations, notably the Southern Italian Mafia, have adapted to this trend and successfully shifted to operate successfully within a globalized economy (Schneider, Schneider 2021). Using SNA, the Yakuza's form can be significantly more easily understood, as it shifts to adapt to a globalized market. Through the lens of SNA, not only can the Yakuza's internal structure be analyzed, but their place within the globalized market can be understood as well. The Yakuza has traditionally been an extremely hierarchical and rigid social structure, with detailed

traditions and militaristic ranking systems, but has the potential to shift towards much more open and less hierarchical frameworks (Bright, Leiva 2020). Utilizing SNA, their place within Japanese society can also be understood, and their influence within the relatively open illicit markets of Asia can be much more coherently discussed.

The other most fundamental concept to understand is that of securitization. As is explained by Carrapico (2020), securitization can not be understood outside of the theory of security itself. Security as a concept can mean several things, which have been debated upon. It can refer to economic stability, and the strength of an economy or a market, but it can also refer to issues of state sovereignty, or physical security from violence. Until relatively recently, organized crime was largely treated as an economic, and criminal issue (Carrapico 2020). Societies attempted to address organized crime through conventional policing and economic manipulation. However, this has shown to be largely unsuccessful. Security was initially conceptualized as state sovereignty, but in past decades has increased its scope to encompass domestic subversive entities, as well as foreign. States began to view criminal organizations as security threats rather than economic problems, and adjusted their enforcement efforts accordingly (Wheatly 2020). This has led to immense change in the global sphere of TOC. Therefore securitization can be understood as the shifting of enforcement focuses to address the concerns of security that TOC groups pose to societies and states. However, it is important to note what securitization actually looks like. It can be understood most simply as the government of a certain area investing resources into addressing TOC, outside of pure policing. This can be seen in the case of the Yakuza with the anti-bōryokudan act within

Japan. This legislation was the first to explicitly identify and vilify the bōryokudan within Japan, marking them as distinctly detrimental forces. Since the implementation of this act, the bōryokudan have steadily decreased in number.

With these two fundamental theoretical concepts established, there are numerous other concepts which arise from these ideas, which can help to understand further the strategies of the contemporary Yakuza.

The first of these that is helpful to understand in the context of global criminal markets is the tide of globalization which has swept across the globe. As the world becomes more globalized, so too do its illicit organizations. Currently, organized crime is just as globalized as the textile industry, or car manufacturing, or any other market that exists. Two of the most popularly smuggled substances (cocaine and heroin/opium) can only be grown in very specific parts of the world (Northern South America, and Afghanistan/Myanmar respectively). Despite this, they are available in virtually every illicit market in the world. These substances are created by one or two criminal syndicates, and then are sold to other criminal syndicates, who then distribute them locally all across the globe (Windle 2021). Similarly, organized criminals in the modern world often have a wide range of sources crossing numerous borders, making their markets inherently global. The Yakuza have sources in America from whom they smuggle firearms into Japan, and then dominate Asian sex and drug trade routes. Generally, as globalization progresses for states and economies, so too does it progress for subversive groups and illicit markets. As a result of this trend, criminal organizations

have adjusted their strategies and tactics to continue their influence within their respective markets.

These trends have led to the situation that the various bōryokudan of Japan find themselves in today. They have experienced a dramatic decline in physical and violent coercive power due to the increased securitization of the idea of organized crime, which is one of the primary shifts I have identified within this research. This changing sphere of criminal organizations can be understood as violent or direct coercive power. The other resulting development I have identified is these organizations' strategies and control over Japanese politics, domestic legal economies, and global illicit markets. Hereby referred to as indirect coercive power. The Yakuza has significantly decreased in terms of being able to send thugs to extort small business owners, but has been able to continue to operate in several ways that are different from that (National Police Agency 2021).

Direct coercive power is a concept that can be understood as an entity's ability to force or impose itself onto another group or within a society. In terms of a nation or national government, this would be the military, or police. This concept when applied to organized criminal groups is not as segmented, however. Criminal groups usually do not have designated branches for exercising direct coercive power. Most illicit organizations have traditionally had to employ their direct coercive power alongside whatever illicit markets they are attempting to operate within. For example, a drug smuggler employing armed guards and carrying heavy firearms is working within their market, while simultaneously exercising their direct coercive power. However, the need for direct

coercive power, and the risks associated with using it, have shifted because of globalization and securitization. They have not disappeared, and in fact have increased for some markets. However it is undeniable that the need for this has shifted.

The next concept that is being influenced is what I identify as indirect coercive power, which relates to politics, and both formal and informal economies. This concept is linked to the other aspect of organized crime and illegal syndicates, which is their immense profitability. Indirect coercive power is what organizations use to manipulate the world around them without necessarily utilizing force, although the threat of force is usually upheld. Indirect coercive power can most easily be understood in terms of money, however numerous other factors exist, such as cultures, politics, organizational structure, products (etc.). This kind of power also increases as an organization expands its scope in the global stage. In terms of the Yakuza, they have historically enjoyed indirect coercive power that stemmed from their unique position within Japanese society, however this has changed as the government clamps down, but also as the illicit markets of the globe have become more accessible, and more globalized.

Within the world of transnational organized crime, many things are a mystery to all but those directly involved, making it very difficult to research and accurately identify, or even notice trends that are happening for scholars and governments alike. This makes documenting things, and predicting the future uniquely difficult among other contemporary issues. However, some things are known, and can be identified. Therefore, I theorize that the Yakuza's traditional source of power as a street gang with the ability to coerce businesses on the street will continue to decline as anti-Yakuza

legislation is continuously revised and enforced within Japan. However, as their position as an embedded group within Japan is threatened, these groups have begun shifting into other markets in order to secure cashflow, and caring less about strict morals and codes of conduct. I hypothesize that increased securitization within Japan clamps down on the Yakuza's ability to control its traditional markets, and has pushed the groups into increasingly innovative markets. While this has occurred, increasing economic globalization has provided ample opportunity for the Yakuza to break into lucrative markets in the East-Asian sphere of TOC. Ultimately, I hypothesize that the trends discussed have led to the Yakuza becoming organizers of TOC that are based in Japan, as opposed to Japanese gangsters. While they benefit from TOC, and are based in Japan, their focus has shifted away from exploiting Japan, into utilizing it as a base of operations for their global money-making schemes.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to address the research question, I use a qualitative approach to analyzing evidence gathered from the relevant literature. This will encapsulate a variety of specific tools and methods of research including Social Network Analysis, historical and content analyses, and narrative studies. This study seeks to explore the connection between the Japanese Yakuza's apparent decline and the development of their strategies and tactics going forwards. I use a historiographic approach to understanding the context behind the trends discussed, as well as analyses of current statistics

provided by law enforcement and political analysts in order to understand current trends and developments.

The qualitative data collected during this research has been a compilation of political, economic, and law-enforcement based documents, all of which are relevant to the Yakuza and the strategies it utilizes to adapt to contemporary market trends, as well as those that help to frame and contextualize the trends discussed (Gaudet, Robert 2018). This has led to a generally broad picture of how these organizations function within a modern society, and a much more specific image of how their strategies have shifted in response to this modern society.

This research is a qualitative analysis, and many of the trends and concepts discussed are explicitly qualitative. While quantitative research on these subjects is theoretically possible, it is extremely difficult to obtain enough data to form any sort of coherent, or reliable quantitative argument. So this study utilizes SNA, which means that it will analyze how the Yakuza exists as a social network, rather than a bunch of criminals. SNA is inherently qualitative, but is extremely useful for understanding the human aspect of criminal groups (Bright, Leiva 2020). In the case of the Yakuza, it is crucial, because of the dramatic demographic shift that has occurred over the past decade. SNA essentially allows for an explanation of the structure of the Yakuza, and facilitates predictions surrounding how that structure will change.

However, the other approach I utilize is a discursive approach, which is also inherently qualitative. A discursive approach to research basically allows for an analysis

of the changing meaning of different ideas within human discourse. Utilizing pre-existing research and comparing them to contemporary trends and ideas, in order to see what has changed, how things have changed, and what might happen in the future (Wetherell, Taylor, Yates 2014). Terms can mean different things to different people at different times, and so utilizing a discursive analysis is crucial for understanding the shifting face of the Yakuza from before the anti-bōryokudan act to the modern day.

One large challenge facing this research is the lack of substantive case studies pertaining to the Yakuza in the contemporary setting. The majority of reliable and substantive information which pertains to Yakuza changes, activities, and tactics are sources written prior to the implementation of effective countermeasures by the Japanese government in 2012. Adelstein (2011) discusses how the Yakuza's number have stayed "constant" in the years between the anti-bōryokudan act, while the Yakuza began declining in number the year after. Several sources discuss the inadequacies of the anti-bōryokudan act in handling organized crime, but since the implementation of new legislation known as the Yakuza Exclusion Ordinances in 2012, few detailed academic reports have been written.

The outcomes of this research will paint the Yakuza in a new light, analyzing their shifting markets within Japan, their increasing and innovative utilization of legal markets and legal loopholes in order to secure their finances domestically, and their increasing role as an intermediary between different Transnational Criminal Organizations around Asia and the globe. The outcomes of this research point to these trends, but due to a critical lack of hard statistics that are inherent with TOC, it is impossible to prove any

quantitative data, however the qualitative research in concert with what statistics do exist point to trends such as those I have delineated here.

Some of the most important variables in this study are both heavily related to the decline of Yakuza groups in Japan. The first variable is the 1991 signed, and 1992 implemented anti-bōryokudan act, which has severely limited the authority and power of the Yakuza, and is an example of the securitization of organized crime within Japan.

There are various controls that I will take into account in this research. Firstly, timeframe. Historiography is incredibly important to understanding the trends of the Yakuza, however this study is limited to the period of decline within the Yakuza, stretching from the 1992 implementation of the anti-bōryokudan act, to 2022. I also will hold other non-Yakuza criminal organizations in Japan as a constant, which will allow me to discern the trends that affect the Yakuza specifically, as opposed to other organized criminal groups. As these groups have control over different markets and fields from the Yakuza, discussing their impact would lead to significantly less cohesion.

The data collected during this research is extremely varied, and due to the nature of the subject matter. What statistics do exist have been compiled by the Japanese National Police Agency (NPA). The NPA is able to document the trends of Yakuza growth and decline, and identifies 25 different active Yakuza groups across Japan as of 2019, ranging in size from as low as 30, to as many as 4,100 active members. In total, the NPA places the number of Yakuza members at 28,200, which is a record low, especially considering that a significant portion of these are currently in prison (Info-

Communications Bureau NPA 2020). However, it should be noted that this designation is only placed upon Yakuza groups that the government has dedicated resources to combatting. The NPA also has a published annual report on criminal trends in Japan in general, which demonstrates that violent crimes have been declining significantly, and are still at a record low for most crimes (Info-Communications Bureau NPA 2022). This data was collected by doing reviews of arrest records and reported crimes within Japan, as well as virtually every other aspect of criminal activities within Japan, which are all readily available due to the meticulous documentation required by Japanese government offices. This data was gathered by me through research done into government and journalistic sources found using the internet, primarily utilizing journalistic outlets.

The methodology utilized in the course of this research has been deeply qualitative, and can be best described as a combination of discursive and social network analysis, for which a significant amount of historical context has been provided by secondhand sources. While quantitative sources would shed significant light on many of the issues discussed, the nature of these organizations makes that an impossibility.

ANALYSIS

It is evident that the Yakuza's influence has declined dramatically, as the laws in place have been developed to very effectively crush their operations. Since the implementation of the 1991 anti-bōryokudan act, the Yakuza has shrunk to a miniscule fraction of what it once was. Since the implementation of the act, it has been

documented that the number of active Yakuza registered within the anti-bōryokudan act has decreased dramatically. Whereas these groups peaked in social dominance within Japan following WW2, and peaked in numbers in the 1960's with over 200,000 members, in 2022, it is estimated that the Yakuza have around 25,000 members left, and approximately half of this number is in prison at any given time (Information Communication Bureau NPA 2020). Numerous Yakuza organizations have shuttered their buildings and officially closed down. At the surface level, the Yakuza is declining, and rapidly.

It should be noted that sources pertaining to the details and activities of the contemporary Yakuza groups suffer from several drawbacks. Notably, they are almost universally out of date. Most documents written after the implementation of the 1991 anti-boryokudan bill are critical of it, describing its pitfalls and how the legislation fails to effectively deal with these groups. However, in 2011 new enforcement legislation was passed, which has caused the downward trend of Yakuza membership. However, no sources have effectively described the implications of this impact, or explored it in great detail. The most reliable and accessible information on the subject comes from the Japanese government, as enforcement agencies keep detailed files on the activities of the designated bōryokudan. However, the same level of investigation is not conducted on un-designated groups, or on gangs of other ethnic origins. Therefore, the Japanese government's description of bōryokudan leaves many loopholes that are exploited by many groups to stay off the list all together. The designation does not account for any other forms of organized crime within Japan, and limits its membership to organizations

largely run by and employing people with criminal records. Therefore a company could act within society as a Yakuza group, but still be excluded from the list. This makes finding reliable sources on the state of organized crime in Japan somewhat difficult. This is compounded by the fact that a significant amount of the research that has been conducted is in Japanese, and remains largely inaccessible.

However, while in depth analyses of the post-2010 state of the Yakuza remain inaccessible or non-existent, many of their activities are known, and the expansion of many of these groups into new markets has been well documented. Essentially, we know what the Yakuza is doing, but we don't know how they are doing it. By analyzing both the international and domestic incarnations of Yakuza activity, a clearer picture begins to form.

In foreign affairs, the Yakuza has shown that they are expanding into a more cooperative space with other major actors in the realm of TOC, such as the Italian, Mexican, and Chinese iterations of organized crime. In 2019, the record for the largest police seizure of cocaine shipments was broken twice, once in August, and once in November, with the latter shipment being the largest at 400 Kilograms (FreightWaves 2020). While the cocaine was undoubtedly produced by Latin-American cartels, the shipments originated in a port in Italy, which is widely known to be dominated by the Italian 'Ndrangheta (FreightWaves 2020). This is an interesting case study of the ways in which TOC has developed to take advantage of economic globalization and trade in general, but it also demonstrates an increasing willingness by the Yakuza to engage in more risky, but potentially more profitable, global illicit trends.

These seizures may be negligible in comparison to other sources of revenue for the Yakuza, however the cocaine trade had been very taboo for Yakuza groups throughout most of its history. In 2022, a Yakuza member named Ebisawa, and three men from Thailand were arrested in New York for attempting to import large quantities of methamphetamines and heroin into the United States, in exchange for high grade military equipment which was to be sold to the Shan State Army which produces large amounts of heroin in order to fund their guerilla conflict against the Myanmar government (DoJ 2022). This particular story is extremely convoluted, but demonstrates excellently the role that the Yakuza has begun to play within the global criminal markets. They have begun to operate as intermediaries and negotiators between other groups, while also taking advantage of the opportunities for profit that are presented by globalization. The role that the Yakuza plays with other Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) is largely based on patronage. The Yakuza are now richer than ever, but are also largely elderly, thus other local gangs are hired as muscle for operations, while the Yakuza oversees the deals and operations (DoJ 2022).

Domestically, the Yakuza has begun to increase its involvement within markets that they previously had no interest in, as they are shut out of their traditional sources of revenue. A significant portion of this is facilitated through the exploitation of legal loopholes, which the government chooses not to close or to do anything about. Gambling is outlawed in Japan, however a game called “Pachinko” is so ubiquitous that even the smallest and out of the way towns will likely have at least one pachinko parlor. You purchase small metal balls, which you shoot into a brightly flashing plinko style

game, and try to win more balls by sinking them into certain holes. You then exchange all of the balls you have won for a card with “gold” or some other prize, as they are unable to give you money directly. However, there is also always a separate “store” that is in a separate building very close by, where you can exchange your gold for money. These places are, of course, owned by the same people. However, it is not illegal, since you are technically selling a prize you’ve just won, as opposed to winning money directly.

While prostitution is illegal, many brothels operate as “restaurants” where you officially pay for the amount of time you want to spend in the establishment. The “waitress” will bring the customer a plate of snacks and a glass of tea. Anything following that is seen as a “private affair between the waitress and the client” and is thus permitted by the law (Adelstein 2009). The Yakuza has operated in both of these spheres basically forever, taking advantage of the legal loopholes to gain profit.

However, these examples are not exclusively Yakuza dominated, and are widespread in Japan. However, Yakuza groups have recently begun to reach more into legal and illegal dogfighting in Japan, as there is a large market for well-bred dogs to use in Japan’s legally dubious dog-fighting tradition (Wofford 2016). The Yakuza is desperate to make money, and while they have been involved in regular style illegal dog-fighting for decades, their involvement within the more legal and open iteration of this activity was only recently infiltrated by the Yakuza. While gambling on dog fights is illegal, orchestrating them is not. The Japanese law that protects animals merely claims that one can not hurt an animal without “good reason”, although what is considered a good justification is not delineated (API 2020). This has allowed things such as dog fights to

continue occurring. So the Yakuza has begun to profit off of the industry, not through controlling gambling as may be expected, but through the control and sale of specially bred dogs for the fights (Wofford 2016). This is indicative of the Yakuza's activities within Japan today. As opposed to operating in explicitly illegal markets, they seek to take advantage of loopholes and gray areas within Japanese legislation in order to secure as much profit as possible.

This utilization of legal loopholes to secure profits in a technically legal way allows the Yakuza to hold onto profits, despite their apparent decline in street power and increasingly elderly workforce. Due to the securitization of Japan, it is increasingly difficult to intimidate and extort small businesses and enforce their rules and power. Due to this, the Yakuza has made a concerted effort to infiltrate the technically legal, but dubious markets that they can find. Part of their response has therefore been a push to outsmart the government and police at whatever space they can find. And as the institutions of prostitution and pachinko in Japan demonstrate, law enforcement has little interest in stopping these schemes when people find loopholes. Therefore an important aspect of the securitization of Japan is its inherent failings when it comes to these loopholes. There is a lack of concern for stopping things that Japanese society has determined to be relatively harmless, even if they are thinly veiled violations of the law. The Yakuza's existence as a legal organization is an example of this as well.

These trends are compounded by the estimates of the wealth of the Yakuza. During the last major peak of Yakuza activity, in 1988, the NPA estimated that the Yakuza controlled approximately \$10 billion as a collective mass, including all of the

syndicates registered (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice 2020). At this time there were nearly 10 times the number of Yakuza within Japan. While no official calculations of Yakuza revenue exist for the modern day, it has been estimated that the Yamaguchi-Gumi alone control a net-worth of around \$80 billion, which seems to stand in direct contrast to the logical assumption one would make when analyzing the contemporary realities of the Yakuza.

Even if the Yamaguchi-Gumi was responsible for 100% of the fraud, theft, prostitution, gambling, and drug sales occurring within Japan, which is impossible, this would not come close to their estimated revenue. Indeed, alongside this analysis, and the record of increasing cocaine seizures within Japan, it appears as though the Yakuza in general, but the Yamaguchi-Gumi in particular, are increasing their involvement within the international drug trade. This is notable, because Japan's predominant drug for most of modern history, methamphetamines, have almost entirely been produced domestically. Their involvement within this market would however explain their precipitous increase in revenue, as the drug market has always been extremely profitable, especially when one group has a monopoly over an entire market.

Additionally, while there are 25 groups on the official list of bōryokudan, there are an estimated 62 smaller and less organized groups which operate much in the same way Yakuza groups do, but which are not officially listed or sanctioned by the government. These un-registered groups are often much more specialized than the officially listed groups, typically only operating within a particular market in a specific locale. For example, the Nagoya based and officially designated bōryokudan, the

“Chūkyō-Shinnō-kai” was typical, dealing in a variety of illicit activities such as gambling and extortion across several cities and prefectures. However they were slowly cracked down upon in the mid 2000’s, and officially disbanded. Many members of the group then formed the “Aichi Prefecture Small Commercial Cooperative Association” which focuses almost entirely on controlling un-regulated markets within the city of Nagoya itself, and is not an officially designated group. While these pieces of information are not easily verifiable, the trends that they illustrate is clear. While all of the syndicates combined made around \$10 Billion in 1988, the largest single syndicate is now estimated to produce 8 times that wealth single-handedly. And this does not account for the other 24 official groups, or the dozens of unregistered ones. Few estimates for these other groups’ incomes exist, however it can be assumed to be substantial.

Given the estimated value of the Yamaguchi Gumi being \$80 Billion, and their current numbers, every individual of the 8,000 members would on average be bringing in \$10,000,000 every year, which is not possible within solely a Japanese framework. Especially considering that approximately half of this number is incarcerated (NPA 2022). The Construction company bearing the name of the Yamaguchi Gumi is a probable funnel for money, as public financial records for the company cease in the late 1980’s and were likely fraudulent before this anyway. And still, based on projection, it is incredibly unlikely that the company is making \$80 Billion in profit for the organization. Therefore, something unseen must be happening, for which no sources can currently account.

Therefore, something must have changed in the operations of the Yakuza, as violent crimes have decreased on all fronts across Japan. According to the NPA (2020), the only 2 forms of crime that have been on the rise in Japan are shoplifting (largely by elderly people), and telephone fraud. Even if the Yakuza received 100% of the money from all of the telephone fraud campaigns in Japan, it would barely scratch the surface of the amount of wealth the Yakuza seem to possess. Even the drug trade in Japan is miniscule when compared to the proportions of other countries. It is said that less than .1% of Japanese people have ever tried cannabis, which is 60 times lower than the next lowest country surveyed (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice 2020). However, the NPA (2020) do point out that nearly 85% of drug arrests in Japan relate to methamphetamine. Japan is unique, as it is the only state where methamphetamines and stimulants are more popular than cannabis.

If all other criminal groups in Japan are ignored, and the entirety of drug, fraud, and theft profits are somehow solely the responsibility of the Yakuza, this still would not be enough to explain the dramatic rise in their wealth. It would still hardly scratch the surface. The Yakuza's role in the greater Asian drug market is negligible in terms of exports. Domestic drug production in Japan is limited almost entirely to "Shabu" or Methamphetamines, as previously demonstrated. Virtually all of Japan's drugs are produced and consumed domestically. Cases of drug smuggling involving Yakuza are limited to Yakuza affiliates abroad, or are conducted with drugs obtained somewhere else. An example of this is the case of Ebisawa vs the United States, in which a Yakuza member sought to trade heroin from Myanmar for American weaponry (DoJ 2022).

Beyond simply participating in illicit markets, and manipulating legal ones, and beyond simple criminal activities, the Yakuza have a tremendous amount of money which it is unlikely came from the Japanese market. The reason being is that Japan is heavily reliant on imports for virtually every sector, and this includes illicit substances. Japan produces a relatively low volume of narcotics, and is reliant on other nations for sex workers, enforcers, and other illicit merchandise. It is unlikely that there is a mysterious new product being produced and distributed that could account for this trend. Without more direct inquiry by investigators, it is unlikely that the exact revenue streams of the Yakuza will ever truly be known.

However, by looking at similar cases from around the world, many similarities can be uncovered. Adelstein (2009) discusses how the Yakuza's number have stayed "constant" in the years between the anti-bōryokudan act, while the Yakuza began declining in number the year after. However, the Yakuza is not the only organization that has successfully adapted to these conditions. Arguably the most successful of global criminal enterprises in adapting to the realities of globalization has been the Southern Italian criminal groups such as the 'Ndrangheta, the Cosa Nostra, and the Camorra. Traditionally, these groups have been highly stratified, with a clear social hierarchy, and a significant public presence, extremely similar to the Yakuza (Schneider and Schneider 2020). This is no longer the case, as these gangs have been increasingly securitized, and have as a result gone more into hiding. So, just as the Yakuza is a visible and public presence that is being driven underground, so to was the Italian mafia. However, as globalization has progressed, Italian syndicates have adapted, and have been able to

become the most dominant criminal organization in Europe, with operations nearly everywhere in the world (Schneider and Schneider 2020). The Italian mafia is one of the most effective logistics companies in the world, and essentially dominates European drug markets. There are a wide variety of differences between the circumstances of South Italy and Japan, but it is worth noting that if the Italian mafia is able to adapt so successfully to economic globalization, then there is no reason that why the kings of the underworld of the world's 3rd largest economy can't also do the same.

In other words, as the Yakuza has declined in physical power in terms of manpower and street-level influence, they have most likely adapted to the trends of globalization which other criminal syndicates have utilized to maximize their profits. The Italian mafia has taken advantage of the globalization of commerce to become the primary supplier of Europe's cocaine, becoming extremely wealthy and powerful, while maintaining high levels of subversion within the state (Schneider, Schneider 2021). Historically, the Italian mafias operated as very open, hierarchical organizations that existed within the purview of the state, similar in many ways to the cultural position of the Yakuza leading into the current day. Just as the Italian Mafia went underground and became more subversive, so too will the Yakuza.

The Southern Italian Mafias and the Russian mob both are excellent examples of organized criminal groups that have adjusted to similar trends, and have seen the same things happen. It is notable that Russian criminal syndicates have traditionally shared many superficial traits with Japanese Yakuza. Both the Yakuza, and the Vory have traditionally been comprised of social outcasts who banded together in order to survive.

They both had deep traditions involving elaborate tattoos that convey aspects of the person to others immediately. And both of these organizations utilized their position as a semi-romanticized underclass to gain sympathy and do business. However, as the modern Russian State was being formed under Putin, these criminal organizations had to adapt in order to survive. Increased securitization in Russia meant that traditional style “Vory” became progressively weaker, while Russian criminal activities only continued to advance in a much more professional, and in many ways “white collar” way (Cheloukhine, Khan, & Kalkayeva 2020). As securitization progressed, criminal networks in Russia adapted. In response to these increasing levels of securitization, Russian criminal networks adapted to work within the purview of the Russian state as opposed to outside of it, thus creating a bizarre sphere of politics business, and crime, which permeates all levels of contemporary Russia (Galleotti 2018). However, the Russian Mob’s existence has persisted precisely because they have shed their traditional, visible, and violent methods in exchange for blending in with society, and making it unclear when Organized crime is involved with an industry, and when it isn’t. While many of the circumstances between the two organizations are incredibly different, it has been shown that Transnational Criminal Organizations are both capable of, and willing to shed their traditions and abandon their images of themselves in favor of increasing profit.

Yakuza members have been well known for travelling between various markets across Asia, working with everyone from Russian gangs in Vladivostok, to gun smugglers in Hawaii, to Sex traffickers in Bangkok, and anybody else in between (Rankin 2012;

Galeotti 2019). In 2018, a former Yakuza boss was arrested living peacefully in Bangkok, and it is very common for Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Thai women to work within Yakuza run brothels (Kaplan, Dubro 2012). Therefore it is likely that the Yakuza has begun to act in the role of a mediator for global trade and illicit commerce, utilizing their connections to organized crime all across Asia to seek immense profit as a result of market globalization. This is not enough evidence to empirically say that the Yakuza is shifting into a more globalized framework, but rather that they are simply using the framework that already exists, without adapting to it. It is unclear how much the organization has truly changed due to global supply lines developing, but it is undoubtable that they have exploited them.

This analysis relates back to numerous aspects of my research that I delineated. Primarily, the relationship between the Yakuza and its contemporary developments. While I set out to analyze the role of Securitization on the Yakuza in Japan, and how that has affected their existence within the context of the increasingly globalized economic system that benefits virtually every economy on earth. What I discovered however was a bizarre blend of trends. As opposed to my expectations, the Yakuza's role in the global economy has become significantly stronger as an arbitrator between other groups. While the Yakuza are most likely going to continue to lose control over the streets in Japan, they will continue to dominate the illicit markets in general. No other criminal groups in Japan have the connections or the resources to import drugs on the scale that the Yakuza can. So, in response to the hard pressing of the government, the Yakuza are utilizing their vast connections abroad to act as organizers for other criminal syndicates.

Their role on the Japanese street has decreased, but their role within the Japanese economy has increased. In place of their presence at home, they are more present abroad, while still utilizing Japan as a base of operations, and seeking to profit from the immense Japanese market.

CONCLUSION

Many different trends have developed within the past 30 years in Japan, including the increase of securitization of the Japanese Yakuza. As a result of this, there are numerous trends that have developed as a response. Firstly, the apparent power of the Yakuza has declined significantly since the implementation of the 1991 anti-bōryokudan act, and more importantly the Yakuza Exclusion Ordinances. Secondly, despite the boot that the government is placing on their throat, the Yakuza is significantly richer than it was before these legislations were put into place. The latter development cannot be explained by any external economic forces, or increasing crime statistics, as Japan has had a relatively stagnant but large economy since the 1980's, and crime rates are down. If their prosperity was merely a result of a prosperous economy, then Japan's economy would be exploding at a rate similar to China, which it isn't. And yet, it is not a case of increasing their criminal street activities either, as violent crime, extortion, and various other crime statistics are significantly lower today than they were at the time of implementing these legislation. So, what is happening?

The Yakuza is unable to do business in Japan like it used to, but also still takes advantages of the economic opportunities offered by their proximity to the gigantic

Japanese economy. The Yakuza is losing manpower, but increasing its revenue, through acting as middlemen in the international illicit markets. Takeshi Ebisawa's case is a prime example of Yakuza members acting as go-betweens for a wide spread of different organizations that exist outside of the purview of any one state's formal economy. They are being squeezed out of their markets in Japan, which has created a perception that they are dying out. However, the real effect of this has been to encourage them to act in their new role as international criminals. They operate increasingly without concern for borders or nationality, so long as a profit can be made. While the Japanese government would like the world to see the Yakuza's decline in manpower as a successful result of securitizing legislation, it would be more accurate to say that the Yakuza is shedding excess weight. While it may take a team of 500 men to control the markets of a city in Japan, it only takes 1 to negotiate a deal between different groups looking to do business abroad. However, the latter option is increasingly bringing in more money.

So the legislation that seems to have brought the Yakuza to their knees within Japan have really only encouraged them to go abroad. While there are fewer and fewer Yakuza every year, there does not appear to be any shift in their exploding profits. Whether or not it is better for there to be a poorer but more public criminal presence, or a richer and more subversive criminal presence within a society is outside of the purview of this research, however it can not be said that either is particularly good. It certainly is not the case that the Yakuza are completely dying out, however. Indeed, it appears as though the legislation that was meant to crush the Yakuza only encouraged them to find more creative ways to make money, and they have profited immensely as a

result. Even if their presence is less visible for Japanese people, it is becoming more visible for criminals across the world.

In conclusion, the legislation that was meant to crush the Yakuza within Japan has been overall quite successful, as crime rates are down, and the Yakuza have lost nearly 2/3rds of their workforce over the past decade. However, in reality it has encouraged the Yakuza to spread out from home, raking in significantly higher profits with a significantly smaller workforce. The legislation only served to bolster their motivation to work with foreign gangs, making them into the middlemen of Asian crime. In spite of the Japanese government's claims, the Yakuza are not dead. They are simply adopting a new form in response to harsh legislation. Indeed, what didn't kill the Yakuza, only served to make it stronger.

This research directly relates to the understanding and analysis of TOC as it has developed in Asia in general. The case of the Yakuza, while unique in many ways, is indicative of the developments of deeply embedded ethnic gangs in response to government securitization and of economic globalization. Much in the same way that the infamous 'Ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra of southern Italy have gone from powerful public figures that flaunt the government to subversive gangs that operate below the surface of society, the Yakuza's existence is an example of this same trend developing in another theater of global commerce.

However, there are a wide variety of other avenues of analysis that should be analyzed in order to fully understand the position of the Yakuza within contemporary

Japan. While it would take an entire career to fully analyze any aspect of this particular subject, the main theater of Yakuza influence in Japan that should be analyzed is that of their role in government. I initially included some analysis of their role in sponsoring far-right groups in Japan, known as Uyoku Dantai (literally “Far-right parties”), but eventually did not explore this line of inquiry. In addition, the Yakuza’s influence within the surface level of politics in Japan should also be analyzed. However, this would require an in depth analysis of legal and governmental processes in Japan, in addition to the Yakuza’s relationship with it. In general, the Yakuza’s relationship with Japanese government and a deeper analysis of their activities within the legal economy would require an entirely different line of inquisition than the one I pursued, however it would undoubtedly be assisted by the analyses and conclusions I have drawn in this thesis, and I intend on continuing all of this research in the future. Additionally, if my analysis is correct, significantly more research into the new role of the Yakuza will need to be conducted by scholars of TOC, law enforcement agencies across the globe, and International Governmental Organizations such as the UN. I intend to take part in this future research.

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