

The historical rheology and cultural value of private state design

Congrong Xiao, Dongkwon Seong*, Yan Zhang

Department of Xcultural Studies, Kookmin University, Seoul 02707, Korea

* **Corresponding author:** Dongkwon Seong, dongkwonseong@kookmin.ac.kr

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Abstract: Private states (also referred to as “micronations”) are unique cultural and creative products that involve political, economic, and cultural factors tied to individuals, groups, and specific social contexts. From ancient settlers establishing overseas colonies to modern digital virtual state projects, the forms and operational methods of private states have continuously evolved and innovated. The successful marketing of private states is often accompanied by the creation of narrative elements, such as their histories, constitutions, national flags, and coats of arms, constructing a grand narrative that attracts consumers, in line with the theory of monogotari consumption. As symbolic cultural products, these states not only possess material attributes but, more importantly, also embody cultural experiences and emotional value. Therefore, the significance of studying private states lies in elucidating how they present and operate their unique worldviews and cultural atmospheres to attract participation.

Keywords: private states; micronations; branded cultural products; marketing strategies; narrative consumption

1. The private state: Concept and definition

The essence of a normal sovereign state lies in the “organ of class rule” (Selected Works of Lenin, 1971, p. 114). In a state, government agencies and departments are, by nature, tools for the ruling class to exercise power. In current times, however, the internet has given rise to groups and organizations that claim to be sovereign and independent entities called “Micronations”¹(James and C D. 2022.). Whether they possess territory or not, these entities use the convenience and speed of the internet and digital technology to actively promote and sell cultural products, such as state identification documents, across various online platforms. It is important to clarify that compared with genuine government agencies, these organizations are merely shell entities with the nominal title of “state” or are private sector groups representing small collectives² micronations may have governments that include a “president”, “ministers”, or other official titles, but these positions rarely hold actual power. Micronations often have no real governing apparatus and cannot govern or implement laws in any meaningful way. Therefore, aside from a few coincidental diplomatic cases (such as the negotiations between the Principality of Sealand and German³), these entities have never been recognized by the international community, nor have they been acknowledged by any states or academic circles as “political entities with limited recognition⁴”.

Between 1973 and 1988, the International Micropatrolological Society (IMS) serves as a poignant reflection of the rise and fall of private states in the 20th century. Within just a few years of its establishment, the IMS documented 128 private states and categorized them into five legitimacy levels based on statistical

data: B (“Bogus”), E (“Extinct”), F (“Fictional”), T (“Traditional”), and O (“Other”). According to the IMS, only those micronations rated as “T” or “O” have a chance of achieving “sovereign independence.” However, considering that the IMS existed for only a short period and none of the emerging private states in its records attained “sovereign independence”, I believe that while its documentation can be referenced, its conclusions should not be adopted.

These “state entities” are also referred to as “micronations”, “model countries”, or “new country projects”. The literal English meaning of “micronation” is “a very small state”. This emerging term, originating around the 1970s, describes the numerous entities that arose during the aforementioned period but quickly vanished, unrecognized by the international community as legitimate states.

Despite standard translation principles and mainstream usage online, where these entities are typically called “micronations”, my review of relevant papers and promotional materials suggested that using the aforementioned term easily leads to confusion with actual sovereign entities known as “microstates.” The word “private” more accurately conveys the true nature of these entities, which exist based on the will of individuals or small groups. Therefore, I advocate for using the term “private state” instead of “micronation” to refer to these entities. Nevertheless, this approach involves adopting the suggested term in new contexts while continuing to use the previous wording when discussing existing historical materials.

The formation of private states is typically driven by personal interests, cultural creativity, or social experiments. In other words, they are cultural and creative products of artists or social activists for purposes of self-expression and the pursuit or exploration of new social models, political forms, or cultural expressions, among other goals. Therefore, private states have no established governing institutions or stable population resources, making it impossible for them to be recognized by the international community or sovereign states in the same way as other colonial independence movements.

Strictly speaking, it is not entirely impossible for private states to gain some degree of recognition by the international community. This is because, among existing sovereign states, there are a few rare exceptions that bear some resemblance to private states. For example, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM) is not a sovereign state, as it does not claim or effectively control any territory. It only possesses certain extraterritorial buildings and estates. However, as of 2020, the Order had established diplomatic relations with 115 countries worldwide (110 at the ambassadorial level and 5 at the consular level), qualifying it as a recognized sovereign entity organization.

It is important to note, however, that cases like the SMOM are extremely rare on a global scale. Additionally, the SMOM traces its origins back to the medieval Catholic military order of the Knights Hospitaller during the Crusades, giving it significant historical roots and influence. Therefore, it is possible for private states and similar entities or organizations to become internationally recognized sovereign entities. However, the probability is very small, and it may require a long time to expand their influence or wait for a historical window of opportunity—for example, the Teutonic Knights, a military religious order, became the prototype of Germany. But to date, the Principality of Sealand is the only existing private states entity that

has had official contact with sovereign states. Therefore, it's hard to say it's absolutely impossible, but at least in the next few decades, it's almost impossible.

At the same time, the private state is a broad concept that encompasses various types of entities, ranging from personal cultural creative projects to those with genuine sovereignty claims. I believe that private states (micronations) can be generally categorized into two types: Traditional micronations and society micronations. Traditional micronations are typically declared and managed by individuals or small groups who claim to possess a specific geographical location and attempt to establish their own government and social system on their territory. These private states often establish themselves in remote areas, such as certain borderlands, wastelands, or islands, thereby evading the jurisdiction of existing sovereign states.

Society micronations today do not possess actual geographic territories (or the territories that they claim are under the jurisdiction of real sovereign states) and exist solely through internet platforms and social organizations. Strictly speaking, traditional and society micronations often share similar design concepts and operational methods. Both are formed by groups of individuals who espouse common ideals or interests and establish symbolic laws, constitutions, flags, anthems, and other elements. They conduct “diplomatic” activities and promote their states through websites, social media, and online forums.

In the digital age, traditional micronations differ from their societal counterparts primarily in that they possess operational physical territory, whereas the latter rely solely on internet communities without any tangible land. However, the distinction between the two is not always significant. Many traditional micronations face harsh geographical conditions that compel the establishment of “government departments” within sovereign states rather than in their claimed territories. They also often lack permanent residents. Conversely, some society micronations have substantial territories within sovereign states that support their organizational operations. However, these private states do not achieve sovereign independence in form and therefore fall under the category of internet micronations. For example, the Conch Republic in Key West, Florida and the Principality of Seborga in Italy have established related organizations (**Figures 1** and **2**), conducting promotional activities to attract tourists and sell “national” cultural products. Nevertheless, both Key West and Seborga pay taxes to and are administratively governed by their respective sovereign states. To present the differences between traditional micronations and society micronations more intuitively, a comparative analysis is provided in tabular form. Please refer to **Table 1**.

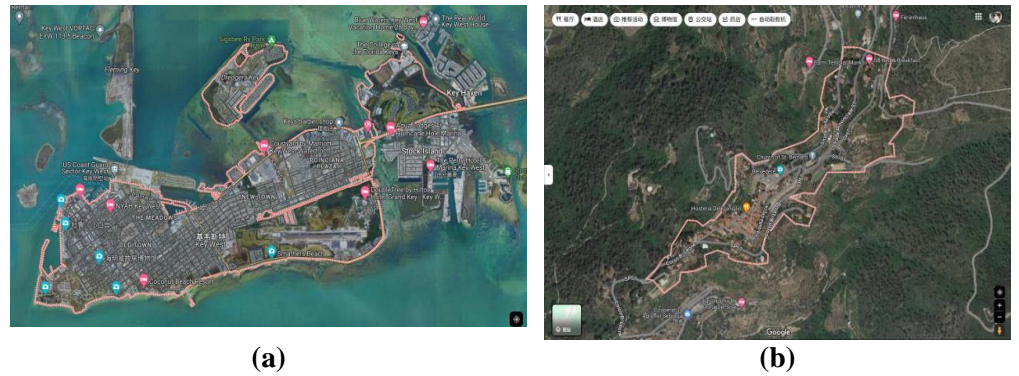


Figure 1. (a) Conch Republic, key west, Florida, USA; **(b)** principality of Seborga (Principato di Seborga), Seborga, Italy.
Image source: Google maps.

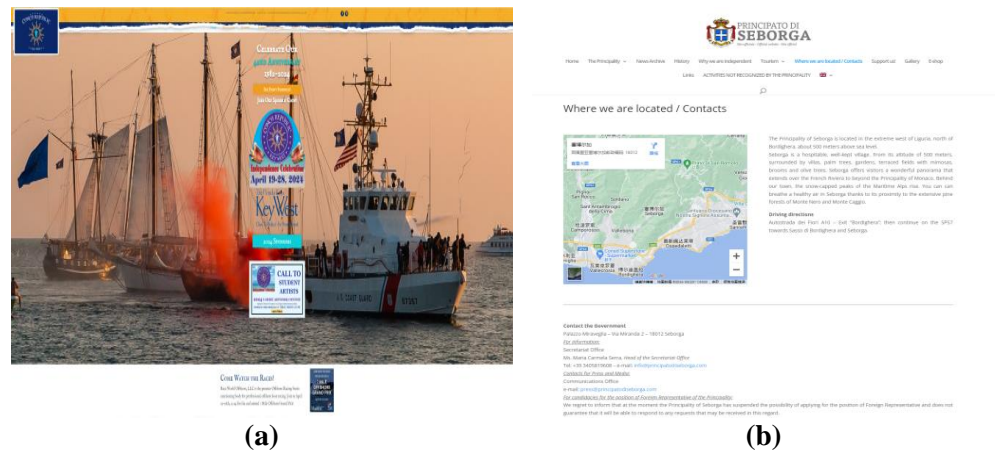


Figure 2. (a) Homepage of the conch Republic website; **(b)** homepage of the Principality of Seborga website.

Table 1. Comparison table of traditional micronations and society micronations.

Feature	Traditional Micronation	Society Micronation
Geographic Territory	Claims a specific geographic area and attempts to control it	Does not have actual territory, governed by a sovereign state
Operational Method	Managed by individuals or small groups, government departments often located within the sovereign state	Exists primarily through internet platforms and social organizations
Citizen Status	Usually lacks permanent residents	Primarily consists of online communities, lacking physical citizens
Promotion Method	Establishes symbolic laws, charters, flags, etc., and engages in diplomatic outreach	Uses websites, social media, etc., to promote ideas and values
Cultural and Brand Identity	Emphasizes unique brand values and cultural identity	Similarly aims to shape a distinct brand image
Sovereign Independence	May have geographic presence but often lacks actual sovereignty	Lacks sovereign independence, resembling more of an online micronation

Similar to society micronations, various “exiled governments” exist on the internet. Only a few of these exiled governments have achieved status as formal government organizations, such as the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance and the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea⁵(Li, 2022.). Currently, the only

exiled government with a historical governance background that remains to this day is Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, which has been active since 1919. Other contemporary exiled government organizations are essentially grassroots, non-government entities similar in nature to society micronations. Society micronations are frequently established for non-political purposes, such as entertainment, personal interests, or community activities, and they generally have no actual governing authority or claimed territory, existing mostly in virtual spaces or creative contexts. Exiled governments and new types of internet micronations are social organizations that rely on internet activities and share significant similarities: Both create symbolic elements, such as constitutions, flags, and anthems, and use online platforms for their activities. Consequently, some internet micronations may claim to be “exiled governments” as a form of self-expression and as a means of attracting attention.

Private state organizations focus heavily on promoting and shaping their national images online, using internet platforms to spread their ideals and values. As a result, the concept of a private state is closely tied to brand culture and creative design. These promotions and designs often incorporate elements of regional cultures, family or “national” histories, and team values, granting the groups unique identities. These design elements serve as promotional material for portraying a private state as a sovereign state while also distinguishing it from other sovereign or private entities. In essence, this process is akin to the way brand logos are used to establish visual recognition, differentiate brands, and aid in promotion and outreach.

In dissertation *Subversive Sovereignty: Parodic Representations of Micropatrias Enclaved by the United Kingdom*, Dr. Moreau argues that private states employ strategies of parody, satire, and liminality to challenge traditional concepts of sovereignty (Moreau Terri Ann, 2014). This traditional conception of sovereignty is typically linked to territorial control, international recognition, and legal norms. Moreau suggests that these “sovereign” declarations are not merely acts of absurdity or folly but rather critical interventions that, by mimicking the actions of states—such as creating flags, currencies, and constitutions—reveal the constructed nature of sovereignty. Consequently, the existence of private states is framed as a liminal condition, occupying a space that is neither fully integrated into the system of sovereign states nor entirely separate from it. Through their “being in liminality”, these entities question the foundational legitimacy of sovereignty. Dr. Moreau’s dissertation focuses on how micronations, through their use of parody, blur the boundaries between the “legitimate” and the “anomalous”, arguing that the primary function of private states lies in social critique and the challenge they pose to the norms of sovereignty.

It is important to note that in today’s internet context, despite the emergence of numerous small groups and individuals claiming to be “micronations” or “associational micro-nations”, these entities often exhibit significant flaws that hinder their recognition as subjects of genuine academic research value. These groups typically lack the necessary organizational structure, failing to establish stable operational teams and management systems, which leads to internal disarray and inefficient operations. Moreover, they often produce little substantial cultural output, lacking originality and depth in their cultural concepts, thereby failing to create unique cultural symbols or effective social influence. This absence of content

and depth makes it difficult for these groups to engage in sustained social interactions, preventing them from establishing stable influence or recognition within the public sphere. Although there are numerous private states, not all of them hold significant value for in-depth research. For statistical analysis of research value, please refer to **Table 2**.

Table 2. Statistical table of the academic value of private states.

Standards	The Private State worthy of inclusion in academic research	Situations that should not be included in academic research
Definition	Originating from personal interests, cultural creativity, or social experiments, possessing unique cultural products, fundamentally different from traditional nations.	Merely a simple claim of 'micro-nation,' lacking substantive cultural and organizational construction.
Organizational Structure	Possessing a clear organizational framework and a stable operational team, establishing systematic management systems.	Lacking a complete organizational structure, with a loose membership composition, unable to sustain operations.
Cultural Creativity	Possessing unique and relatively complete cultural concepts, capable of continuously producing original content, forming a distinct cultural symbol system.	Only basic symbolic signs (such as simple flag designs) exist, with no substantial cultural output or innovative content.
Social Influence	Has a substantial impact in specific fields, possesses a stable audience, and is capable of effective cultural dissemination.	Lacks social influence, unable to form sustained cultural output and social interaction.
Operational Sustainability	Has a long-term operational plan, maintains stable cultural output, and establishes a sustainable operational model.	Only exists as an online community or 'association-like micro-nation,' with no substantial cultural output or systematic operational planning.
Classification	<p>Traditional micro-nations: Teams that claim to have a tangible geographical location and attempt to establish a specific governance system, usually located in remote areas such as borders, wastelands, or islands.</p> <p>Society micro-nations: Focusing on cultural creative design and social organizational forms, generally possessing a fixed office location, a relatively large organizational scale, and a longer history.</p>	<p>Society micro-nations: Entities without actual geographical territory, extremely small in scale, operating on internet platforms and existing in a social form.</p>
Research Value	Revealing their role in cultural innovation, social experimentation, and market strategies.	None
Selection Criteria	Attention should be paid to 'micro-nation' groups that possess systematic cultural and creative design, a complete operational system, substantial social impact, and the ability for sustained cultural output.	Individuals or small groups without influence are not included in the statistical scope.

Academic research should focus on private states that have clear organizational structures, sustained cultural output, and significant social influence, rather than on small groups that, due to their simplicity and superficiality, fail to foster genuine social interaction. Only those private states that can make substantial impacts on cultural, social, and political levels merit in-depth study and discussion. By analyzing these private states, we can not only gain a better understanding of the diversity and complexity of contemporary society but also reveal the potential and challenges individuals face in seeking self-expression and social innovation. Therefore, research on micronations requires more rigorous standards to ensure that the subjects chosen possess sufficient academic value and research significance.

In summary, private states tend to shape their own unique brand values and cultural identities, combining these beliefs and personal attributes with symbols and imagery to create distinctive brand images that attract attention and recognition. At

the same time, private states adopt brand-building and marketing strategies to promote such images and values to garner increased support and visibility.

2. The history and development of private states

Private states (micronations) have a long and complex history, with various interpretations surrounding their origins. Pinpointing exactly when private states emerged, as a form of contemporary cultural creativity, is therefore difficult. I propose that the phenomenon of private states dates back to the Classical Era or even earlier and to human settlements established overseas. By this time, early state governments had already emerged, so overseas settlements that existed beyond the control of these states could be considered early “prototypes” of private states. As these settlements grew, they evolved into ancient colonies, such as the Phoenicians establishing Carthage or the expansion of Greek city-states (Yang, 2010.).

Carthage was located 17 km northeast of present-day Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, strategically positioned at the narrow entrance to the Tunisian Strait. Covering an area of over 300 hectares, it was a renowned colonial city founded by the ancient Phoenician city-state of Tyre (in present-day Lebanon) in North Africa. As Tyre declined, Carthage gained increasing autonomy and quickly separated from its mother city, Tyre, to become an independent city-state. Leveraging its advantageous geographical location and powerful navy, Carthage rapidly developed and grew, eventually becoming a major political, economic, commercial, and agricultural center in the ancient Mediterranean world. The founding date of Carthage has puzzled many scholars. First, there is a scarcity of historical sources from the early period, and second, Carthage lacked a tradition of writing annals. The Carthaginians typically used “Year One” as the starting point for their founding date, and their coins were not inscribed with dates. The dating of Carthaginian history could only be inferred from the portraits of ruling figures on the coins. During the final centuries of Carthage’s existence, their scribes began consciously imitating the Greeks by drafting lists of local magistrates, the Suffetes, and recording the deeds of each Suffetes. These lists have become a crucial historical resource for the study of Carthaginian history. Traditionally, scholars have debated the founding date of Carthage, with two main schools of thought among Greek and Roman historians: The “Early Founding Theory” and the “Late Founding Theory” (Du, 2014).

The “Early Founding Theory” is most notably represented by the 4th-century BC Greek historian Philistos of Syracuse. He argued that the founding date of Carthage should be placed during the time of the Tyrian figures Azoros and Karkhedon, who were legendary heroes credited with the establishment of the city. Another key proponent of the “Early Founding Theory” was St. Jerome, who, by citing the works of Philistos, calculated the specific founding date as 802 years after the time of Abraham, which corresponds to 1215 BCE (Yang, 2010.).

In contrast, the “Late Founding Theory” is based on official records and firsthand accounts obtained from scholars who had direct contact with the Carthaginians. For example, the ancient Greek historian Timaeus of Sicily (ca. 345 BCE–ca. 250 BCE) argued that Carthage was founded 38 years before the first

Olympic Games, which would place its founding around 814 BCE or 813 BCE. Timaeus also learned certain details about Carthage's founding from Carthaginians in Sicily, including the story that the city was established by Elissa, the sister of the Phoenician king Pygmalion, and that the city's inhabitants revered her as "Deido" (Yang, 2010).

The Archaic period in ancient Greece was also a transformative era for Greek society. During this time, the Greeks chose to colonize foreign lands and establish numerous city-states, which laid the groundwork for the eventual flourishing of Greek civilization. Gaetano de Sanctis, in his *Storia dei Greci* (History of the Greeks), argues that the colonization movement played a crucial role in solidifying Greek national identity. It also contributed to the socio-economic development of Greece, which in turn fostered political progress. This economic growth led to the liberation of individuals, the collapse of aristocratic political structures, and ultimately paved the way for the democratization of Greek politics. Victor Ehrenberg, in his article *When did the Polis Rise?* discusses the role of the east-to-west movement in the development of the city-state. He notes that the colonial communities in Asia Minor were no longer loose ethnic groups like their mother cities, but rather cohesive communities with stronger social bonds. In this sense, colonization played a significant role in refining the city-state system. However, he argues that the early cities in Asia Minor should not be uncritically labeled as city-states in a political sense (He and Wang, 2006.).

In my view, these early colonies were essentially a transition from "private states" to "city-states".

The reason why there has not been a systematic study of the ancient colonization movements, particularly the rise of the Greek city-states, is primarily due to the severe lack of surviving historical sources—especially written records—pertaining to the Archaic period's colonial activities. However, with the advancement of archaeology in recent decades, particularly the new archaeological findings and related reports from the Asia Minor and Sicily regions, the potential for further research into this topic has expanded. For example, Graham has pointed out that new excavations in Asia Minor and Sicily have not only reshaped our understanding of Greek colonization and settlement in these areas, but they also have significant implications for addressing the rise and nature of the Greek city-state (Cui, 2011).

Similar to these ancient Greeks and Phoenicians, the colonies of the Roman Republic also had a significant impact on later human history. The term colony (Latin: *colonia*) originally referred to outpost fortifications established by Rome in conquered territories for defensive purposes (Li and Gong, 2014.) According to Titus Livius, Rome founded its earliest colonies around 752 BCE in Antemnae and Crustumerium. In ancient Roman, colonies were classified into two types: Roman colonies (*coloniae civium Romanorum* or *coloniae maritimae*) and Latin colonies (*coloniae Latinae*).

Roman colonies typically consisted of approximately 300 Roman veterans and their families, who were granted agricultural land ranging from 1 to 2.5 hectares of *ager colonicus* (state-owned land) and free access to *ager compascus scripturarius* (public state-owned land) for use as pastures, grazing grounds, and woodlands.

Latin colonies, on the other hand, were significantly larger and served as military outposts located near or within enemy territory. Historian A. N. Sherwin-White likened these colonies to Athens' military settlements (cleruchies). Settlers in Latin colonies were allocated large plots of land, sometimes as extensive as 35 hectares. However, they forfeited their Roman citizenship, which could be regained upon returning to Rome.

Although these colonies were under the jurisdiction of the Roman Republic, they lacked permanent military garrisons and enjoyed a degree of autonomy in their early stages. This autonomy made them resemble private-state communities. Over time, however, their independence was gradually integrated into the Roman Republic's administrative and political structure, eventually erasing their initial community sovereignty.

With the division and decline of the Roman Empire, history entered the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages, the First Crusade began in November 1095 when Pope Urban II called upon Christians to embark on a military expedition against Muslims at the Council of Clermont. With the advent of the Crusades, a new type of military monastic organization emerged. Although these groups were backed by the Catholic Church, they operated as independent military forces within the Crusader states, enjoying considerable autonomy (Xiao and Zhang, 2022). These organizations can be seen as proto-forms of "private states". The three major standing military orders of the Crusader states were the Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitaller, and the Teutonic Knights.

The Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller were formed and grew stronger during the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Among them, the Knights Hospitaller have successfully endured to the present day, recognized as a sovereign entity by the international community.

After the Third Crusade, the Teutonic Order was founded in Acre and primarily operated around the Baltic region. Following the fall of Acre, the temporary capital of the Second Kingdom of Jerusalem, in 1291, the Teutonic Order moved its headquarters to Venice, dedicating itself entirely to conquest in the Baltic area. In the early 14th century, under the leadership of Grand Master Siegfried, the Order relocated to Malbork in Prussia, where it began the Christianization and colonization of the conquered territories. This effort gave rise to a new and unique theocratic polity, the State of the Teutonic Order (Deutschordensland), governed by a military elite, which served as a prototype for Germany (Prussia) (Xiao and Zhang, 2022).

These regimes or governing structures established by individual organizations represent early explorations into state-building with the endorsement of official powers (the Vatican), which may be regarded as attempts at creating private states.

After the end of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery in Europe stimulated the global activities of numerous European explorers, merchants, pirates, and companies. The overseas outposts that they established as footholds can be considered *de facto* private kingdoms or micronations. These outposts were typically exempt from paying taxes to either their host or home countries and maintained considerable independence. Over time, weaker entities dissolved as their teams failed to sustain operations, leaving minimal historical traces. Stronger or more influential entities were often either subdued or absorbed by host nations or

other powers. One of the most notable examples of such short-lived entities is the overseas Chinese Lanfang Republic⁶.

The earliest proponents of the idea that the Lanfang Republic (Kongsi Lanfang) was a “republic” were 19th-century Dutch scholars, such as Schlegel, who repeatedly referred to the Lanfang Company as a “republic.” They believed that the company system was derived from Chinese village communities, which they viewed as “absolutely democratic” and “independent” “small republics.” They described the situation as follows: “In Chinese village communities, there is no government official appointed by the imperial court.” Instead, governance is carried out by a village leader elected by the public. The village leader oversees law enforcement, maintains public order and customs, resolves disputes, apprehends thieves and criminals, and manages the harvest. In these communities, every member serves as a voluntary police officer, and everyone has an obligation to assist in the collection of taxes, which are levied fairly. The village community also acts as a guardian for its members. When someone faces unforeseen difficulties and is unable to live independently, they can receive support and protection, relying on the community for the security of their life and property (Zhao, 2024).

The scholars further note: “Throughout various dynasties, the government has always been convinced of the superiority of the village community system, and thus no official ever dared to act against public opinion”. They continue, “If an official incites public anger, he will be dismissed without hesitation.” They concluded by stating: “In China, the independence of the people is guaranteed by both law and historical tradition, and the people take great pride in this, regarding it as their greatest possession. Therefore, when they go abroad, they bring with them the idea of the village community alliance and establish such independent systems wherever their circumstances lead them, especially in areas inhabited by what they perceive to be barbaric or semi-barbaric peoples.” The final conclusion drawn from this analysis is that “the companies in Borneo are merely replicas of their homeland’s village community system.” (Zhu 1988). Similarly, American missionary Robert Henry Mathews, in the Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary (1931), translated the Chinese term “公司” as “Public Company” and explained that in Chinese, “公司” does not specifically refer to business enterprises but carries the meaning of “public” (open to all).

Though the Lanfang Republic was regarded by some scholars as a “republic”, it lacked any form of international recognition. Despite its autonomy in governance, it was not a sovereign state recognized by other nations. It didn’t have a functioning diplomatic apparatus, nor did it establish formal diplomatic relationships or sign international treaties—fundamental aspects of statehood. Similarly, many micronations (self-declared sovereign entities) claim control over land, but their territorial control is often limited to marginal areas, such as uninhabited islands, barren land, or remote locations, and this land is typically not recognized by international law or any other sovereign states (Zhao, 2024).

Some outposts and headquarters established by private individuals, chartered⁷ companies, or organizations were absorbed into the colonial systems of their suzerain states, becoming part of local colonial administrations. This process

accounts for the establishment of many colonial regimes: For example, the Dutch East India Company's establishment of a colony in South Africa was the precursor to the Boers' ancestors⁸. Similarly, the British East India Company gradually annexed the Mughal Empire and almost the entire Indian subcontinent, while the Portuguese transitioned from leasing to eventually occupying Macau.

I have identified several entities considered private states in the 19th century, before the advent of the information age but with relatively abundant historical documentation. These entities include the Islands of Refreshment (1811–1816) and the Republic of Parva Domus Magna Quies (meaning “small house, great rest”, 1878–present). However, among the many entities recognized as private states in the 19th century and beyond, the Kingdom of Araucanía and Patagonia and similar political entities warrant further discussion regarding their classification as private states. The Kingdom of Araucanía and Patagonia was established by the Mapuche to advocate for their rights and gain international support against the military and economic encroachments of the Chilean and Argentine governments. The king, Orélie-Antoine de Tounens, was a leader chosen by the local Mapuche, and the regime possessed a defined territory, population, and assets. Thus, the establishment of the Kingdom of Araucanía and Patagonia was fundamentally a political movement by Indigenous people resisting colonial invasion rather than a social experiment or self-expressive private entity. Consequently, it should be classified as a “provisional government” with limited recognition rather than as a micronation or private state.

The emergence of documented private states increased significantly in the 20th century. On the basis of World War II as a dividing point, the post-war period saw a tightening of international communication, along with advancements in science and technology, as well as rapid developments in various ideologies, movements, and cultural arts. The entire world was cast under the shadow of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. During this time, many liberals viewed the establishment of private states as a testing ground for their ideal utopias. Some artists and opportunists also regarded the creation of microstates as an alternative form of cultural innovation or a method for achieving personal transcendence. Since the 1960s, numerous private states or similar organizations have emerged under the concept of seasteading⁹, which refers to the construction of homes in international waters. However, most sea steading efforts have ended in failure due to poor management, natural disasters, or dismantling and eviction by local governments. Two of the most representative cases from this period up to the present are the Principality of Sealand and the Republic of Rose Island (Respubliko de la Rozoj). The former gained international attention after negotiating with West German diplomats over the detention of a “political prisoner”, considering this a significant breakthrough toward international recognition. The latter's story was adapted into the 2020 film *Rose Island* (**Figure 3**).

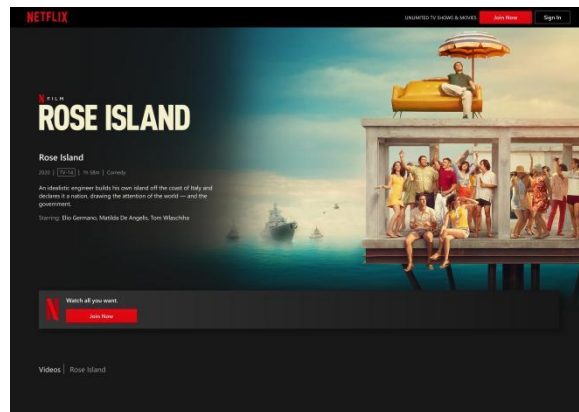


Figure 3. The netflix film Rose Island, Based on real events of the Republic of Rose Island.

In the 1980s, the Japanese writer Hisashi Inoue's novel *Kirikiri Hito*¹⁰ (Niu, 2019) gained widespread acclaim in Japan, marking a significant cultural phenomenon. In 1982, the Kirikiri region in Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture declared itself the Kirikiri State, triggering a widespread wave of micronation establishment across Japan. This phenomenon led to the creation of numerous society micronations, which were not intended to achieve political independence from Japan or promote religious beliefs. Instead, these entities were established as part of regional revitalization efforts, aimed at attracting tourists and boosting local economies. At the peak of Japan's micronation trend in 1986, the Ginkgo Federation in Hachioji City, Tokyo hosted a miniature independent nations Olympics. By 1990, the number of private nations in the country reached a high of 203. However, as the novelty wore off and the sheer number of these entities diminished their impact, coupled with the lack of planning and mismanagement of many micronations, the trend gradually faded before eventually disappearing.

Similarly, the year 1982 saw Key West, Florida declaring itself the Conch Republic and staged a symbolic "war" and "surrender" to the US military as a protest against the federal government's roadblocks and checkpoints in the area. The name "Conch Republic" and the organization have since been retained, and Key West continues to celebrate an Independence Day annually. As with the Kirikiri Fever, however, the 1980s saw the peak and subsequent rapid decline of the micronation trend that encompassed the Conch Republic.

From 1990 to the present, the proliferation of the internet and information technology has driven many people to shift from the traditional practice of establishing private states through overseas expansion and operational bases to designing and operating virtual "national projects" on internet platforms. During this period, the number of traditional physical micronations has significantly declined, while a wide variety of online virtual nations, society micronations, and exile governments have emerged. Compared with the surge in private state establishment in the 1980s, that in the digital age has increased, but the impact of these entities is far less pronounced than that observed in the 20th century. This decline in influence may be related to the more diverse cultural and entertainment options available to people today.

3. The commercial and artistic value of modern private states

Jean Baudrillard argued that in a consumer society, people do not consume merely items themselves but also the symbolic value that these items represent. Thus, objects are viewed as symbols and are influenced by the logic of fashion and differentiation, shaping consumer behavior. Building on Baudrillard's conception of the consumer society, Hitoshi Otsuka posited that, in contemporary society, the symbolic consumption of many cultural products has evolved into a form of story consumption. From this perspective, products such as comics and toys are consumed not for their intrinsic value but for the fragmented stories and grand narratives or sequences (i.e., story settings¹¹) that they represent (Wang, 2022).

This theory, referred to as narrative consumption, serves as a foundational concept for understanding how many film, television, and animation industries derive their value and as a validation of the operational significance of private states. As a unique cultural entity, a private state is often established along with the construction of a series of narrative elements, which encompass the state's history, origin, constitution, flag, anthem, and more—components that collectively form the grand narrative of the entity. Through these elements, the private state presents a distinctive, unrecognized “national history” to the outside world. Consumers who engage with the growth of a private state and purchase related products are essentially experiencing the unique story behind the entity. Therefore, the artistic value of a private state lies not only in its material attributes but also in the cultural experiences and emotional value that it carries. The participants in a private state experience its constructed worldview and cultural atmosphere, enjoying the emotions and sentiments embedded within.

The popularity of Hisashi Inoue's *Kirikiri Hito* provides important cultural context for “narrative consumption theory”. *Kirikiri Hito* constructs a fictional “Kirikiri state,” featuring unique political and economic systems such as self-sufficient agriculture, advanced healthcare, and a gold standard. These systems establish the operational logic of the state, giving this fictional country a plausible existence. Within the framework of narrative consumption theory, these systems become vital elements for attracting consumers, showcasing an idealized alternative reality. As consumers engage with this story, they psychologically experience a longing for an ideal society. Additionally, the book reflects certain phenomena and issues within Japanese society at that time. This narrative approach allows consumers to gain experiences not only on a material level but also on emotional and cultural levels. From the perspective of narrative consumption theory, readers, by engaging with the story of the Kirikiri state, are essentially participating in a profound dialogue about the individual and society, freedom and constraint. This cultural experience and emotional value enable consumers to not just read a novel, but to achieve a sense of spiritual fulfillment and belonging through the intertwining of story and emotion (Niu, 2019).

The narrative style of *Kirikiri Hito* has influenced many subsequent Japanese works, such as Taniguchi Goro's *Infinite Ryvius*. This story follows a group of children living aboard a spaceship named “Ryvius”, who face betrayal from the outside world and are falsely accused of being terrorists during their months of

escape without adult guidance. This storytelling style strongly echoes that of Kirikiri Hito, and these works, in turn, have subtly influenced other Japanese creators, including Ichirō Ōkouchi. As a prominent scriptwriter in Japanese anime, Ōkouchi's most influential works include Code Geass Lelouch of the Rebellion, Guilty Crown, Valvrave the Liberator, and Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress. The common thread among these works is that the protagonists often find themselves in small groups that oppose mainstream society for extended periods. Notably, Valvrave the Liberator can be seen as a blend of 20th-century Japanese Gundam UC series and Kirikiri Hito, infused with sci-fi and space opera elements: students at Sakimori High School in the neutral country of JIOR “establish their own nation” to resist the invasion of the enemy Dorssia army, relying on the powerful humanoid machines known as “Valvrave”, which surpass nuclear weaponry. Although the popularity of Kirikiri Hito has gradually waned over time, the works influenced by it will undoubtedly continue to impact future Japanese creations and creators.

In terms of direct commercial value, entities such as Liberland, the Principality of Sealand, and the Conch Republic have directly sold distinctive cultural products through their “national” portals, including national identification, titles of nobility, email addresses, and passports (Yu, 2002). Notably, the Principality of Sealand enjoys significant popularity on Chinese internet platforms (Figure 4), with its official website supporting Chinese language options and WeChat payment. However, it is important to note that not all organizations or institutions selling official documents qualify as “micronations”, and these profit-driven methods are not exclusive to “micronations.” Historically, as early as the pre-Qin period in China (around 221 BC), there are verifiable instances of government office selling (Venal office). In Europe, the Venal office system in France and the “Purchase of commissions” in the British army were also widely known. In contemporary times, the Knights of Malta and the UK engage in legitimate noble title trading, while the sovereign state of Liechtenstein began attracting tourists and international attention in 2011 by promoting the rental of “temporary kings” as a publicity stunt. These phenomena within sovereign states similarly indicate the commercialization and marketization of power and status in human society.

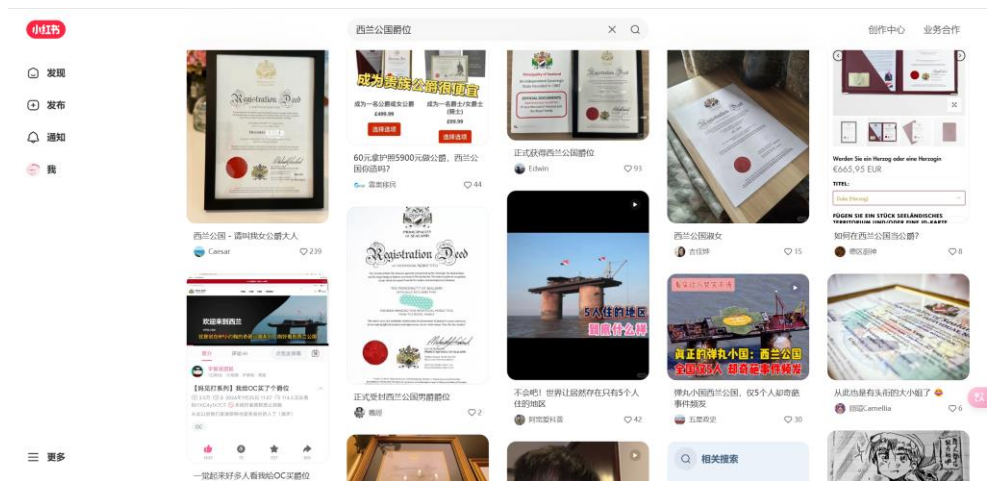


Figure 4. The sharing of titles from the Principality of Sealand on China's “Xiaohongshu (REDnote)” platform.

Although these private states are not universally recognized by the international community in terms of their legal status, and the passports, identification cards, and other forms of identity verification they issue may not be recognized by sovereign states, certain private nation documents might still hold some utility in specific situations due to information asymmetry and legal barriers. For example, the passport of the Republic of Conch, while primarily a cultural symbol, is promoted on its official website (**Figure 5**) as having helped a visitor named Bud Navarro avert a potentially fatal conflict during a critical moment. Despite its limited legal efficacy, this passport serves as a symbol of culture and identity, illustrating how private nations transform “identity” into a marketable commodity. In some cases, certain passports may even have extraordinary effects due to their uniqueness and symbolic meaning. For individuals who subscribe to the ideology of private nations, these documents may represent not just personal identity, but also a pursuit of “freedom” and “independence”. However, the commercialization and virtualization of identity verification may also present legal risks. If these private nation documents are used illegally to evade legal oversight or engage in unlawful activities, they could trigger legal conflicts between states, and in some cases, those involved might face diplomatic or legal issues.



Figure 5. The Republic of Conch’s promotion of the role of its passport.

In some film and television productions, production teams often design a temporary private state as the setting of a story to avoid using the names of real countries or creating a fictional backdrop while presenting realistic details. For example, the 2015 film *Wolf Warriors 2* is set in a nameless African country. Similarly, the 2017 film *Sky Hunter* features a fictional neighboring country called Mahbu as its setting, with the film crew designing distinct national identities for both sides of the fictional conflict (**Figure 6**). The films *Operation Red Sea* and *Home Coming*, based on the 2011 Libyan Civil War evacuation, depict the fictional countries Numia and Yewaire, taking inspiration from the Gaddafi regime of Libya (**Figure 7**). Other examples include the Kingdom of Corea (Korean Empire) in the South Korean drama *The King: Eternal Monarch* and television series and films that extend the Nazi regime in *Iron Sky* and *The Man in the High Castle*. Designing and constructing temporary private states for film and television creation can be regarded as common artistic methods.



Figure 6. (a) The flag and emblem of the Mahbu central government; (b) the anti-government flag from the film *Sky Hunter*.



Figure 7. The flag and passport of the Hazaka Regime of Numia from the film *Home Coming*.

Film production teams design fictional countries as backdrops for their stories, creating original elements, such as flags and emblems, based on real nations. The essence of such design is akin to the creation of private nations, as these entities do not actually exist in our world. Film production teams meticulously craft every detail to ensure that fictional nations seamlessly integrate into narratives while adhering to the logic of the real world, immersing audiences without leaving them feeling detached. These creatively designed settings provide a unique stage that, while grounded in contemporary reality, distinctly differs from any actual nation. The crafted national identities and histories not only advance plot but also enhance a story’s appeal and imaginative scope, presenting a cohesive grand narrative that captivates viewers.

4. The business operation of private states

The existence of private states carries significant cultural and artistic value. However, it is important to note that these values, while meaningful, do not constitute the core foundation of their existence or continued operation in the modern era. In other words, as an organizational entity, a “private state” must focus on expanding its financial resources to sustain its operations more effectively, ensure long-term viability, and even enhance its influence.

The vast majority of contemporary private states develop their operations through internet platforms, particularly benefiting from breakthroughs in digitalization and metaverse technologies, which have provided them with broader development prospects and potential. For instance, Liberland (**Figure 8**) has a long-term plan modeled after Switzerland, with one of its development goals being the establishment of a digital nation. To this end, Liberland has organized initiatives such as CYBERLAND: The Liberland Design Proposal: Global Design Competition for the 21st Century Micronation, aiming to integrate digital technology with

traditional spatial planning to create a space governed by free Bitcoin and blockchain (Zhu, 2021).

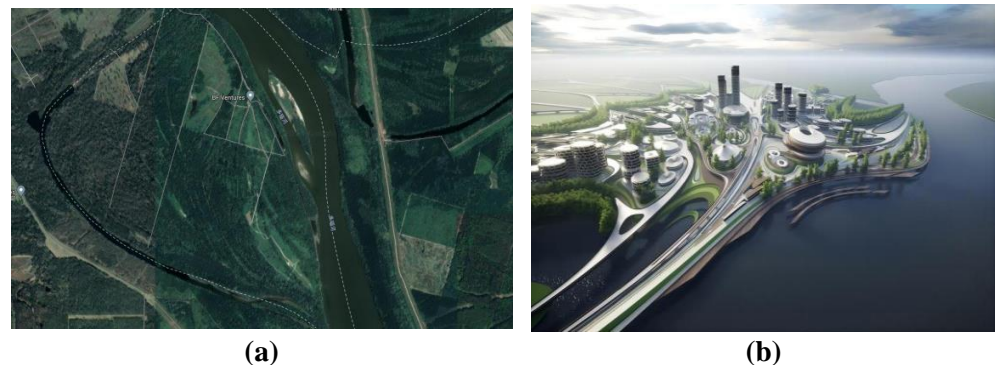


Figure 8. (a) The location of the Liberland Free Republic on google maps; (b) promotional images from the Liberland official website.

Similar to Liberland's development plans, the Space Kingdom of Asgardia—a non-territorial online association—also declares its intention to become a fully independent digital nation to achieve scientific objectives and build a future society, ultimately seeking recognition from Earth-based nations. Economically, Asgardia claims to have established its own decentralized monetary policy based on blockchain technology. This digital currency, named “Solar,” is distinct from Bitcoin and is pegged to the Euro at a fixed exchange rate of 1:1.

The development of internet platforms has not only enabled private states to better market cultural and creative products but has also led to the emergence of data havens as an operational model for some private states. A data haven refers to a sanctuary for data that remains undisturbed or unregulated. These havens typically exist in regions where enforcement of information system laws or extradition regulations is weak, or they rely on technological measures (such as encryption) to protect data from being subjected to any legal jurisdiction. The concept of data havens overlaps with notions such as corporate havens or tax havens. Tax havens, in particular, are highly favored by multinational corporations, which increasingly exploit the tax disparities between their home countries and tax havens to shift corporate income from high-tax jurisdictions to low-tax jurisdictions. By engaging in profit shifting, these corporations aim to achieve tax avoidance.

In addition to enabling private states to better market cultural and creative products, the development of internet platforms has also facilitated the emergence of data havens as an operational model for some private states, akin to profiting through decentralization and blockchain technology. A data haven refers to a sanctuary for data that is free from interference or regulatory oversight. Such havens often exist in regions where the enforcement of information system laws or extradition regulations is weak, or they leverage technological measures (such as encryption) to protect data from being subjected to any legal jurisdiction. Data havens overlap conceptually with corporate havens or tax havens. Tax havens, in particular, are highly favored by multinational corporations, which increasingly exploit the tax disparities between their home countries and tax havens. By shifting corporate income from high-tax

jurisdictions to low-tax jurisdictions, these corporations engage in profit shifting to achieve tax avoidance.

In 1999, a group of young American entrepreneurs proposed the concept of “HavenCo” to Michael Roy Bates, Prince of Sealand. The idea was to establish an internet server farm on the Principality of Sealand, allowing users to circumvent the strict censorship regulations imposed by other countries. In 2000, a contract was signed, funds were raised, and HavenCo was established on Sealand, with operational bases set up in London and Amsterdam. To accommodate the extensive server racks and meet the logistical demands of the project, Sealand embarked on a large-scale infrastructure upgrade, installing satellite and microwave links. According to official records from Sealand, around 25 employees from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe immigrated to Sealand during this period to oversee and implement the necessary installations. Although Sealand announced that HavenCo dissolved in 2003 due to operational issues, a report by Thomas Stackpole suggests that HavenCo was revived around August 2013.

In summary, while private states primarily emerge as cultural and creative art products, they are increasingly shifting their focus towards economic sustainability and expanding influence, rather than being confined to the sale of cultural and creative memorabilia. The once-flourishing Kirikiri phenomenon in Japan demonstrated the potential for tourism to foster and sustain private state operations. However, this model has shown its limitations, as evidenced by the cessation of numerous private states in Japan, the destruction of the Republic of Rose Island by the Italian Navy, and Sealand's Prince Michael successfully repelling at least seven armed incursions by the British Navy. The inherent instability of such governance, the challenges they face, and the relatively small number of tourists render this approach unsustainable as a primary operational model.

The advent of the internet and blockchain technology has opened new pathways for the development of private states. For instance, the traditional Principality of Sealand attempted to innovate as early as 2000 by operating HavenCo, a data haven concept. Later examples such as Liberland and Asgardia have incorporated digital nation-building and blockchain governance into their strategic frameworks. Looking ahead, the evolution of private states may further explore the integration of technological innovation and virtual economies. This trajectory could position certain private states operating outside the jurisdiction of sovereign nations as distinctive entities within a globalized digital ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

Private states have historical documentation dating back to earlier times. I argue that the age of geographical discoveries intensified the concept of private states, as many early colonies were essentially similar to these entities. With the rapid technological advancements accompanying the digital age and the acceleration of globalization, numerous private or fictional nations have gained more avenues for promotion and sales. The development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence has made it easier and more feasible to design, promote, and manage a private nation. For instance, through social media and website operations, private

states can more effectively attract and engage their fans and supporters while also promoting their products and culture through online sales.

Moreover, the rise of private nations is underpinned by artistic principles and commercial value. They offer a unique cultural backdrop and narrative stage, providing creators with abundant material and inspiration, thereby driving the development and prosperity of the entire cultural industry. The evolution of private nations and related research is expected to further enhance innovation and growth in fields such as film, literature, and gaming.

In conclusion, modern private nations are not only significant in the context of symbolic consumption within the consumer society but also reflect the developmental trends characterizing the cultural creative sector in the digital age. As fictional cultural entities, private states provide unique backgrounds for audiovisual works and offer audiences rich cultural experiences and emotional value. They also present new creative possibilities and imaginative spaces for creators, enriching the cultural enjoyment of audiences.

Dr. Moreau's dissertation provides an analysis of the definition and phenomenon of private states, but Moreau's views both complement and diverge from those of this study. Although our research objectives differ, both of us emphasize how private states construct identity and attract recognition through symbolic and performative practices, such as flags, anthems, and constitutions. Both studies also note that these entities showcase their identities and engage with the external world through symbols (e.g., flags, currency, postage stamps) and symbolic consumption practices. The key difference between our approaches lies in Dr. Moreau's focus on micronations as "geopolitical anomalies", where the core of their existence is the subversive challenge they pose to the concept of sovereignty, with a focus on their social critique and symbolic significance. In contrast, this study views private states primarily as vehicles for cultural creativity and brand-based cultural production, particularly emphasizing how symbolic practices and consumption narratives attract consumer recognition. It highlights their entertainment and commercial attributes, positioning them as commodified cultural creative entities or products of cultural consumption (Moreau Terri Ann, 2014).

While both studies underline the potential of private states, particularly through digital technologies and symbolic practices, to redefine sovereignty, identity, and culture in the contemporary context, Dr. Moreau's work deepens the cultural significance of private states. In contrast, this study's focus on creative practices offers a more direct analysis of their expressive forms and provides insights into the potential for sustainable business models and communication pathways for the future.

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Note

- ¹ Micronations: These are sovereign states with extremely small land areas and/or populations. Some private entities attempt to blur the lines between themselves and actual micronations. For example, the private organization Liberland refers to itself as a “micronation” in initiatives such as the Global Design Competition for Micronations of the 21st Century.
- ² Private Sector: According to the definition in Cihai (a comprehensive Chinese dictionary), the private sector refers to individuals, households, and privately owned enterprises or organizations, as opposed to the public sector, which is government controlled. The defining characteristic of the private sector is its reliance on personal incomes and privately owned assets, with a primary focus on maximizing personal or organizational interests.
- ³ Negotiations between the Principality of Sealand and Germany: The failed armed rebellion launched in July 1978 by Alexander G. Achenbach, the “Prime Minister” of the Principality of Sealand, and the subsequent negotiations between the Principality of Sealand and German diplomats over the status of “political prisoners” are often regarded as a key moment in the recognition of private states transitioning from de facto governance to sovereignty acknowledged by international sovereign states. However, this event, being an isolated incident with no subsequent impact, can only be considered a coincidental exception.
- ⁴ Limited Recognition: This refers to independent political entities that have declared themselves sovereign states but have not received widespread recognition from the international community or have only been recognized by a small number of countries. These entities typically exercise significant control over large territories and populations and have functioning government structures. However, due to issues related to the legitimacy of their rule or territorial disputes, they often remain unrecognized by other sovereign states. Examples include Kosovo, South Ossetia, Northern Cyprus, and the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (Transnistria).
- ⁵ During its time in China, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea received assistance from China in training underground armed and intelligence personnel and in forming organizations such as the Korean Liberation Army (Huan, Li, 2022). After the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea was established, the Provisional Government’s legal continuity was recognized and affirmed in the Constitution of the Republic of Korea.
- ⁶ Lanfang Republic: The Lanfang Republic (1777–1884; Dutch: Kongsj Lanfong) is the name that modern scholars use to refer to a community or political entity (Kongsj Republic) established by overseas Chinese in present-day West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This political entity refers to itself as the Lanfang Kongsj (Company) or the General Assembly of the Lanfang Kongsj of East Mandor.
- ⁷ Charter: A charter is a government-issued permission and declaration granting a specific right to an individual, group (such as a company), or other legal entity. This charter typically confers a limited independent monopoly over land, business operations, or other forms of ownership. For example, the British East India Company received a royal charter from Queen Elizabeth I of England, which granted it trade privileges in India, allowing the company to evolve from a commercial trading enterprise into the de facto ruling body of British India.
- ⁸ The Boers: The Boers, also known as Afrikaners, are descendants of White settlers in South Africa and Namibia, primarily of Dutch origin who migrated to South Africa between the 17th and 19th centuries. Their lineage also includes some French, German, Flemish, and Walloon ancestry. They speak Afrikaans (also known as South African Dutch or Afrikaner), and the majority adhere to Christianity.
- ⁹ Seasteading: Seasteading refers to the concept of constructing permanent dwellings, including private states, in international waters, beyond the territorial claims of any government. The primary methods for achieving seasteading are the modification of cruise ships and oil rigs or the creation of custom-built floating platforms.
- ¹⁰ Kirikiri Hito: The Japanese novel Kirikiri Hito tells the story of a remote village in northeastern Japan that, weary of the Japanese government’s rule, suddenly declares itself independent as the Kirikiri State. Despite attempts by the Japanese government to intervene, the Kirikiri State secures its survival through self-sufficiency in food and energy systems as well as by showcasing its advanced medicine and unique practices, such as a gold standard and tax haven policies, to the global community. This novel has also influenced some later Japanese works. For instance, several productions by Japanese director Ichirou Okouchi exhibit the impact of Kirikiri Hito.
- ¹¹ Setting (narrative): A setting is the fictional element related to time and space within a narrative. It is a fundamental component of fictional works, encompassing aspects such as culture, history, style, and geography. These elements collectively form the background world of a story, upon which the narrative should be logically constructed.

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