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# The anatomy of the Cayman Islands offshore financial center: Anglo-America, Japan, and the role of hedge funds

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ABSTRACT

The Cayman Islands is an under-researched offshore financial center. This article examines the main sectors of the Cayman Islands economy and their performance. It determines the role of the Cayman Islands in the global financial system with Japan and the United States. The Cayman Islands are a major factor for the growth of the offshore industry. It is legally distinct from the United Kingdom jurisdiction.

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explanation for the unparalleled rise of the Cayman OFC by seeing this jurisdiction as one node in an Anglo-American triangle together with the USA and the UK, Cayman's sovereign power.

KEYWORDS: Cayman Islands offshore financial centers tax havens Anglo-America hedge funds Japan

## INTRODUCTION

'Small place, big money' was the apt title of one of the first analyses concerning the position of the Cayman Islands in the international financial system (Roberts [1995](#)). Twenty years later, the archipelago south of Cuba is, of course, still small in geographic terms. The amount of foreign capital booked in the Cayman offshore financial center (OFC), however, has become bigger in this period of time – much bigger. Significantly improved availability of data concerning OFCs and their counterpart countries during the last two decades allows for a better understanding of the role that the Cayman Islands plays in international finance. This tiny group of islands in the Caribbean with roughly 58,000 inhabitants and a domestic economy of less than US\$3 billion has attracted foreign capital of over US\$4100 billion if we take into account banking assets, direct investment, and other assets. It is likely that the Cayman Islands will continue to be a major offshore financial center ([2016](#)). Since the 1990s, the Cayman Islands jurisdiction has become a major offshore jurisdiction. This ratio of assets to population is much higher than in any other jurisdiction. Cayman Islands is a small island OFC in the Caribbean region. Several hundred small island OFCs exist in the Caribbean region. As the leading offshore financial center and as the largest asset-backed jurisdiction in the Caribbean region, the Cayman Islands has become a major offshore financial center.



2007, Cayman had even been the largest jurisdiction concerning the issuance of collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), according to Culp and Forrester (2010). Hedge funds as well as opaque CDOs have contributed to the development of the global financial crisis and thus such financial 'innovation' has serious consequences for international financial stability (Lysandrou 2012; Lysandrou and Nesvetailova 2015; Wójcik 2013a, 2013b). Utilizing all sources of publicly available data, this paper compiles the first 'anatomy' of the pivotal Cayman OFC. The aim is to perform a fine-grained analysis of the three main segments of cross-border finance: (1) banking, (2) direct investment, and (3) portfolio investment. This in-depth case study of the Cayman Islands OFC is highly complementary to recent studies in Economic Geography, e.g., on the role of advanced business services for offshore finance (Wójcik 2013a), on offshore jurisdictions and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Haberly and Wójcik 2015a, 2015b), and finally on the political geography of offshore banking (Haberly and Wójcik 2014). In order to further our understanding of the extremely 'successful' development of the Cayman OFC, this paper introduces the Anglo-America/Anglosphere approach from international relations (IRs) and International Political Economy (IPE) to the analysis of the Cayman OFC. Furthermore, I analyze the important role of Japan, which has escaped virtually all existing studies about the Cayman Islands.

The remainder of this paper is organized in six sections. In the first section, I briefly discuss the development of the Cayman OFC. In the second section, I analyze the following two sectors: banking and direct investment. In the third section, I analyze portfolio investment. In the fourth section, I analyze the crucial hedge fund sector. In the fifth section, I analyze the Anglo-America/Anglosphere approach. In the sixth section, I analyze the policy implications of the Cayman OFC.



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Despite the fact that the Cayman Islands OFC is a relatively new phenomenon, surprisingly

advancing our understanding of the Cayman Islands and its role in the international financial system. Roberts' ([1995](#), 237) conclusion that the Caymans have created the image of a respectable up-market OFC and 'strategically positioned themselves at the nexus of the circuits of fast and fungible financial capital' is still valid today. Furthermore, Roberts ([1995](#)) argues that the status as a dependent territory of the UK is of central importance for the success of the Cayman Islands as an OFC, because this status guarantees political stability. She identifies a series of 1960s laws designed to attract foreign capital as a cornerstone for the development of the Cayman OFC. Rapid growth began in the 1970s after the end of the Bretton Woods system and the concomitant transition to free exchange rates, which included the abolition of capital controls by most Western countries. According to Roberts ([1995](#)), the number of foreign banks active in the Cayman Islands grew at an annual average rate of 23% between 1972 and 1982. This is primarily due to the rapid development of the Euromarkets in the City of London (Palan [1998](#); Burn [1999](#)), which subsequently included OFCs such as the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands (Ridley [2007](#)). Hudson ([1998a](#)) has compared the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas and concludes that the specific development of these OFCs can only be explained by analyzing the behavior of transnational actors (e.g., American and Canadian banks and lawyers) and important counterpart countries (primarily the USA). Moreover, he emphasizes the key role of trust by foreign financial actors in the particular OFC, which takes time to develop and in practice limits the mobility that the Islands, from there because to Caym Besides about of coined

Roberts ([1995](#)) Islands, from there

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Palan et al. (2010), too, stress the importance that the Cayman Islands is a British dependency; in fact, it is still legally correct to refer to the British Overseas Territories as 'colonies' of the UK (Hendry and Dickinson, 2011, 4). Moreover, Palan et al. (2010) report that in 2008 Cayman was the fourth largest international banking center in the world, however, concentrating only on short-term financing. An important point that Palan et al. (2010) highlight is that most OFCs, and Cayman in particular, act as secrecy jurisdictions. Secrecy through opaque financial structures played a key role in the corporate scandals of Enron, Olympus and Parmalat as well as in the near-collapse of the large hedge fund LTCM, which all had significant subsidiaries in Cayman. According to the Tax Justice Network, the Cayman Islands is number five in the 2015 Financial Secrecy Index, which combines a secrecy score with a global scale weight in financial services exports (TJN 2015a; Cobham et al. 2015). Cayman's relatively high secrecy score of 65, however, is lower than those of other major OFCs, such as Switzerland (73) or Singapore (69), reflecting regulatory improvements in recent years (TJN 2015b).

The analysis of the Cayman Islands OFC by Freyer and Morriss (2013) focuses primarily on legal aspects, but nonetheless represents one of the most comprehensive endeavors to trace the development of this jurisdiction since the 1960s. Their core argument is that the success of the Cayman OFC stems primarily from what they call the 'collaborative policy-making process' that includes local politicians and regulators,

foreign officials. Moreover, Cayman legal system, liability to the largest financial (2013) discuss is the cr 1990s; the legislative firm Maples & Calder and. Finally, Harr trust Alternat it 'eliminat co-optation of chara t for use in commer Besides m govern nt



citizens and corporations to shift financial activities to the Cayman Islands. In addition to the obvious motivation to save taxes, another reason was to simplify transactions with third countries; the good reputation of the Cayman Islands for stability, legal certainty, and compliance with international standards also seems to play an important role for the success of this jurisdiction (GAO [2008](#)). In 2009, the IMF has assessed the regulation of the Cayman Islands financial center. The locally available expertise in matters of financial law and accounting – mainly provided by large international advanced business services firms – is identified as an important competitive advantage of this jurisdiction. The greatest danger to the success of the Cayman Islands OFC, according to the IMF ([2009](#), 11), is ‘reputational risk’ – the potential loss of confidence by foreign investors. Finally, the OECD found Cayman to be ‘largely compliant’ with international standards of tax information exchange (OECD [2013](#)).

The various studies presented here have analyzed a range of important aspects concerning the development of the Cayman Islands OFC. However, the most obvious research gap is that there is no publication that has systematically compiled all available data about this OFC – both diachronically to see when large inflows occurred and geographically to determine what role certain countries play in different financial segments. Such an ‘anatomy’ of all relevant financial data is a fundamental prerequisite for a profound and comprehensive analysis of this pivotal OFC. The

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English legal tradition law evolves in a bottom-up fashion from individual case decisions, thus significantly facilitating transnational finance. The key difference between common law and civil law is that in general Anglophone common law only stipulates what is prohibited, whereas civil law (France, Germany, Japan etc.) identifies what is permitted (Vlcek [2008](#)). The consequence is that new financial ‘innovations’ (such as ABS, CDOs or hedge funds) can be set up easily, because strict regulation is only put in place in case of conspicuous misconduct or strong pressure from powerful foreign actors.

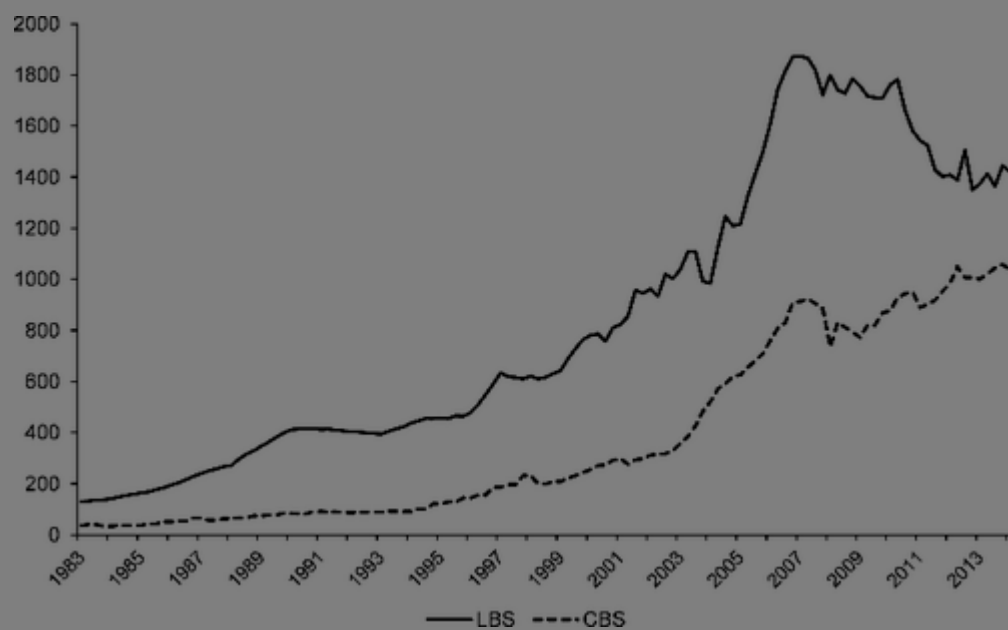
The Bahamas was one of the biggest offshore banking centers in the 1960s. When, however, Nassau experienced political instability in the late 1960s, leading to the independence of the Bahamas from the UK in 1973, Cayman was ready and took over much of the fleeing business (Hudson [1998a](#); Freyer and Morriss [2013](#); Ridley [2007](#)). During the 1970s and 1980s, Cayman experienced rapid growth in offshore banking due to the liberalization and deregulation of finance pursued primarily by the USA and the UK as well as the development of the Euromarkets – themselves a kind of offshore market, because Britain decided to withhold regulations on the trading of foreign currencies in the City of London (Burn [1999](#)). Data on cross-border banking in the Cayman Islands began in 1983 and come from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS). The BIS collects two kinds of statistics, the Locational Banking Statistics (LBS) and

the Consolidated Balance Sheets (CBS). The LBS captures cross-border banking flows between 2015, in the LBS positions between national intern 2015 intragrou internati the Cayr resident internati Islands (

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Figure 1 Development of the Cayman Offshore Banking Sector, 1983-2014 (billion US\$).



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From 1983 to 1991, the international claims of bank subsidiaries resident in the Cayman Islands (LBS) grew much faster than the consolidated claims of internationally active banking groups from the countries participating in the CBS on counterparties resident in Cayman. From the early 1990s until the mid-2000s both measures grew with approximately the same pace; LBS increased from about US\$415 billion to roughly US\$1125 billion while CBS increased from around US\$90 billion to over US\$600 billion.

Then, however, from 2007-2014, LBS fell sharply to around US\$1400 billion in 2013, while CBS continued its upward trend to reach over US\$1000 billion in 2013. The total international claims of the Cayman offshore banking sector grew from over US\$900 billion in 1983 to over US\$2150 billion in 2007, a 350 times increase.

with a significant portion of the total claims being in the Cayman Islands. The Cayman Islands is in the world's largest jurisdiction for offshore banking, with over 1000 individuals and companies registered in the Cayman Islands. Table 1 shows the development of the Cayman offshore banking sector in March 2015.



## Table 1 External loans and deposits of reporting banks vis-à-vis individual countries, March 2015 (billion US\$)



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The banking statistics by the BIS provide other useful information about the Cayman offshore banking sector as well. For example, 68% of the claims reported by banking offices located in the Cayman Islands are intragroup, 26% are to non-banks and only 6% are to other banks – and over 91% of all claims are in US dollar (BIS [2015a](#)). These numbers seem to confirm the findings by the IMF ([2009](#)) that the largest factor for the Cayman banking sector is US banks that transfer client's funds to overnight sweep accounts in the Cayman Islands (over 57% of all assets in 2008). Such sweep accounts are profitable for banks and their clients (mostly large corporations) because they reduce reserve requirements and because excess funds in checking accounts can automatically be 'swept' overnight in instruments such as Eurodollar deposits, repurchase agreements or money market funds (FDIC [2009](#)). Cayman acts as a pure conduit for foreign banks in this segment; or, in the words of Gonzalo Jalles, the CEO of Cayman Finance, 'a significant part of the banking assets registered in Cayman are US banks placing overnight deposits in their own Cayman-registered branch. The money is effective local bar... d to how a

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balance, overnight sweep accounts of US banks in the Cayman Islands increase the complexity of the US financial system, reduce reserve requirements of US banks, and potentially increase client's risk because Cayman accounts are not insured by the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

LBS data can also be used in another way, to analyze (unconsolidated) cross-border positions reported by banking offices located in the BIS reporting countries vis-à-vis counterparties resident in the Cayman Islands. According to these data, the unconsolidated claims by BIS reporting banks to the Cayman Islands measured US\$1840 billion in March 2015. Interestingly, over 56% of these claims are on non-banks and only 44% on banks (BIS [2015a](#)). In addition, a surprisingly high share of 17% is denominated in Japanese yen (70% in US dollar and 7% in euro). This is a strong indication that Japan plays a significant, yet hitherto not analyzed role in the Cayman OFC. Then there are also the CBS, which are reported by nationality of banks. The consolidated positions on counterparties resident in Cayman allow for a precise geographical analysis of the Cayman offshore banking center. Specifically, I use consolidated claims on an ultimate risk basis including other potential exposures. In March 2015, these consolidated claims on counterparties resident in the Cayman Islands amounted to US\$1074 billion (BIS [2015b](#)). Before we turn to a granular geographical analysis, it is important to note that the vast majority of the claims are on 'non-bank' counterparties and other investments.

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facts: The three categories bundled in 'other potential exposures' (derivatives contracts, guarantees extended, and credit commitments) all show a strong peak in 2008-09, reflecting the prominent role of derivatives and special purpose vehicles legally domiciled in Cayman in the financial crisis. Furthermore, there are a number of abrupt jumps in the data of some countries; for example, total claims by US banks (excluding other potential exposure) leaped from US\$40 billion in December 2008 to US\$163 billion in March 2009. Since then US claims have increased steadily to over US\$283 billion in March 2015. Japanese claims jumped from US\$226 billion in December 2012 to US\$284 billion in March 2013. It is unclear whether these leaps only reflect better reporting by banks or genuine increased claims. What is striking in [Table 2](#) is that claims vis-à-vis banks are negligible compared to claims on non-bank financial. This shows that the Cayman Islands do not function as an international banking center in the sense that banks from different nationalities lend to each other but rather that foreign banks (mainly American and Japanese ones) lend money to hedge funds and other investment funds. Foreign banks resident in Cayman mostly conduct intragroup transactions in US dollar. During the last thirty years, the Cayman Islands has become one of the largest international banking centers - the global financial crisis notwithstanding. However, this section has shown that we need to dissect the anatomy of the Cayman offshore banking sector in order to understand its role in the international financial system, which lies mainly in being the offshore jurisdiction of choice for Cayman

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Cayman economy precludes significant inflows of greenfield FDI. Hence, foreign portfolio investment is much larger than FDI and the vast majority of Cayman direct investment has to be related to finance. [Table 3](#) shows the ten largest counterpart countries of the Cayman Islands for both inward direct investment (IDI) and outward direct investment (ODI). The data are from the Coordinated Direct Investment Survey (CDIS) by the IMF. The Cayman Islands does not participate in the CDIS. However, IDI and ODI counterpart values allow the IMF to derive data for Cayman.

### Table 3 Inward and outward direct investment stocks of the Cayman Islands, 2014 (billion US\$)



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CDIS data are available only since 2009. Cayman direct investment has more than doubled in just five years (IMF [2015](#)). However, comparable to banking we do not know if these numbers reflect genuine growth or just better reporting. In 2014, total Cayman IDI amounted to about US\$550, or over 180 times the GDP of the Cayman Islands - a very high value. Note that Cayman direct investment is likely even higher than these numbers suggest, because we do not have the corresponding direct investment data

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categories accounted for 80% of Cayman IDI from the US, 1) holding companies (nonbank) and 2) finance (including depository institutions) with over 40% each - all categories pertaining to manufacturing are negligible (US\$185 million). The USA is also the largest destination for Cayman ODI (US\$100 billion). The Netherlands is the second largest source of Cayman IDI and the third largest destination for Cayman ODI (US\$54 billion, respectively, US\$76 billion). The Netherlands is the dominant global direct investment conduit, specializing in 'Special Purpose Entities' (SPEs). Weyzig ([2013](#)) has conducted an in-depth case study about the Netherlands and found that Dutch SPEs allow multinational enterprises (MNEs) to avoid paying withholding taxes in many developing and EU countries and enable profit shifting through royalty payments. [Table 3](#) shows that the Cayman Islands is involved in this process via direct investment to/from the Netherlands. Luxembourg, another large global direct investment conduit, plays a similar role as the second largest destination for Cayman ODI (US\$88 billion). UNCTAD ([2015b](#)) estimates that developing countries face tax revenue losses of US\$100 billion per year due to the role of OFCs and SPEs in international direct investment.

Brazil and China also use the Cayman Islands as a direct investment conduit; in fact, Cayman is the largest destination of Brazilian FDI (IMF [2015](#)). A combined China-Hong Kong would be the second largest destination for Cayman ODI. Cayman ODI to China-

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interest entity' (VIE). VIEs allow Chinese corporations to publicly list abroad, usually in the USA, and thus to gain access to foreign capital. The legal structure works as follows: The Chinese corporation is separated into two parts - the businesses that are open to foreign ownership are transferred to a so-called wholly foreign owned enterprise (WFOE), the restricted businesses are put in the VIE, which is owned and controlled by Chinese individuals. Then, an offshore holding company is created that owns the WFOE, typically in the Cayman Islands because until 2014 it had been the only OFC allowed to publicly list corporations in both the USA and Hong Kong (Sutherland and Anderson [2015](#)). Subsequently, the Cayman holding lists its shares in the USA. However, the problematic aspect had been how to consolidate the restricted businesses that are part of the VIE without violating Chinese rules on foreign investment. The solution devised by accounting firms was to mimic ownership through a series of legal contracts between the Cayman company and the VIE. These contracts give the Cayman holding enough de facto control over the Chinese VIE that it is able to consolidate it under current accounting rules, even though Chinese law actually prohibits foreign investment in this sector. Thus, this legal structure constitutes a grey zone with considerable hidden risk for investors in the Cayman company, because the whole structure rests on the willingness of Chinese authorities to tolerate it. In 2014, the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba (the Cayman holding, that is) raised a record US\$25 billion with its initial public offering (IPO) in the USA, thus probably perpetuating the VIE structure. Alibaba have no de jure control over the Cayman holding. The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has expressed difficulties in protecting investors from the US federal courts may be able to conduct our research but only if the offshore company shares or other arrangements are in the forefront of the SEC's attention (shareholders). Furtherm



Haberly and Wójcik ([2015b](#)) have found that Cayman is part of the 'Anglo Alliance' direct investment network, acting as a strong link between the 'Pax Americana' and the 'Greater China' subnetworks. This section has shed new light on the specific characteristics of Cayman direct investment. However, even though it already measures about half a trillion US dollar it represents the smallest of the three financial segments. The largest segment by far is portfolio investment.

## PORTFOLIO INVESTMENT

Equity and debt instruments (e.g., shares and bonds) that are held for financial gain (i.e., are below 10% of voting rights) represent the bulk of global cross-border portfolio investment. The most comprehensive data source for this segment is the Coordinated Portfolio Investment Survey (CPIS) by the IMF. In mid-2015, 70 jurisdictions have participated in the CPIS, including Cayman. However, the Cayman Islands reports only portfolio investment held by banks thus excluding the vast hedge fund sector (Lane and Milesi-Ferretti [2010](#); Zucman [2013](#)). This renders the official Cayman CPIS data virtually useless. In addition to the reported assets, the IMF also publishes derived portfolio investment liabilities. These data are derived from the 70 reporting countries and cover 234 jurisdictions. Especially for non-reporting OECs or underreporting jurisdictions,

derived portfolio investment liabilities for the Cayman Islands are reported in the CPIS ([2016](#)). The derived portfolio investment liabilities (d) portfolio investment data suggest that the Cayman Islands is a financial center in the world. The Cayman Islands has been the largest jurisdiction in the world (US\$ 35 billion) (IMF [2016](#)). The Cayman Islands hedge funds) and derived portfolio investment liabilities (IMF [2016](#)) suggest that the Cayman Islands plays a central role in the global financial geography of the Cayman Islands. The Cayman Islands counterpart countries (i.e. the



The countries participating in CPIS have reported US\$2574 billion of portfolio investment into the Cayman Islands in mid-2015. The largest counterparty by far has been the USA with US\$1206 billion (or 47%), followed by Japan (US\$558 billion), Hong Kong (US\$343 billion), the UK (US\$91 billion), and Luxembourg with US\$83 billion (IMF [2016](#)). These five countries are responsible for almost 90% of total portfolio investment into Cayman. Due to the severe underreporting of the Cayman Islands, CPIS data are not useful for determining the destinations of Cayman portfolio investment. Japan is the only major counterparty of Cayman that reports portfolio investment liabilities, an encouraged item of CPIS; in mid-2015, Japan measured US\$51 billion of inward portfolio investment from the Cayman Islands. Thus, less than one tenth of the Japanese portfolio investment of over half a trillion US dollar to Cayman has flown back. A substantial share has probably ended up in the USA. According to US Treasury data, the value of US securities held in Cayman amounted to a staggering US\$1506 billion in mid-2015, making the Cayman Islands the third largest counterpart jurisdiction behind Japan and China (Treasury [2016](#)). In fact, when excluding long-term US Treasuries, of which the central banks (or other public institutions) from both Japan and China hold more than US\$1000 billion, Cayman is the largest holder of US securities in the world. US portfolio investment into Cayman amounted to US\$1206 billion. Hence, Cayman portfolio investment into the USA is US\$300 billion larger than vice versa. It is reasonable to assume that a substantial share of this difference can be ascribed to investor portfolio investment into Cayman Islands. Monetary authorities in several jurisdictions in order to attract funds have made several visits to Cayman by CIMA regulatory fund when they conduct investment in China (Japan Treasury data). The complete CPIS data (for all countries) are available on the International Portfolio Investment Database that have been compiled by the IMF and are equivalent to the US Treasury data.



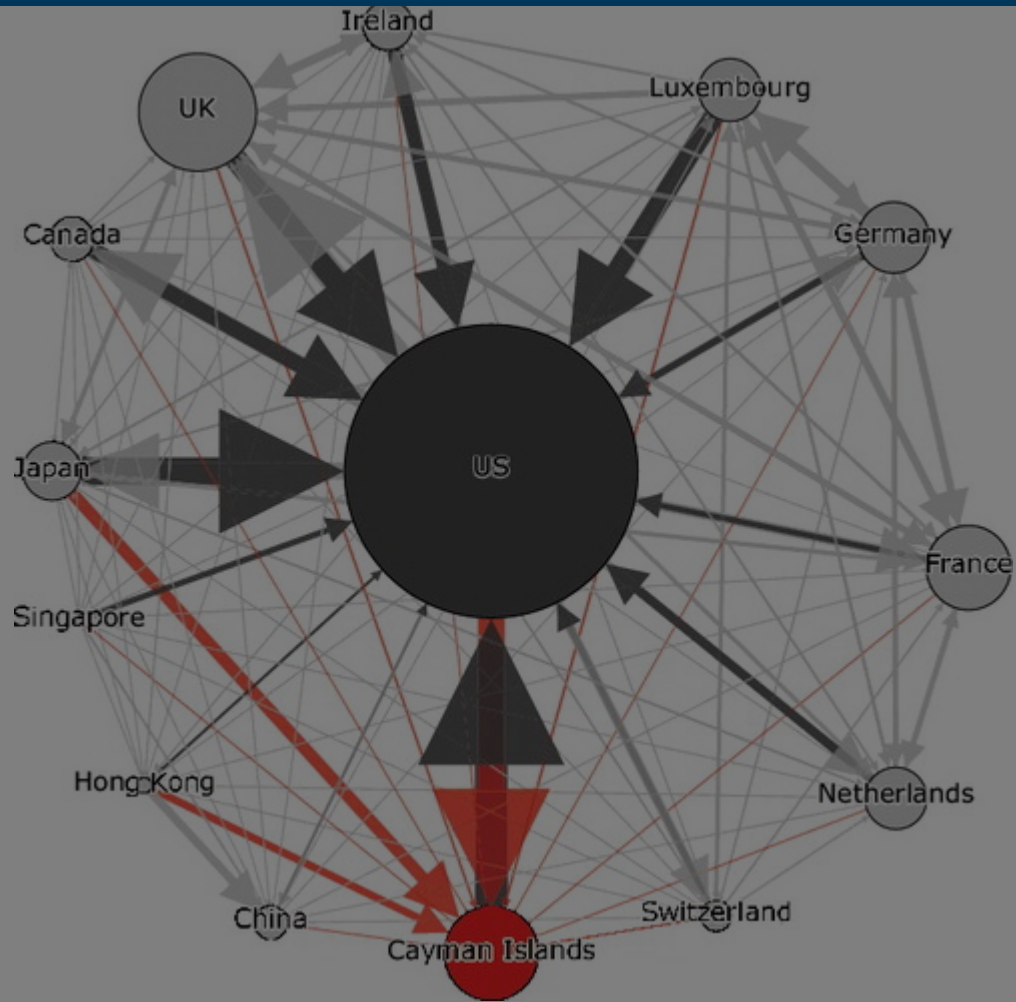


Cayman Islands and all portfolio investment into this jurisdiction is shown in red. The USA as the dominant country in cross-border investment is put at the center of the graph and colored dark grey (as well as the portfolio investment into the USA); all other jurisdictions are shown in light grey. Jurisdictions have been arranged for maximum visual clarity. The figure makes clear that the USA is still the undisputed center for international portfolio investment, followed by the UK. France, Germany, and Japan play a much smaller role as destinations of portfolio investment. China (for which CPIS data became available for the first time in mid-2015) is still small in portfolio investment due to strong restrictions for foreign investors (see Fichtner [2016](#) for four novel visualizations of global finance). [Figure 2](#) shows that Cayman is one of the largest global nodes for portfolio investment, but primarily acts as a conduit for investment into the USA, either via American 'round-tripping' or from Japan and Hong Kong. Luxembourg, Switzerland, and the UK also report notable portfolio investment into Cayman but on a much smaller scale than compared to the USA, Japan, and Hong Kong. In mid-2015, portfolio investment from Cayman to the United States (US\$1506 billion) has actually been the largest individual cross-border stock of portfolio investment in the world, ahead of US portfolio investment into the UK with US\$1336 billion (note that reserve holdings, such as the large amount of US Treasuries held by Japan and China are excluded in CPIS). This massive holding of portfolio investment by Cayman residents can only be understood by analyzing the financial geography of the Cayman hedge fu

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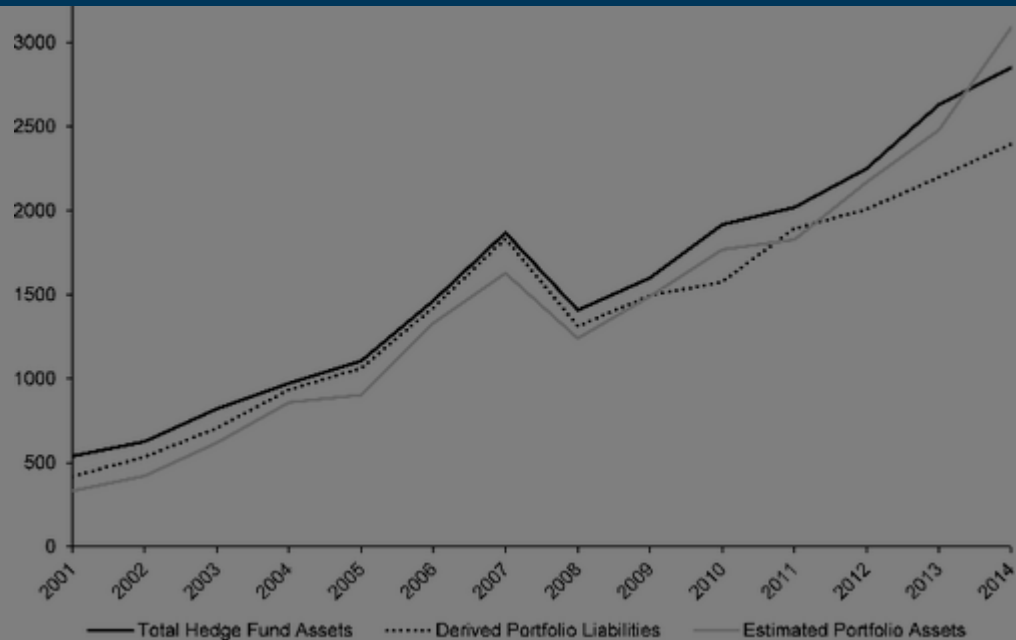




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Until recently, data on the global hedge fund industry had been exclusively collected by private organizations. The International Hedge Fund Association (IHFA) has conducted surveys. More than US\$1 trillion in assets have been do... 69% (FC... total hed... BVI, 12%... is the... the entire... such a ti... Cayman... databas... data for... Figure 3... ent, 2001-





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The result is astonishing; all lines have moved extremely close together from 2001 to 2014. This suggests that 1) Cayman has been able to maintain its role as the leading domicile for hedge funds throughout this period, and 2) that the hedge fund industry is significantly larger than the data from HFR indicate. Calculations by the author based on CIMA's Investments Statistical Digest suggest that the Cayman hedge fund industry had approximately US\$2030 billion in assets under management in 2013 (net asset value of master funds and stand-alone funds divided by 0.82 in order to adjust for the



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Tiger Global. This fund created shell companies in Cayman with firm names including the legal suffices of European countries, such as the Dutch 'NV' or the German 'GmbH'. Then 'Blau GmbH', 'Fest NV' and other shells build up short positions in several listed corporations, whose shares fell significantly after negative research reports emerged, which could have been ordered by Tiger Global, netting the fund substantial profits (Johnson [2014](#)). Paradoxically, Cayman regulations have to be loose to a certain extent to give hedge funds enough 'flexibility', but at the same time, the regulatory infrastructure has to be sophisticated to maintain the image of a trustworthy up-market OFC to investors and to avoid pressure by foreign countries.

Probably due to foreign pressure, the Cayman regulator began publishing yearly investment statistics in 2008. These data allow for a granular analysis of the financial geography of Cayman's giant hedge fund sector, which comprised over 11,300 funds at end-2013 (CIMA [2014](#)). I do not use data on all registered funds, but only on master funds to avoid double-counting through funds of hedge funds (detailed data on stand-alone funds are not available). Master funds had net assets of US\$1230 billion in 2013, which represents about 60% of total Cayman hedge fund assets. About 75% of master fund assets have been invested in 'North America' (Canada and the USA) and only 19% in 'Europe' (probably mainly in the UK). Thus there is a strong concentration of hedge fund investment in the USA (investment in Canada is likely minor). Hedge funds require



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the existence of a specific Anglo-American model of capitalism. Hall and Soskice (2001), and Amable (2003) argue that the Anglophone economies constitute a distinct socio-economic model - 'liberal market economies' or 'market-based economies' in which financial markets play a pivotal role. Moreover, the legal systems of all Anglophone countries and territories are based on common law, which facilitates financial activities within this Anglo-American transnational space. Green (2015) has shown that an 'Anglo-American developmental sphere' was crucial to the development of the pivotal Euromarkets in London, which, in turn, led to a 'transatlantic regulatory feedback loop' that induced wider international financial deregulation. Thus, Anglo-America has played a key role for financial globalization. The revelations about the unparalleled cooperation by the Anglophone countries in the extremely sensitive field of intelligence (dubbed the 'Five Eyes') have corroborated the cogency of the Anglo-America/Anglosphere approach significantly (McGregor 2013).

Virtually all international socio-economic statistics treat the Anglophone countries solely on the grounds where they are located geographically, i.e., the UK is seen as part of 'Europe', Australia as belonging to 'Asia-Pacific', and Cayman, BVI and others as 'Caribbean'. The Anglo-America/Anglosphere approach, on the other hand, suggests that these states and territories generally have much more in common with other Anglophone countries than with neighboring countries and, thus, should be analyzed together

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BVI, Bermuda, Jersey or Cayman, which makes them qualitatively different from (aspirant) OFCs that are independent, such as Panama, Belize or the Seychelles.

The development of the Cayman OFC is inextricably linked with its sovereign power, the UK. In the 1960s, the Colonial Office assisted Cayman (as well as the BVI and others) with the adoption of British laws in order to establish OFCs, reportedly to avoid being left with financially dependent territories in the Caribbean (Picciotto [1992](#); Freyer and Morriss [2013](#)). However, British support for the Cayman OFC continued after London ended development aids to Cayman in the mid-1970s, supposedly because it was thought that Cayman and other British OFCs brought more business to the City of London than they caused tax avoidance in the UK (Freyer and Morriss [2013](#)). London also played a key role in repeatedly assisting negotiations with Washington when the USA complained about conspicuous deficiencies in Cayman regulations. Arguably, only this tripartite relation has made it possible that Cayman became the domicile of choice for the hedge fund industry and the largest holder of US securities (excluding Treasuries) in the world. Thus, the Cayman Islands can be conceived as a quintessentially Anglo-American OFC. A final key link between Anglo-America and the Cayman OFC is the advanced business services-offshore nexus identified by Wójcik ([2013a](#)). Virtually all leading advanced business services firms, such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, Ernst&Young, and Deloitte, as well as most large

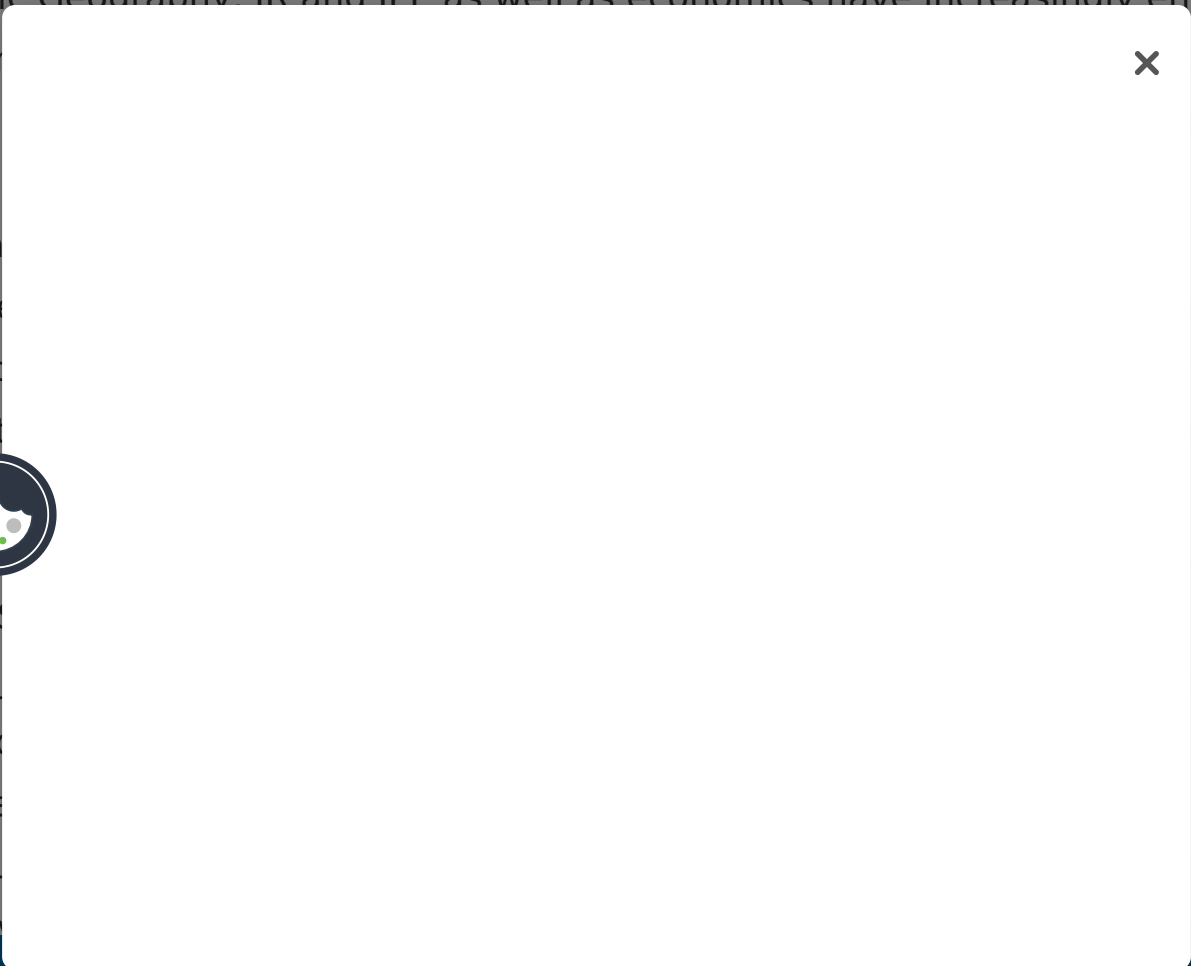
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British Empire' in finance, which is centered on the City of London. This concept is indeed very useful to highlight the ancillary role of the UK 'colonies' for the strong position of the City of London in international finance (see also Norfield [2016](#) on this point); however, I would be skeptical to include Hong Kong and Singapore, because both are clearly not under the sovereignty of the UK anymore, and also compete with the City in certain financial segments. The Anglo-America/Anglosphere concept has the advantage to stress the strong trans-Atlantic financial integration of the City with New York (i.e., NY-LON). Whereas the term 'Second British Empire' would suggest that London is firmly in control I would argue that in many cases there is a joint Anglo-American leadership in international finance (see Fichtner [2016](#) for a study of the persistent structural power of Anglo-America in nine key segments of global finance). The analysis of the Cayman Islands OFC in this paper shows that while it is an important factor that this jurisdiction is under UK sovereignty, Cayman primarily caters to the interests of American (and to a lesser degree also Japanese) investors and is not as strongly connected to the City of London.

## CONCLUSION

Economic Geography, IR and IPE as well as economics have increasingly engaged the important role of the Cayman Islands. In particular, the Cayman Islands OFC in a global context. The Cayman Islands OFC revenue is primarily derived from investment, and particularly from American ultra-group companies. The Cayman Islands OFC is primarily catering to the Cayman Islands as American investors. This tiny jurisdiction is contributing to nearly 50% of the Cayman Islands economy.





Cayman regulator has created specific regulations to set up investment and hedge funds for Japanese investors.

Cayman is qualitatively different from most other OFCs, especially from many small aspirant ones. The primary aim of the Cayman Islands seems not to be to attract illicit financial flows (although there is probably a significant amount of black money in Cayman), but to function as a conduit for large international financial institutions, enabling them to reduce taxes as well as evade 'onshore' regulation. In that regard, Cayman is probably more comparable to Luxembourg, which acts as a major hub for European investment funds and large MNEs, than to Switzerland, which mainly attracts private funds or the Netherlands, which acts as the largest direct investment conduit. The Cayman Islands is one of the largest OFCs in the world, but, more importantly, it is a central node of contemporary global finance. This tiny group of islands in the Caribbean acts as the global domicile of choice for the hedge fund industry. Other financial 'innovations' for which Cayman has played a key role are opaque CDOs that contributed to the financial crisis as well as dubious VIEs used by many Chinese corporations to get access to US capital markets. Most of these 'innovations' bring clear benefits to Cayman and certain financial actors, while entailing significant hidden costs and risks for other groups and countries, thus impairing the transparency and the stability of global financial markets. The global financial crisis has caused a temporary decline of

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and China (including Hong Kong) to Anglo-American financial markets. Cayman's 'strength' in this context is that it combines relaxed regulation with relatively sophisticated financial authorities that are able to react quickly to international developments. In this way, Cayman enables indirect access to the crucial US financial markets that may be particularly suited for investors from Asia, especially China. Future research should analyze the role of Anglo-America for offshore finance, focusing on key OFCs such as Bermuda, BVI, Delaware and Ireland, and their link to NY-LON. Furthermore, studies on the nexus between Anglo-America, advanced business services firms (e.g., the Big 4 accounting firms), and offshore finance are crucial.

Finally, a few policy implications arise from the findings of this paper. At the very least, all large OFCs such as Cayman should have to participate fully in CDIS and CPIS (without being able to exclude sectors, such as hedge funds) or face serious consequences. Only complete reporting enables regulators and researchers to analyze the complex global network of direct and portfolio investment. In addition, the introduction of mandatory country-by-country-reporting for large multinational corporations would bring much needed transparency concerning their financial activities in OFCs. A more ambitious measure would be to create a comprehensive global financial register as proposed by Piketty (2014) and Zucman (2015), including mandatory participation for tax havens. This would remedy the fact that cross-border

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Additional information

### Notes on contributors

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Jan Fichtner is postdoctoral researcher in the CORPNET project at the University of Amsterdam where he focuses on the re-concentration of corporate ownership through the rise of very large passive asset managers, such as BlackRock and Vanguard. His research interests lie in International Political Economy, particularly Global Finance (structural power, financialization, hedge funds, offshore financial centers).

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