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Wrestling Beetles and Ecological Wisdom: How Insects Contribute to the Cosmopolitics of Northern Thailand*

Stéphane Rennesson**

In Northern Thailand, a game that builds upon an uncanny cooperation between human beings and rhinoceros beetles (*xylotrupes Gideon*) has developed at a high level of refinement and institutionalization. Beetle-fighting is even being widely presented as a marker of the local identity and a local ecological wisdom. In this paper, I will show how it is not so much the coleoptera that symbolize a harmonious connection built by human populations with their natural environment, but rather a question of what happens in the intimate relationship between human beings and insects. Following the way players build on the great alterity between them and the insects, this article will address how the technical and conceptual handling of the beetles shapes pragmatically an original cosmology. It will pay specific attention to the ways players try to connect with their coleopteran by projecting human traits on them and adopting their communication mode. Through these, we can examine how beetles force humans to reflect on their engagement in the world, up to the point where it brings this game onto the stage of political ecology.

Keywords: Northern Thailand, beetles, cosmology, ecology, cybernetics, analogy, nature, culture, pragmatism

In the campus of Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, one can visit a “museum of life” (*phiphithaphan chiwit*, พิพิธภัณฑ์ชีวิต). Designed at the end of the twentieth century by local academics, it aims to celebrate the traditional way of life of “Northern Thai people” (*khon müang*, คนเมือง). Interestingly the museum is structured in two parts where two different practices are exhibited. These practices, thought to be representative of the “Lanna (Thousands of rice fields) culture”—the local culture that flourished in the ancient Principalities situated geographically in the northern part of the contemporary Kingdom

* This article is based on three fieldworks. The main one was carried out with Emmanuel Grimaud and Nicolas Césard, with whom I co-authored four articles (2008; 2011; 2012a; 2012b) and an ethnographic film (2013).

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of Thailand—consist of: the fishing of the famous “Mekong giant catfish” (*plaa bük*, ปลาบึก, *pangasianodon gigas*) in the Mekong River; and the fighting competitions of Rhinoceros beetles (*xylotrupes Gideon*), locally called *kwaang* กว่าง, *maeng kwaang* แมงกว้าง or *maeng khaam* แมงคาม. The Mekong giant catfish and Rhinoceros beetles are notably highlighted due to their dramatically decreasing populations: both species are endangered because of the rapid development of the region. It is widely assumed that the building of numerous dams in the Mekong basin negatively affects the well-being of the giant catfish, whereas the Rhinoceros beetles are becoming scarcer every year because of deforestation and the intensification of chemical use in commercial crops. The museum was thus designed to claim that the relations with the two species speak in favor of the local wisdom of a “harmonious relationship” (*khwaam klomkleun*, ความกลมกลืน, *khwaam saamakhi*, ความสามัคคี) between human populations and their “natural environment” (*singwaetlom*, สิ่งแวดล้อม), as opposed to a more predator-like relationship in the western model of development.

Through the fishing of the biggest and most sought-after fish of the Mekong River (known for its famously unmatched fat meat and its scarcity), one can understand the regional social life. Fishing in itself is quite complicated and requires a certain level of cooperation among villagers to be effective, thus presenting a good opportunity to celebrate the village collectivity. Moreover, the giant catfish also symbolizes the nourishing role of the Mekong River, an idea that is discussed in Yos Santasombat’s book, *The River of Life*.

But what about the beetles mentioned earlier that are not even eaten? They cannot be considered utilitarian animals whose force or part of the body would be useful to people. Further, they seem to have no special aesthetic, religious, or ritual value. Neither are the beetles considered pests that pose a nuisance to the peasants. How, then, could they embody an ecological issue or any local predisposition to a sustainable way of life?

Yet the local people emphasize the fact that contrary to the rest of Thailand, they do not eat the beetles but play with them (Cf. Fig. 1). In the local idiom, claiming to be respectful of that mere life form is a way to show a higher level of “civilization” (*khwaam jaroen*, ความเจริญ). However, that strategy of differentiation is still thin, all the more because games involving insects can be found elsewhere, especially in Asia. In Japan for example, all kind of bugs are enrolled in games (Laurent 1997), notably Japanese rhinoceros beetles (*allomyrina dichotoma*), which are a cousin species of the one in question here (Hoshina and Takada 2012; Takada 2012). But coming back to our *xylotrupes Gideon*, it has to be specified that they are found all over Southeast Asia, in Southern Australia, and in the Solomon Islands. Many kids throughout these regions play with insects, notably beetles, especially rhinoceros beetles which are among the favorite



Fig. 1 An Advertisement for a Competition That Met Someone's Interest (Stéphane Rennesson)

bugs alongside stag beetles, for example. However, from the information gathered on the subject, it is only in Northern Thailand that the human-coleoptera relationship has reached such a level of refinement and institutionalization.

The great development of the rhinoceros beetle fighting game could support the claim made by all the players I met in Northern Thailand during my fieldwork—especially Khun Pairat, the chairman of an international association of *kwaang* fighting which he founded himself in the early 1990s—that only “people of Northern Thailand” (*khon müang*) know the “true and deep nature of the rhinoceros beetle” (*thammachaat thae khong kwaang*, ธรรมชาติแท้ของกว่าง). In that regard, the museum gives insights on the life cycle of the animal and the material culture that emerged from the institutionalization of the game. Visitors can thus appreciate the craftsmanship and the imagination of the locals in their designing of equipment meant to breed, take care of, and play with beetles. Yet it is still difficult to frame the real significance of Pairat’s assertion—how the idea of life links, ecologically speaking, people’s and beetles’ own existences. It actually fails to suggest how the numerous competitions of *chon kwaang* (ชนกว่าง) can stir passions among

a fair part of the regional masculine population every year between September and November, which is the span of time during which these horned beetles finally emerge from eight months of growth in the soil—from eggs laid by their mothers, to adults ready to breed when they break out in the open air. It especially seems to come short of explaining how a game can build a bond between human beings and animals like beetles, such as being eligible to advocate a true ecological stake for local people.

As an anthropologist, the main reference in the field of animal fights is the interpretative approach Clifford Geertz (1972) put up to analyze Balinese cockfighting. Following Geertz, the game embodies at least a part of what being a Balinese is. Considering Thailand, it is also worth considering the work of Stanley Tambiah (1969), who committed a famous and comprehensive study on animal symbolism in Thailand. Both represent authentic landmarks to think how animals have a high potential for identification processes, and how they may be used as screen on which to project human, sociocultural issues.

These works did influence the very existence of this study. Yet, since *kwaang* amateurs insist on the intimacy one needs to build with their coleopteron for them to be competitive, it may prove too limitative to consider the animals as embedded in a human game and manipulated as symbols in a cultural context to which they are alien. The lines that follow will hopefully show that it is not so much a matter of animal symbolism as it is a question of what each actor of the game brings with him in the playful device. As such, the argument will build on and contribute to the recent development of multispecies studies that consider that humans are only one living form entangled in a web of communication and meanings (Candea 2010; Despret 2013; Haraway 2008; Helmreich 2009; Kohn 2007; Raffles 2010; van Dooren *et al.* 2016).¹⁾ Following the players themselves, we shall thus be particularly attentive to the central piece of the game: the rhinoceros beetle and the specific communicational challenge they impose to human players. As it has been demonstrated elsewhere, their random behavior is the keystone of the game (Renneson *et al.* 2011; 2012a; 2012b). By expanding the scope of scrutiny, not only observing technical and conceptual handlings of the *kwaang* during the fight, it will also question the broader meanings of the claim by the players that “they know the deep

1) Lewis Henry Morgan could be regarded as a remote precursor of the multispecies studies that started to flourish from the beginning of the twenty-first century. Strangely enough, it is one of the forefathers of social anthropology who conducted the first comprehensive monography of an animal to prove that every form of animal life shares a common principle of free intelligence. In 1868, Lewis Henry Morgan published *The American Beaver and His Works*. Not only does the Beaver adapt its behavior to its environment, writes Morgan, but it also actually shapes its environment to meet its own needs. The Beaver is ultimately part of the same American community of experience as much as the Iroquois communities that Morgan previously studied.

nature of beetles” with regard to the local cosmology and the ecological disposition of Northern Thais communities.

Undoubtedly such an immersion will force us to think afresh the categories that we are used to calling upon in order to describe and conceptualize the way humans form collectives and engage in their world such as nature, culture, environment, and milieu. What is a good beetle? What is a beetle action? What emergent meanings and virtues can produce the game beyond the immediate interest of both humans and insects? What can be the ecological value of the beetles, since it is not a question about the energy they can represent in the food chain or their participation to human production activities? These are a few questions that we shall try to answer with the amateurs and their beetles.

From Beetles’ Fitness to the Fertility of the Land: Rhinoceros Beetles and “Thai Nature’s” Co-authorship in Question

Let us start by trying to step into the player’s shoes and pragmatically assessing what makes a good beetle. Actually, a kind of thorough ambiguity pervades in the network of *kwaang* fighting, from their collect up to the fights and through endless training and assessment sessions. One can never be sure when beetles are to appear, where, if they will be good at fighting, or if they will be evenly aggressive throughout their three-month career.

The game is notably built on a few putative ethologic characteristics of beetles. First, male specimens are said to be quite mutually aggressive as they would be obsessed with the idea of getting the right to disseminate their genetic factor. Competitions of *chon kwaang* are thus suitably organized everywhere in Northern Thailand each week between September and November, which is the span of time during which these horned beetles finally emerge after eight months of growth in the soil. Second, *kwaang* are thought to be unable to learn and develop new abilities. Considering that the three or four months of adulthood are dedicated to reproduction, each specimen is regarded to have fitness—a specific potential reproductive success sustained by fighting skills.

As mentioned earlier, one of the local names of rhinoceros beetles is *maeng khaam* (litt. grabbing bug). This designation is interesting since it describes the interest people take in the rhinoceros beetles. *Khaam*, “to grab,” evokes the skill that this kind of beetles have to clamp one another, thanks to its two horns. When the upper horn is proto-thoracic and cannot move, the cephalic lower one is mobile—it can move up and down and a bit left and right to adjust some kind of wrestling or *jujitsu* holds and projections, much to the enthusiasm of the amateurs. Actually, there is a great sexual

dimorphism and only the male specimens grow horns. Females are also part of the competitions, but as we shall see, more as a stimulation device for males than as fighters. Aficionados will therefore select *kwaang* very carefully as each and every animal does not have the same fighting talents. They are attentive to a lot of physical and behavioral characteristics considered to be significant of their fighting skills but, to put it simply, they will generally keep big males with well-developed horns since these supposedly have an advantage in the reproduction arena. The beetles also have to meet a few requirements concerning the way they fight.

Nothing is more different from a beetle than another beetle. Coleoptera are sorted by size and development in three categories: large ones (called *kwaang song*, กว่างโซ้ง) and the medium ones (*kwaang saeem*, กว่างแซ่ม) are eligible. Small and “flimsy” ones (*kwaang ki*, กวางกิ) are not kept during collect.²⁾ When caught, they are either freed immediately or given to children. That way, beetles would not have any physical defects that may jeopardize their chances in the ring, such as a too-thin head, very short legs, one missing leg or claw, one or two short horns, not being straight, having not enough or too much curve, and so on. This paper does not exhaustively list and review all the criteria that amateurs pay attention to. One should acknowledge here, however, that *kwaang* assessment is a serious matter and that it takes time to become a real expert in this area.

We could sum up the whole idea of selection by saying that players are looking for the most fully developed, “perfect” specimen (*sombun*, สมบูรณ์). Players share the certainty that the fitness and thus the fighting skills of the beetles stem primarily from the soil substrate in which they grew up. This notably explains why it gets harder year after year to encounter the insects in question in the village area. The people remember with nostalgia the good old times when a good *kwaang* could be found in the garden under the first rays of sunlight. More recently, though, amateurs observe that beetles encountered in human dwelling areas are usually not very well developed. They blame this on the encroachment on forests, and the increasing quantities of chemicals sprayed on commercial crops, which kill the coleopteron in the egg. It is therefore not surprising that the way to get beetles is to collect them in wild areas. Gleaners have to search for beetles in remote places, notably in regional and national parks where the soil is said to be the most “fertile” (*udom sombun*, อุบลสมบูรณ์). When I was there in 2007, 2009, and 2013, the organizer of the world championship of beetle-fighting even dedicated a few days to collect *kwaang* in Chaiyaphum and Udon Thani Provinces (Northeastern Thailand), where the environment is supposed to be more pristine and conducive for the

2) For the Thai vocabulary about *kwaang*, see: <https://zooacademy.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/นกกวาก/>



Fig. 2 Players at the Morning Market Looking for Their Next Champion (Stéphane Rennesson)

emergence of big, beautiful specimens, which make for aggressive and courageous champions. The idea was to inject in the local market (here in Chiang Mai area) a couple of weeks in advance the beetles they lacked, to hold a competition worthy of its reputation (Cf. Fig. 2).

The same people used to be part of those who tried to breed beetles as another way to cope with the scarcity of good specimens. Since rhinoceros beetles are more and more difficult to find in Northern Thailand—because of the reduction of their natural habitat, claim the players; or due to the intensification of the use of *kwaang* for the sake of the game, say their critics—some amateurs have tried to develop beetle-farming methods. Drawing on hormonal enhancement techniques of the soil, thanks to more or less natural materials, some influential players have tried to select beetles to produce genuine fierce prizefighters. But the little animal resists all efforts done to try to breed him. As a matter of fact, I am unaware if, after a few years of selection, specimens out of *kwaang* farms could compete with those collected from the wild. If some experiments have led to the production of big and beautiful coleoptera, they have never proved to grant players with a daring specimen that one can find among “forest beetles” (*kwaang paa*, ท้าวป่า). At best, there could have been competitions dedicated to farm beetles, but this idea has not been brought into being. Well, not totally at least, since among the couple of “traditional *kwaang* festivals” held each year, they organize a “*kwaang* beauty contest” in conjunction with the fights themselves. So even if the breeders have failed to produce good fighters, they are still very proud to get some really good-looking specimens that can compete with others.

There are two lessons to be learned from these breeding experiences. First, some of them are incidentally documented in the museum of life. The curators seem to nurture the idea that these farming tests demonstrate the Lanna people's mastery of *kwaang*'s life cycle. Obviously this knowledge is in turn considered as proof of the intimacy that inhabitants have developed with the local natural environment, to the point of paying attention to the well-being of insects. The survival of the game, which is presented as an old local tradition, is associated to the survival of the *kwaang*. By highlighting the danger of the intensification of agricultural technique for the insect, the small animal is presented as a kind of sentinel of the quality of the soil as much as of the vivacity of Lanna identity.

In order to fully acknowledge what this means, we have to decenter our thoughts such that we can move away from any ethnocentric truisms. According to Philippe Descola (2013), we have to open our mind to other cosmologies. *Kwaang* amateurs do not separate as clearly socio-cultural fact from biological ones, such as in the case of the modern, Western worldview. Players and their beetles belong to a localized and situated nature, not an objectified one: we speak here about the Thai idea of *thammachaat* (ธรรมชาตฺ, literally *order of what is*)—a nature that is not mentally constructed in contrast to culture, but to disorder. Nature is a world in itself, where everybody has to find their place so that everything, every phenomenon is in order . . . or not. The construction of Thainess (*khwaam pen thai*, ความเป็นไทย) or other regional identity like Lanna, is thus articulated with a distinctive way of building one's relationship with their own environment, be it cultural, natural, or whatsoever, as already underlined in the specialized literature on Thai Studies.³⁾ It is a question of a Thai nature and obviously, it emerges from the relations that the Thais nurture with what is around them. Rather than acknowledging "one world, many worldviews," we need to recognize multiple worlds. We should not therefore limit ourselves to "representations," "symbolism," or "belief," but also investigate alternative realities. As such, *kwaang* may be said to contribute to the making of the local identity along with their human mates, beyond what we are prone to distinguish as natural and cultural realms.

The real contrast in the Thai cosmological model is between the civilized center of the *mueang* (เมือง, a term which denotes the idea of human polity) and the peripheral zone where the influence of the king and the Buddhist institution vanishes as we move further away and approach the "wild" (*pa thuean*, ป่าเถื่อน) areas, from where *kwaang* are found, preferably. It could be the reason why an intermediate solution between the very controlled breeding of *kwaang* and their collect in remote areas has not yet met with success.

3) On the Thai notion of *thammachaat*, one may consult Charles Keyes (1987), Philip Stott (1991), and Amare Tegbaru (1997).

I recently came to know of more extensive methods, in which people try to attract males in their garden by placing trees traps, each constituting a peeled sugarcane chunk with a female attached. Also chemical-free, the idea is to make the garden attractive both for reproduction and the laying of eggs in the ground. Instead of trying to control everything, like with the farming method in which the insects are bred in a small enclosure, they are trying to model the ideal natural conditions that will hopefully foster true gladiators for their collection. The results seem more interesting, but have yet to produce high-range champions, and the few experimenters themselves have admitted to buying some additional specimens on the market in order to go through the three-month season.

Generally, the great majority of players rely on the “traditional” collect of wild specimen—still regarded as the most interesting to play with. The beetles thus get their strength from wild areas and untamed territories. Deep forests are, for example, widely regarded as highly potent places, where you may have the opportunity to master the risks (either animals or malevolent spirits) and transform them into personal spiritual power such as *baaramii* (บารมี, prestige, righteous power, virtue, charisma) to be used for political and economic purposes (Jory 2002; Jackson 2009). One can notably think of the tradition in which Buddhist monks wander out in the forests to experiment “the Buddhist Law” (*thammachaat*), and allow themselves to be confronted with their own fears, pains, hunger, and thirst (Tiyavanich 1997). Even if the game of *kwaang* is definitely a question of channeling and mastering raw forces out there, I am not aware that outstanding specimens or even skillful players would be regarded as showing (a high level of) *baaramii*. Yet, players speak of a “king of *kwaang*” (*phayaa kwaang*, พญาคว้าง), referring to a single specimen that can be found every year, and which has “magical/supernatural power” (ฤๅ, rit) that enables it to beat any other beetle. But the question remains: what do the beetles get when they are from wild parts of the country; that which the “king of beetles” best embodies? In this regard, the scientific environmental argument is weakened by the breeding experiments, and this is the second lesson to be drawn. Even without chemical inputs and with best efforts to emulate the composition of pristine forest soils, players admit that these do not always work. Instead, they only produce beetles for beauty contests to celebrate the simplistic idea that the value of a beetle depends on how it looks like. The vast majority of amateurs think it impossible to reproduce the miracle of the life force that stems out of the wild. The difficulties and hazards one has to undertake with beetles are obviously not on the same level as those faced by wandering monks. We thus have to underline what makes the game’s very specific features. If it is not a question of *baaramii* building, then how can the vitality of the *kwaang* be transformed and become meaningful for both players and beetles? Obviously, the beetle-fighting game cannot be reduced to the opposition between wilderness and civilization, as with

the forest monks' practices. We thus have to leave behind us the symbolic potential of animals and scale down to a kind of phenomenological cosmology—close enough to the players/beetle interface in order to have a chance to decipher what is at stake in the game. As we shall see, players seem to build on the difficulty to canalize the fighting instinct of the animal, whatever level of fitness it will ultimately demonstrate in the game.

Building an Interspecific Sensible World: The Difficult Art of Circulating Combativeness

A good-looking *kwaang* is a promising beetle, but not mechanically a champion. It is not enough to be from the forest and look good; rather, it takes some know-how to validate (or not) the initial diagnosis and to help one's coleoptera to express all their potentialities. More than anything, a good *kwaang* is an animal that has been well taken care of. If wild specimens are regarded as being the fiercest, a beetle is not ready to go into the ring right out of the forest. Instead, the insects have to be closely looked after for weeks beforehand. First, they have to be nurtured with high intakes of sugarcane on which they dwell, night and day. They are also sometimes given a real glucose dope (sugarcane juice) to boost them when needed—a few minutes before a fight, for example. Second, they have to be well trained, tested in opposition to challengers of various morphotypes: they are endlessly stimulated on a daily basis. Only then is there a chance that among the 30 or 40 insects with whom you spend at least a couple of hours a day, there may be five or six ready-to-clinch gladiators every weekend—a few really outstanding fighters for the entire season.

The question, then, is: what really happens between a player and his beetles since the insects allegedly cannot learn anything? Further, how can we tackle this issue as anthropologists, not ethologists? We have to fight not only with our ethnocentrism, but also with something which is cognitively even more powerful—our predisposition to anthropocentrism: regarding and interpreting the world in terms of human values, human experiences, and human points of view. I try to scrutinize not only what Thai players think they could share with their animals, but also what they truly do share or not. This is what it takes to strive to escape that doomed heritage of the Cartesian dualism (that opposes spirit to matter, humans/animals, etc.) that leads us to see animals as mere reactive machines to stimuli, not masters/owners of their actions.

We need here an analytic tool that will help us emulate the pragmatic stance the players take concerning the beetles, for they are forced to deal with these beings that are far away from us on the phylogenetic tree. Following the German-Estonian biologist

Jakob Von Uexküll (2010), whose work is at the root of biosemiotics (Brentari and Von Uexküll 2015), let us try to understand what can happen between two beings living in very different “subjective worlds” (*Umwelt*). I assume Von Uexküll grants us with the most convenient frame to think about our interspecies device; to raise the question of what the two species can share. As a matter of fact, he remarkably does not speculate on the intelligence of animals, a perspective that always leads one to confirm the qualitative difference between humanity and the rest of animality. Instead, the idea is that every living being has an interiority that is not confined to the limit of its body; it emerges from the interaction with one’s environment. Interiorities are thus like built from outside; they go beyond the limits of the organic body and overflow into the environment, as far as one perceives and acts upon. An interiority is made of one’s capacity to extract information from the milieu and to project oneself in the latter. Through this feedback loop, every being is an actor of his own world that could best defined as what he is interested in, and what has some meaning for him, to put it simply. This “subjective world” is the reality as it exists for one being, a milieu that is different from the environment, from all the objects within the Euclidian space around (*Umgebung*). It is interesting indeed to note that a similar distinction is made in another cultural context a little bit closer to Thailand. Watsuji Tetsurô (2011), a Japanese philosopher, distinguishes the material environment (*Shizen kankyô*) and the milieu (*Fûdo*) (Couteau 2006). Yet these sensible worlds are not to remain closed in on them. I here make a reading of Von Uexküll that draws more on a pragmatist stance than a semiotic one. He bestows us the descriptive tools to shed light on the very empiric stakes of the interspecies playful encounter. Building on pragmatism as developed by William James and John Dewey, for example, I shall consider experience as the result of an interaction between a living being and its milieu that affects both of them (Debaise 2007, 8). If action conveys significations, it especially shows points of interests. So it is neither a question of pure subjectivity nor objectivity, but rather the idea that a common world can be elaborated during action. How can the interests of human beings and beetles be connected? We shall subsequently outline how and to what extent the respective milieu of human and beetles can meet over a playful device. How can an interspecific coordination of action be possibly established between animals that perceive the world and act upon it in quite a different way? How can we even communicate with them actually? What can we share with them?

Let us look for answers in the *kwaang* fight set-up, which can appear rudimentary at first glance. Yet it is quite obvious that it is actually built on the knowledge that players gathered about beetles over generations. Two male beetles are placed on a “wooden log” (*mai kön*, ไม้คอน) that serves as the combat area. This log has two small holes containing females whose pheromone is expected to excite the two males. Besides their



Fig. 3 The Beetles Are Now Engaging in a Real Balance of Power (Stéphane Rennesson).

presumed aggressiveness linked to their obsession to breed, rhinoceros beetle males are also regarded as highly sensible animals, mostly to vibrations. In fact, the players try to communicate with their beetles, thanks to a “notched stylus” (*mai phan*, ไม่ฟัน) that when properly manipulated can produce vibrations that the insects seem to be interested in. By doing so, the players follow a well-documented ability of vibratory communication among arthropods. Beetles, notably, can produce various kinds of stridulation depending on the different species (by scraping their protothorax against their mesothorax, in the case of the rhinoceros beetle).

Making the most of these local putative ethological assets, players develop strategies to enhance the aggressiveness of their insects, not only during the fight but also throughout a real training process that takes weeks to enable a *kwaang* to walk up the ring. As a result, the drama inherent to these duels attracts the attention of many amateurs and produces an intensive gambling economy (Cf. Fig. 3).

The material device utilized for the fights is always the same and there is an oral set of rules that players have to follow in a game. We shall present here a few that may help us understand the difficulty of framing together human and beetle actions, so that human spectators can make sense of what the insects are doing.

First, if the *kwaang* can be stimulated by direct contact with the stylus before the beginning of the match, players are only authorized to roll and tap their stylus on the log once they have released their champions. After a few minutes to warm up before the fight, on the sugarcane and then on the log where players make them smell the presence of the females, the beetles are freed simultaneously. The appropriate technique to pro-

duce influential vibrations involves rolling one's stylus between the thumb and the middle finger. Players cannot stimulate them by direct contact anymore, at least up to the moment when one or two beetles fall off the log and both players need to restart the fight.

Once the beetles are released, players are allowed to turn the log around its longitudinal axis, but only in certain circumstances. The idea is to help one's beetle to find the best position in which to grab its opponent or escape its opponent's grip. When none of the beetles has taken an advantage on the other, both players can then manipulate the log. But when an advantage is recognized, the log can only be turned by the owner of the *kwaang* who is in a position of power.

A fight should go on up to the moment when at least one *kwaang* gives up the fight. If the two beetles withdraw simultaneously, it is a draw; if one of the two withdraws before the other, this signals victory for its opponent. A beetle is said to have lost when it clearly refuses the fight by fleeing its opponent three times in a row.

A fight is also finished when the two beetles have wrestled for 12 rounds. The match then ends up as a draw and all the bets are cancelled. The rounds are not discrete time units. They are called *khaam* (กาม), grabbing, and represent a unit of action when the two beetles really engage in a physical balance of power. It starts when the beetles grab each other and stops when they separate.

If we look strictly at the rules, they are more or less the same across all competitions, though there are some differences in the ways to end fights. The aforementioned rules are the ones enforced in official competitions, as far as possible, considering the circumstances. It is the case in larger venues, the so-called traditional festivals that are held on few occasions in a season; it is much less obvious in the numerous authorized and non-authorized "*kwaang* casinos" (*bon kwaang*, บ่อนกว่าง) where a large number of players and a small number of logs may cause organizers to hasten their decisions by making the rules simpler to win a fight. For instance it can be decided that a beetle loses if it flees its opponents once, or if it falls off the log. This enables more players to have the opportunity to play, to bet, and for the organizers to collect more registration fees.

Upon closer examination, we can see that there are even more differences that are not specified in the rules themselves. Each rule is actually organically open to interpretation and discussion. What does it mean when you say that a *kwaang* undoubtedly refuses to fight, three times in row, more or less quickly than the other, or that a coleopteron has an advantage on the other? Indeed, the interpretation of the rules and the action of the insects are subject to endless negotiations. The confusion is nurtured up to the point that the empire is one of the principle gamblers. He is in fact responsible (to the owner of the place) for stirring up the gambling activities.

The analysis of this normative corpus sheds light on the ways that different beings

can be brought in the same game and the extent to which they can be said to cooperate or even coordinate their actions, and on what it means to know the true and deep nature of the *kwaang*. The observation of the beetle game shows that it is actually neither a natural nor a pure human balance of power device (Renneson *et al.* 2011; 2012a). The game cannot be reduced to a pure technical device that would see human players confronting one another through insects. The beetles do not in fact always answer to players' commands faithfully, and it is not a remote-control kind of relationship. Maybe it could have been, but the players themselves have decided to make it a little bit more difficult. Once the beetles have been released, the players are no longer allowed to touch their champions directly, except when the game has been stopped because at least one of the opponents is no longer in a combat position, having either backed away or left the combat area. It means that the players choose to let their beetle free, to loosen the relation of control, and to let their insect go wild. If *kwaang* are quite responsive when directly touched, we can at least say that they seem to do what they want when the players reduce their hazardous influence on the game by rolling their notched stylus on the wooden log. It appears that the notching of the stylus at a distance from the two beetles during the fight is a kind of cooperation between the two players to sustain a kind of minimal stimulation level to prevent the beetles from separating and not acknowledging the presence of the other anymore. By doing so, they are merely sustaining a kind of vibratory field that cannot be really considered as a clear, discrete, and unambiguous signal to one or the other coleopteran to eventually interpret (Cf. Fig. 4).

Similarly, we cannot limit ourselves to a natural or "etho-naturalistic" understanding of the process such as males fight each other only for the right to cover the females. *Kwaang* enthusiasts cannot solely bank on the insect's ability to stimulate itself. The rules considering the possibility of stimulating and helping one's beetle and their possible negotiation confirm that the supposed aggressiveness has to be sustained from time to time. Amateurs know that in the wild, most meetings between two beetle males end in either avoidance or a relatively quick fight; in any case, the fight does not last long enough to produce a spectacle that *kwaang* players would consider worthy of that name. Strong in their know-how, players admit that they are never sure that their beetles, even those that displayed their aggressiveness regularly, will be prone to fight on the day of the competition. Beetles are versatile and nobody can be sure that they will not escape the device the next moment. A "mono-specific" set-up that would only involve releasing two males on to a log would not provide the same quality of fun as an "interspecific" set-up in which players pit their skills against one another, as is the present case, stimulating their protégés, and sustaining their combativeness. *Kwaang* enthusiasts have chosen to move away from the configuration found in the wild through a clever cooperative system



Fig. 4 Both Players Are Rolling Their Stylus to Send Vibrations to Their Beetles (Stéphane Rennesson).

that allows them to extend the fight, which can last as long as 20 or even 30 minutes.

Kwaang's vital force, however one names it, either biological fitness, raw aggressiveness, or masculinity, is definitely difficult to nurture. Players resort to many different tricks to make out of a beetle fight a show for humans. They are facilitating the circulation of meaning in and outside beetles' bodies, as Von Uexküll would say. Human players insert themselves in the subjective words of the insects that finally impose their own way of communicating. Basically, it is the ambiguity of the relation of control that emerges as a primary property of the device that stimulates the interest of amateurs and teases the activity of gamblers (Cf. Fig. 5). The energy is thus firmly looped as it is finally circulating between all actors in the game, be they human or insects.

Ontologic Volatility and Play upon Cosmologies: The Emergence of an Ecosystemic Wisdom

Players not only spontaneously resort to anthropomorphism, namely to the attribution of human attributes to their animals, such as calling them their sons, assigning them with aggressiveness, boundless sexual appetite, and so on. Amateurs need also to become a vibratory animal, and accept to enter the perceptive world of beetles. In a way, it could be said that they "become an (other) animal," making this an interesting kind of estrangement process.

Ambiguity pervades indeed. Not only does the control of the game seem distributed



Fig. 5 A Player Calls for a Bet. He Feels Confident as the Fight Is Gaining Momentum (Stéphane Rennesson).

in the whole circuit of communication linking players with their beetles and all the technical apparatus, different ontologies of the *kwaang* do also flourish among players. Interestingly, when it comes to interpreting the results of such fights, the ponderation in between natural characteristics (either genetics and or morphology), psychology, training, player's technicity on the log, and so on, vary a lot from one player to another.

For example, some players attribute victory to animal characteristics for 20 percent; insect brave heart 10 percent; training 40 percent, and player's technicity 30 percent. Others might explain it at 30 percent by animal characteristics; 30 percent insect brave heart; 30 percent training; and 10 percent player's technicity. Behind these different rationales, we find alternative ways of considering beetles' ontology. Some will see them as very sensible animals—a kind of nerves bundle with no central nervous system, and which has to be stimulated and controlled as much as possible. Others at the very other end of the spectrum will not only attribute a brain, but also a will and a heart (*jitjai* จิตใจ), some feelings, moods, and even souls (*khwan* ขวัญ and *winjan* วิญญาณ when it comes to special champions). If the players who view *kwaang* as sensible machines prefer stocky beetles with large horns and try to monitor them as much as possible during the fight, another group of players favors slimmer beetles with long lower horns, and which are supposedly more intelligent than their massive counterparts—this latter group of players also tends not interfere that much once the insects are freed on the log, choosing instead to delegate more control of the match to the beetle.

This is the strength of this game: to enable the cohabitation between different species as well as between various conceptions of continuities and discontinuities between

these species. The device upholds a kind of vast network of analogic correspondence between diverse dimensions: connections, i.e., full analogic links can be done and undone endlessly, and can be tested infinitely between the insects' morphological characteristics, interiority, behaviors, and the results of the fights.

Yet, the final ranking of *kwaang* competitions does not celebrate one beetle over the others or a player over the others, but interspecific couples. The major tournaments are designed as such: the winner is a couple (man + beetle) that raised the highest sum of bets among gamblers. Thus, ultimately the game is oriented toward the greatest confidence players with their champions can inspire to the gamblers. And all players agree on one thing: *kwaang* cannot be tamed, and that a good player builds assurance along with the insects he selected and patiently takes care of on a daily basis. They call it a cohabitation process (*hai koei chin kan*, ให้เลขาชินกัน), a reciprocal move where both parties have to learn to mutually acknowledge the other as accurately as possible.

Ultimately, by not choosing to make it a human game through insects or a pure animal game in which human would stay mere spectators, the players build on the radical difference of the worlds in which humans and beetles live. It is not only difficult to know if a beetle is a good fighter, or a better fighter than another; it is also tricky to decide if a *kwaang* is good because of its natural characteristics or because of the intimacy it built with a human player that was able to make the best of its potential. But it is even more fundamentally difficult to know what makes a coleopteron have the upper hand over another—a beetle winning the other. (What is going backward three times in a row for a beetle? When do they engage in a round?) The actions of the beetles are so difficult to frame that the endorsement of a situation is more than always the result of a more or less lengthy negotiation of the interpretation of the fights by the different parties. The game is even regarded by some players as the best school for politics.

When Pairat says that “we Thai know the true and deep nature of the *kwaang*,” I see from the close observation of practice a co-production of a culture of negotiation, where continuities and discontinuities between human beings and beetles are being constantly investigated. Both parties accept to be affected by the other and to experience as a consequence a kind of transformation; they are always open to new possibilities and potencies. I assume that this is an attitude that takes us to the very root of how these people think and practise the “harmonious” relations they foster not with but within their environment, as to emulate Tim Ingold (2000). The beetle ultimately imposes its sensory universe while leaving humans the possibility of appending code, meaning, and technique (Renneson *et al.* 2012a; 2012b).

If we draw on Charles Sanders Peirce's typology of signs (1894) as ways to denote an object, it is not so much that coleoptera are the symbol or the icon of a harmonious

connection built by human populations with their natural environment.⁴⁾ Rather, the game itself is more a question of indexicality, of metonymy than of metaphor, and more about what happens in the intimate relationship between human beings and insects. Beetles can act so unpredictably that players are forced in a radical alterity that, in a way, gives credit to their ability to cooperate with “natural forces” which are more than often difficult to interpret. The logic here is thus not linear. Limiting oneself to add one technical action to another leads nowhere and there is no real recipe to become the best *kwaang* player; it even has almost no meaning if we consider how major competitions are won. It is more about some kind of a cybernetic loop where control is evenly distributed, and that is made out different feedback effects from beetle and human behaviors.

One cannot say who controls the game, and this absence of control is the quality of self-organized systems—cybernetic loops that are thought to reduce disorder, to bring down the entropy of the systems.⁵⁾ Philippe Descola would surely have spoken of the fragmentation of the interiorities and the physicalities that are to be reordered in ritual context in analogic worldviews (2013).⁶⁾ But if I actually do not know if Lanna people as a whole can be considered to be engaging their world with an analogist cosmology (which is a question that goes beyond the scope of this paper), what I witnessed in the beetle-fighting game is not so much about defragmentation than subtly cultivating a stochastic process, a general state of uncertainty. Flexible cosmologies, ontologies, representations, and technical control effects are all emergent features of the game, not its underlying causes.

Admittedly there is something that circulates and has to flow as much as possible. As such, the playful interspecific device works not that very differently from the well-documented rituals of the area, animal sacrifice for *genius loci*, protective spirit of places and gods of the soil for instance, which organize a triangulation between humans, animals, and the invisible realm to secure the benefits of agrarian activities.⁷⁾ Yet, building on a

4) Charles Sanders Peirce's typology of signs as ways to denote an object: Icon, index, symbol. This typology classifies every sign according to the category of the sign's way of denoting its object. The icon (also called semblance or likeness) denotes its object by a quality of its own; the index denotes its object by factual connection to its object; and finally, the symbol by a convention or rule for its interpretant (1894).

5) Gregory Bateson (1971) was the first to introduce the concept of cybernetics in social sciences, notably in anthropology.

6) The three others ontologies identified by Descola are animism, totemism, and naturalism, the latter having imposed itself in the modern western world (2013).

7) On this topic, Paul Mus produced a seminal work (1933) which underlined the importance of the earth as a main pool of symbolic resources in the area. Bernard Formoso also stimulatingly highlighted the chthonian gods as intermediaries with nature in Southeast Asian societies, a relation that he incidentally coined then as an ecological theme per se (1996). There are other interesting contributions in that regard (Archaimbault 1991; Tanabe 2017; Sprenger 2005).

more pragmatic stance and on Gregory Bateson's conception of cybernetics (1971; 1979), I advocate that in the case of beetle-fighting, the proliferation of singularities is the very chaotic matrix on which possibilities of common worlds can come to light. No matter where the interiorities are or are not (or we risk to give in to old good dualism again), the whole system can be regarded as a mental process; a "Mind" if I follow Bateson's terminology of an "ecology of Mind" (1971; 1979).

What circulates are neither symbols nor a physical energy—a force that would be measurable. It's neither about semiotics and cosmology, nor about Newtonian mechanics, about conservation of energy as widely regarded in the field of ethology or ecological anthropology (Rappaport 1968). Of course, as it has been said, players do resort to the rationale of raw energy that stems primarily from the soil and wild areas, which can then be called upon in *kwaang* as a sexual energy, biological fitness, fertility, physical force, and so on, and finally as "social, prestige" (*kiat*, เกียรติ) for players. But they admit at the same time that what happens in the soil during the insects' growth is mysterious, that the beetles have emotions and feelings, that they can escape the device at any moment without notice, and, even more significantly, that the entire game is a question of weak links of communication. Playing with *kwaang* is therefore dealing with a qualitative force more than anything else. It means taking on the idea that living beings are all linked by a circulation of differences/information that gives birth to forms and patterns that are snatched away from entropy, as Bateson (1971; 1979) would have stated. Living systems surely need energy, but the energy alone cannot explain the structures (morphology and behavior) of the formers.

The proposal here may look similar to those of the circulation of a life force typical of the "hierarchical animism" advocated by Kaj Århem (2016), or in the animistic characteristics of potent places of Southeast Asia highlighted by Anne Guillou (2017). Nevertheless, it was shown that, in the case of rhinoceros beetles game, it is primarily a question of potentialities of connections between disparate elements. It is not essentially an issue about potency or agentivity understood as an animistic calibration of objects, places, or non-human beings in a symmetric intersubjective matrix with humans. Rather, the game develops as what William James (2003) calls a "pure experience," a kind of pre-intellectual experience where subjects and objects are not the premises that make experience possible. It is instead the patient co-building of a common plan of experience, an area that lacks differentiation in which new kinds of relations and knowledge can come to light. Subjects show up with alternative realities only when it comes to linguistics, when the player's verbal language kicks off and to which beetles are deaf. However, the game fundamentally has to sustain a field of pure potentialities. Beetles can thus be regarded as one of the conductive materials of a mental process emulating

the immediate flow of life. The circular logic, on which the beetle-fighting game builds on, shapes what could be coined an “egalitarian analogism” in which the main injunction is to tend towards empathy and communion on the one side, to suspend conscious goals and the will to control.

Interestingly enough, it is the figure of the “king of *kwaang*” (*phayaa kwaang*, พญาคว้าง) which all players wish to find one year or another, that best exemplifies the methodological advantage to consider the game as a kind of flow economy. The “king of *kwaang*” is the only one that would not need any help from its owner, easily beating any opponents thanks to its “magical/supernatural” power (ฤท, rit). When you do not meet him, you have to resort to many never-ending experiments to track, channel, and nurture the flow of life. Could it be the basis of an original proposal in “cosmopolitics,” in the sense Isabelle Stengers conceives it (2005)—the fragile cooperation between two very different species keeping both politics and cosmos open to new participants potentially bringing in their distinctive characteristics? We do not know if Lanna people know the true nature of *kwaang*, but it seems like some of them accept that human kind does not have a control over an objectified nature and that fostering uncertainty in relationships can prove to be virtuous. Fascinatingly, they have selected and chosen a species with which they share a certain tendency for playfulness and reflect upon what it takes to make common worlds with others.

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History that Slithers: Kra-Dai and the *Pythonidae**

James R. Chamberlain**

This paper brings together a number of disciplines in order to demonstrate how historical, anthropological, ecological, zoogeographical, ethnobiological, and linguistic evidence relating to the physical distribution and linguistic representations of pythons in northern Southeast Asia and southern China can be brought to bear on Kra-Dai prehistory and intrafamilial as well as interethnic relationships. The normal and most recognized word for 'python' is confined to the Tai family proper, and even then there are some qualifications. Two species of python are found in much of the Tai linguistic area south of the Sino-Vietnamese border, but only one, the Burmese python, occurs in Guangxi, Guangdong, and Hainan. Some Central Tai dialects have acquired another name that seems to be Austroasiatic (AA) in origin, and yet no AA languages are found in those areas. It is suggested that these dialects received the word via Kra to the west. On the eastern side, yet another surprising correspondence is noted between Lung Ming in southern Guangxi and Hlai on Hainan. Sek, located far to the south, which usually preserves archaic forms of Be-Tai, has no words for 'python' that correspond to those in the rest of the family. Close examination of the linguistics of this particular member of the Southeast Asian mega-fauna reveals a pattern of interaction between the families of the Kra-Dai stock, Austroasiatic, and southern Chinese that mirrors the phylogenetic tree.

Keywords: Kra-Dai, Tai, ethnozoology, python, Tai history, Chinese history, Vietnamese history, Southeast Asian history

I Introduction

This study discusses pythons in southern China and northern Southeast Asia, the interesting historical linguistic situation that surrounds them, and the implications of this for reconstructing certain aspects of the Kra-Dai past. Using linguistic evidence as the starting point, comparative evidence is offered from a number of fields such as zoogeog-

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raphy, ethnobiology, history, folklore, and anthropology, providing an example of how bringing all of these fields of study together can provide insights into patterns of settlement and distribution of families within the Kra-Dai stock.

Specifically, it will be argued that,

- 1) The Proto-Tai (PT) etymon for ‘python’ ***hnuam A** referred to the Burmese python (*Python bivittatus*).
- 2) The Siamese forms distinguishing two species of pythons are an independent innovation, related to the sympatric distribution that is particularly evident in central Thailand. The only other language where /laam/ is found is Yuan (in northern Thailand) where it is the only taxon for python.
- 3) Old Chinese borrowed the Proto-Tai (PT) form from the Eastern Ou Yue people in Zhejiang.
- 4) Cantonese and perhaps other southern Chinese contact words for python were borrowed at a later date directly from Northern Branch Tais in Guangdong and Guangxi.
- 5) The Central Tai (CT) taxon **Proto-CT *daaŋ B** derives ultimately from Austroasiatic (AA) via Kra.
- 6) There exists a Tai-python < AA-skink association that may be seen in discontinuous localities, in both CT and Sek, this seems to have been an avoidance mechanism in areas where pythons were associated with taboos.
- 7) The Lung Ming-Hlai correspondence, Lung Ming /laan C4/ ~ **Proto-Hlai *C-naaŋ?**, may be an original Daic form that was borrowed into **Old Chinese *mâŋ?** < ***malâŋ?** (Schuessler 2007).
- 8) Chinese medical uses for pythons developed independently and were not borrowed from Tai peoples.
- 9) Ou-Yue Tai (CT and Northern Tai [NT]) beliefs associated with pythons are spiritual in nature, whereas Lo-Yue (Southwestern Tai [SWT]) associations are primarily related to edibility. This can be seen in the naming practices evident in the folk systematics.
- 10) A term for python cannot be reconstructed in Proto-Kra-Dai, and as a result we should look for a python-free homeland for this stock.

Language is prior. For purposes of this paper, language sets the backdrop against which other types of information may be placed. The methods of comparative and historical linguistics are based upon immutable laws such as the regularity of sound change leading to reconstructions of proto languages that date back to prehistoric periods. There are no

parallels in the fields of history, anthropology, psychology, and so on. Historical linguistic studies lead to the establishment of classifications that show relationships between the branches and subgroups of linguistic families and stocks, and these in turn may be linked to historical or archeological records, depending upon extant evidence. The comparative method begins with the assembling of data from living languages or in some cases from written records, and the identification of cognates, morphemes that share a common root, in order to examine the variation in consonants, vowels, tones, and meaning that allows the linguist to reconstruct the original form. Take the words for 'moon, bile, flower', Siamese /duan, dii, dɔɔk/ but Black Tai (spoken in northwestern Vietnam) /buan, bii, bɔɔk/. The correspondence of *d*- and *b*- poses the problem of reconstruction of the proto initial consonant and has led linguists (such as Li 1977) to suggest, based on the common point of articulation of *d* and *l*, an original **bl*- cluster for these items and other words with similar correspondences. Later, with the discovery of Sek, a language that had remained isolated in a remote part of Khammouane Province in Laos, the reconstruction was confirmed in the forms /blian, blii, and blɔɔk/ that has preserved the original clusters (Gedney 1970, 83). This is a simple example but serves to demonstrate the cogency of the method in terms of predictability and in providing a foundation for the present study.

Zoogeographic areas here concern the Oriental Region of the Paleotropic Realm, bounded to the north of the Yangtze by the Palearctic Region of the Holarctic Realm, and to the south by the Australian on the southern and southeastern side of the Wallace Line, so-named by Thomas Henry Huxley, that follows the deep water channel between the Sunda region (Java, Bali, Sumatra, Borneo, and Mainland Southeast Asia) and the Sahul (Australia and New Guinea) continental shelves separating Oriental fauna such as tigers and elephants from the Australasian marsupials (Darlington 1957; J. McKinnon and K. McKinnon 1974; Müller 1974). The transitional area between the Wallace and the Zydekker Lines is known as Wallacea and there is a small zone here where the two pythons, *bivittatus* and *reticulatus* overlap. Otherwise *bivittatus* is not found this far south. To the north in China, at least as far as Anyang in Henan Province, Shang Dynasty remains of elephants, rhinoceros, and tapirs have been found, indicating that original sub-tropical forests in this area were apparently destroyed by extensive human settlement (Müller 1974; Chi 1957). But to my knowledge so far, python remains have not been found at this or other sites this far north. By comparing the distribution of animals with linguistic representations and cognates across language families, hypotheses can be formed with respect to original homelands and migrations.

Ethnozoology, the study of human-animal relationships, is the branch of cognitive anthropology that, among other things, seeks to uncover ethnocentric epistemologies

underlying indigenous classifications of animals. Here we add to this a diachronic dimension so that what may be compared historically are sets of classifications which may or may not agree across families and branches within Kra-Dai. Folklore fits here as well, and in principle, such anthropological questions as gender and kinship aspects of animal naming and the degree to which this corresponds across languages and families. The rather positivistic approach of the folk biological taxonomists such as Berlin (1972; 1992) utilizes a system of terminology analogous to the Linnaean system, based entirely upon physical characteristics. The terminology is useful but does not easily accommodate the non-physical dimensions of taxonomies without including additional information (Chamberlain 1977; 1992; Aung Si 2016).

History begins with writing and the preservation and availability of written sources. For the earlier periods these may or may not be associated with identifiable ethnicities currently recognized. In our focal area of southern China, we are fortunate in that numerous ancient texts have been preserved and are available for interpretation by historians.

II The *Pythonidae* in Northern Southeast Asia and Southern China

Pythons are nonvenomous old-world constrictors inhabiting Africa, Asia, and Australia. Members of the family *Boidae* are also constrictors but are found mostly in the new world, primarily in Central and South America and the Pacific islands. (There are some exceptions to this generalization, a python species found in southern Mexico and Costa Rica and a boa found in West Africa [Encyclopedia Britannica].) Pythons are oviparous, but the Burmese python may sometimes reproduce by parthenogenesis (Groot *et al.* 2003), the only snake of this family known to do so. Primarily nocturnal, pythons feed on mammals and birds and occasionally on reptiles.

The family Pythonidae in northern Southeast Asia is represented by two distinct species (see Fig. 1), the Burmese python, *Python bivittatus*, and the reticulated python, *Malayopython reticulatus* (formerly genus *Python*). A third species, *Python molurus*, the Indian Python, confined to South Asia, closely resembles *bivittatus*, which for many years was considered a subspecies of *molurus*. The reticulated and the Burmese pythons are two of the three largest snakes in the world, in terms of both weight and length. Each may weigh over 150 kilograms and measure in excess of six meters in length. One *reticulatus* specimen is reported to have attained a length of more than nine meters.

As can be seen on the maps, the Burmese python has a decidedly more northerly distribution than that of *reticulatus*, on the east reaching as far as Guangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, and possibly eastern Jiangxi. On the west the range stretches to central Yunnan

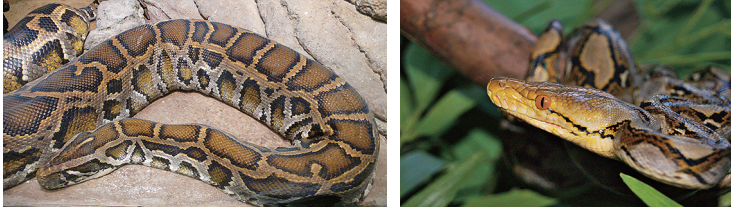


Fig. 1 Burmese Python (Left) and Reticulated Python (Right)

Source: Wikipedia Commons.

and even to southeastern Sichuan. On the mainland the southern boundary is Surat Thani, Thailand, but in the islands, it occurs in Java, Bali, and southern Sulawesi.

The northern range of the reticulated python stops approximately at the Chinese border with Vietnam, Laos, and Burma, and extends westward across all of India. It is found throughout insular Southeast Asia. It can also be seen on the maps that where the islands are concerned, the two species are mostly in complementary distribution, with *bivittatus* being found on Hainan, but absent from Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the only exception being Java and southern Sulawesi where the two species again overlap. Neither species is found on Taiwan, though the Burmese python is found on the Kinmen Islands.

Burmese and reticulated pythons are sympatric throughout much of mainland South-east Asia south of the Chinese border (see Fig. 2). But ecological niche partitioning is difficult to define. Bryan Stuart (personal communication [p.c.]) notes that reticulated pythons are usually associated with water sources, while Burmese pythons are sometimes not. In Indonesia *bivittatus* is said to prefer more arid locations and is less common near human habitations (Stuart *et al.* 2012). In addition, *bivittatus* can tolerate cooler

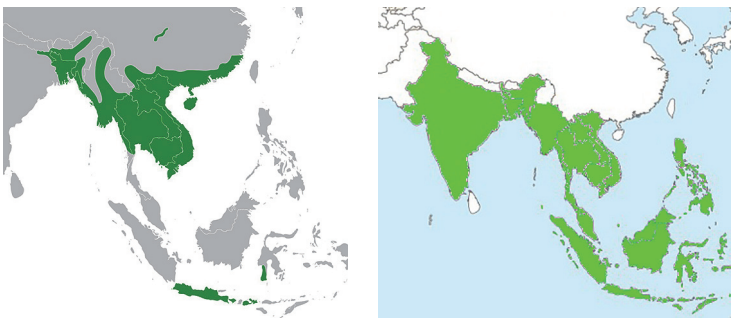


Fig. 2 Ranges of *Bivittatus* (Left) and *Reticulatus* (Right)

Source: Wikipedia Commons.

climates and is known to brumate (hibernate). Otherwise description of their habitats is more or less the same, especially as to their being found in and around water sources, streams, and ponds. Burmese pythons are common around the Tonle Sap in Cambodia, and in the Erhai Lake in central Yunnan. But on the island of Bali in Indonesia, Burmese pythons are found mainly in the northern, more arid part of the island, whereas *reticulatus* is restricted to the more humid areas of the center and south (Mark Aulia p.c.). The Burmese python population throughout its native range is in serious decline (Stuart *et al.* 2012), even while it has increased dramatically in the Florida Everglades where it is thriving as an introduced species following Hurricane Andrew which destroyed a nearby breeding facility in 1992 allowing the escape of the captive snakes.

In Siamese, the reticulated python is called /ɲuu A4 luam A1/ งูเหลือม ‘snake + python’ and the Burmese python is /ɲuu A4 laam A1/ งูหลาม, distinguished as two separate species in the lexicon but obviously deriving from the same root.

In Indonesia, Malaysia, and the far south of Thailand, there exists yet another species known as the blood python (because of its color) *Python curtus*. It is much shorter and heavy-bodied, with a stubby tail, but because of its southerly range it is not relevant to this paper, except in one respect: its Thai name งูหลามปากเป็ด *ɲuu laam paak pet* or ‘duck-billed python’ uses the *bivittatus* taxon, even though the Burmese python does not occur in southern Thailand where *curtus* is found, an indication that the two separate linguistic variants must have developed prior to the time that *Thays* moved into the peninsula (see Fig. 6 below). This situation and its implications will be discussed in greater detail below.

That the names for python in Kam and Sui languages are not cognate with each other, nor with the Tai forms is interesting. Unfortunately, our data from these areas is so far incomplete.

Python bile was the quintessential medicine of southern China and trade in the reptiles became a lucrative enterprise for local people. Schafer (1967, 217) notes that at least as far back as the Tang Dynasty, python farming was carried out by specialists in the counties of Lo and Lei (in present-day southern Guangdong). These were no doubt Burmese pythons that inhabited this region.

With the exception of Siamese not many languages have differentiated them. It may be true, however, that for the second python etymon found in Central branch dialects, for example Lung Ming /taaŋ B/, that is, in the same area, that this is a possibility. One such example from Tày Nùng in Vietnam was brought to my attention by David Holm and is discussed below.

III Kra-Dai (Kra-Tai) Languages

The languages of this stock include three main branches and two sub-branches as shown in Fig. 3.

More recently Weera Ostapirat (2018), as shown in Fig. 4, has modified this arrangement slightly to show the closer affinity of Hlai to Kam-Tai, positing an initial bifurcation between Kra on the left and Daic on the right, and a secondary split between Kam-Tai and Hlai. He also shows Be as splitting off at an earlier period.

The present-day locations of these main groups can be seen on the map in Fig. 5.

It is possible, based on linguistic evidence, to suggest routes of migration that coincide with history to the degree that written records are available. For Chinese this usually means beginning in the Han Dynasty (201–220 BCE), but for Kra-Dai it has meant that written languages are located mainly to the west, beginning in the twelfth century CE.

Work by David Holm (e.g. 2015) with written Tai vernaculars using Chinese characters is most promising and pushes back the time depth for Tai literacy in Guangxi and adjacent parts of Vietnam. In fact, Holm (2017) dates the early vernacular scripts of Central Guangxi to the time of the Sui-Tang transition (c. 600 CE) but with even earlier strata dating from the Han, and suggests that the earliest strata of Chữ NômTày may date from this same period, that is six or seven centuries before the appearance of Vietnamese Chữ Nôm. Still the bulk of Tai history is focused on the western and more recently settled Southwestern Branch groups, skewing the big picture and misdirecting attention away from the geographically older and historically more relevant territory of Lingnan and the southeast China coast.

An example of how the phylogenetic tree relates to history of the Tais can be seen in Fig. 6.

Note here that in the upper branchings, ethnonyms from Chinese history can be

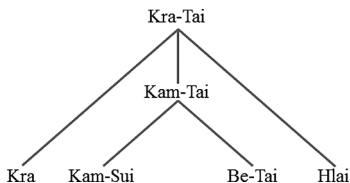


Fig. 3 The Kra-Dai Linguistic Stock

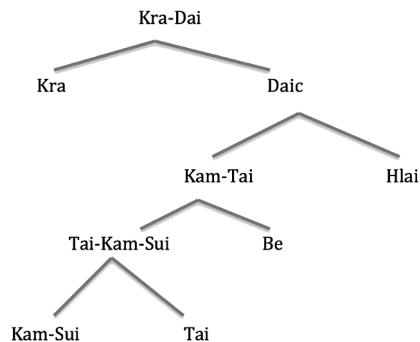


Fig. 4 Modified Kra-Dai Tree

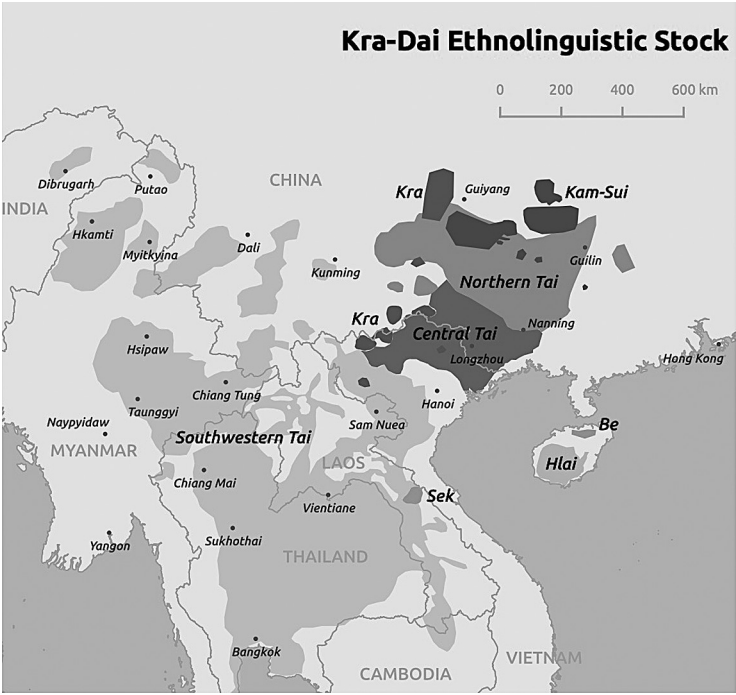


Fig. 5 Map of the Main Kra-Dai Ethnolinguistic Groups
Source: David Wharton, James Chamberlain, and Sylvain Dorey, public domain.

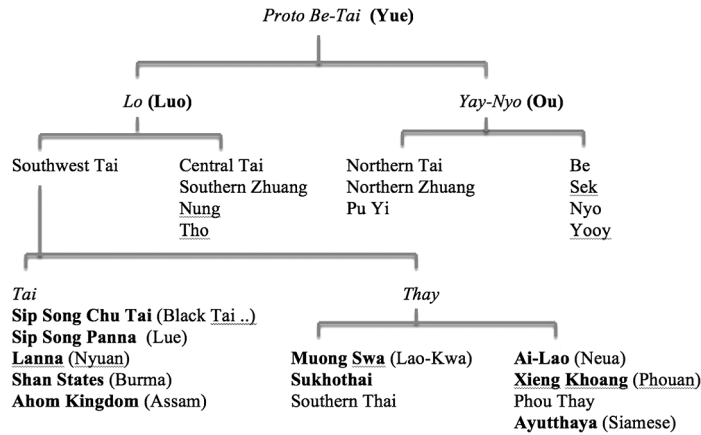


Fig. 6 The Tai Family Tree Linked to Historical Tai States

Table 1 Tai Ethnonyms in Chinese and Vietnamese Histories

Common	Lo	Ou, Nyo	Yi, Yay, Yooy	Yue
Chinese	luo 駱, 鴿, 雒	ou, 甌	yi 倚, 依	yue 越
Old Chinese ¹	*grak, *râk	ʔô, qʰ(r)oʔ	*ʔai, *ʔaiʔ	*giwăt *jwət
Vietnamese	Lạc, cợc	Âu (Mường: <i>nɛw</i>)	Ái, Dươì	Việt
Tai ²	lɔɔ A, kɔk D	ɲɔɔ C (PT* <i>hɲo</i> , <i>hɲo</i>)	yay, yooy C (PT *ʔii, ʔuui, ʔyay C)	-

related to autonyms of modern Tai groups. The above Table 1 may assist readers in following the often-confusing array of ethnonyms as used variously in the historical sources.

IV Snakes and Pythons in Ancient China

Eberhard (1968, 150) suggested that “among the tribes in Southeast Asia, where Ku-like magic is very widely known, the snake may be the true and only magic power.” Thus the category of snakes in Kra-Dai, as might be expected, is a complex one.

Some snakes are named with disyllabic generic level lexemes (like lizards) which, as I have suggested elsewhere (Chamberlain 1981), were probably associated with *ku* [pinyin *gu*] magic. Snakes associated with *ku* magic were mainly kraits and pit vipers which have disyllabic names. Eberhard (1968, 159) writes that on the fifth day of the fifth moon the five dangerous animals—toad, snake, gekko, centipede, and scorpion (or spider)—were placed in a pot to fight with each other, the victorious one becoming the most powerful for that year and the one used for *ku* poison and magic. I have discussed the matter at some length in Chamberlain (1993) suggesting that the Tai etymon for ‘millipede’ /(*boŋ* C3) *kuu* A/ [*boŋ*/ ‘caterpillar’] is a possible correspondence, found throughout SWT and CT. Millipedes are similar in appearance to centipedes which are said to be enemies of snakes and an antidote for *ku* poison.

Also, according to Eberhard (1968, 380ff), snake cults flourished along the coastal areas of southern China in Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong, in other words in the northerly range of the Burmese python. Eberhard also mentions (*ibid.*, 381) that in Guangdong and Guangxi the word ‘snake’ itself was taboo, though unfortunately we do not know what that word was. Snakes could marry women and be worshiped as river gods or gods of lotus ponds. And it is probably not accidental that the Burmese python is usually found in or near water sources. Snakes in such areas are also associated with good health, good

fortune, and wealth. All of these beliefs and more are associated by Eberhard with his “Yueh” Culture, along with bronze drums and the dragon boat festival, linking Tai and Yue (see Chamberlain 2016).

Many of the Tai and other Kra-Dai beliefs concerning pythons are very similar to one another. For example the Black Tai say that if the vine called /cuə? num nɛɛ/ (botanical identity not known) is used, the python can be led about like a dog on a leash, not unlike what Swinehoe wrote in Hainan (1870, 241) that, “the natives declare that they are not hurtful to man, and are easily caught by throwing over their heads a noose of twisted grass, and with this may be led about without danger.”

In the eastern range of Tai, in northern Vietnam and China, pythons are not normally classed as snakes and are referred to as simply *tua A (animal) + ‘python’. The term ‘Snake’, as discussed at the outset, belongs to that category of organisms called Life Forms (LF) by the folk biological taxonomists, along with ‘fish’ and ‘bird’. It has been suggested (Chamberlain 1977) that what sets these categories apart is their lack of physical resemblance to human form, such as the lack of arms and hands, or bodies that are covered with feathers or scales. Where members of such categories as defined by form become closer to humans due to physical or psychological proximity they lose their classificatory status as bird, fish, or snake. The chicken, the duck, and the crow cease to be birds, and the python is no longer a snake.

Although it is convenient here to use the folk systematics terminology for purposes of clarity, this does not imply that school of thought has been accepted verbatim. For example, the use of LF to include or exclude certain species is not well developed, and some LF categories that are put forth in the literature are not in fact used in real language. An example would be ‘mammal’ in English where only recent technical scientific words are available. We do not say, *squirrel mammal, or *wolf mammal in our speech, whereas we do say ‘bull snake’ or ‘rattlesnake’, employing the LF as a part of the taxon. Yet the orthodoxy would assign the label LF to both mammal and snake.

In addition, animals classified by LF, may be less subject to rituals and sacrifices or other edibility restrictions. For example in Lao, presence of a LF in the name may mark the difference between domestic and wild, as in

/too pet/ ‘UB (animal) + duck (G) = domestic duck’

/nok pet/ ‘LF (bird) + duck (G) = wild duck’

Or, also in Lao, the traditionally inedible soft-shell turtle is reclassified as a fish in order to justify its edibility. Thus,

Black Tai /too faa/ 'UB (animal) + soft shell turtle (G)'

Lao /paa faa/ 'LF (fish) + soft shell turtle (G)'

In most Central (CT) and Northern branch (NT) languages, pythons are not classed as snakes, that is, whereas in Southwestern Tai (SWT) the name is a combination of the LF marker 'snake' and the Generic (G) level word 'python', in the CT and NT languages the structure of the taxon is Unique Beginner or Kingdom (UB) plus G, that is, 'animal + python'. (For additional details see Berlin 1992.) A similar problem is addressed by Bulmer (1967) in his classic paper, "Why Is the Cassowary Not a Bird?" and no doubt as in that case, the answer is not straightforward where pythons are concerned. Bulmer concluded (1967) that the cassowary's classificatory position cannot be attributed to taxonomic, morphological, or behavioral characters alone, but must be seen in terms of the culture or cosmology of the Karam ethnic group as a whole. For the python and the Tais (and perhaps other families of the Kra-Dai stock) the great size and its association with water and women, sets it apart from other snakes and other animals generally. We have no firm grasp of either synchronic or diachronic ethnographic detail related to pythons among Tai groups, only the smatterings of information to be gleaned from random fieldwork and Chinese historical documents. The anomalous position it came to hold, *neither fish nor fowl* to use the English expression, due both to its mythological role as deity, brought it firmly into the human domain. In some areas its name was elevated to become the LF marker for 'snake', a quintessential semantic shift (David Holm p.c.).

Of great interest is Eberhard's association of the snake (and in most cases I believe we can relate his 'snake' with the python) with the "Yüeh" culture, as was the case in other early sources discussed below. I will not go into the problems issuing from his cultural divisions, but his summation is interesting when we think of the probable identification of Tai with Yue on China's southern coast, the home of the Burmese python. He relates that for his *Pa* and *Yao* cultures, the snake is inauspicious or evil. In his *Thai* culture, snakes are equated with the *lung*-type dragon and with sexual symbols, but, "only in the Yüeh culture is the snake considered a veritable deity, mostly benevolent. It can marry humans but also receive humans as sacrifices which are rationalized as symbolic marriages. In his Yüeh culture, the snake is most importantly a river god, closely related and often identical with the water dragon *chiao*" (Eberhard 1968, 386), an identification usually reserved for the salt-water crocodile, *Crocodylus porosus*, **PT** ***ɣwək** which in most Tai languages has become a mythological creature (see Chamberlain 1977, 67ff). This crocodile has related forms borrowed into Chinese along the coast, such as Cantonese *ngok*, or Amoy *go 'k-hî* (Douglas 1899). (Benedict in 1976, to account for

the diphthong in Tai, proposed *ɲwuak < ɲ(i)(w)ak based on Indonesian *manjiwak ‘shark’.) And, supporting Eberhard’s linking of ‘dragon’ with serpent, Lung Ming, a CT language, has /tuu A2 ɲoo A4 yii A4/ for ‘crocodile’, that is, classed as a snake (ɲoo).

Snakes, as they are the world over, are associated with various other beliefs and Southeast Asia is no exception. There is the snake that eats the gekko’s liver, the snake that leads the buffalo away, the snake that strikes with its rear end, the snake that throws clubs in the forest. The most universally feared snake (though completely harmless) is *Typhlops*, the blind snake that lives underground (Chamberlain 1981).

Following the Chinese colonization of the south beginning in the Qin and Han dynasties, pythons gradually became recognized as the source of valuable medicine made from their fat pads and bile, and thus became economically important, ostensibly a contribution of the southern peoples to the medical repertoire of Chinese physicians (Churchman 2016, 157ff). The Tai word for ‘fat, healthy’ **PT *buːj or *buːj A** (Ostapirat 2013, 197 Table 16) may be a loan from **OCM *bɛi** 肥, perhaps as a result of its association of python fat in Chinese medicine. But, given the python’s southern distribution, one would assume that Chinese medicine most probably acquired the knowledge from Tais, in which case the borrowing may have gone in the other direction. The Black Tai of northwestern Vietnam, for example say that the fat /pii A4/ of the python /too A2 luam A1/ can be used as a substitute for castration when smeared on the penis and testicles of a horse. They also say the the gall bladder /bii A3/ of the python is placed in alcohol and taken to cure pain in the bones (Author’s fieldnotes 1977). I do not know whether any such specific uses are mentioned in the Chinese materia medica.

Nevertheless, while the idea that the Chinese received their python medical knowledge from the Tais is appealing, there is a complication in this interpretation. David Holm (p.c.) reports that while the Chinese materia medica and pharmacopoeias are replete with references to pythons, the local Tai or Zhuang texts contain no mention of medicinal uses of python parts. For example, medical uses of *bivittatus* and some 15 other snake species are documented in Lin Luhe 林呂何 (1991, 310–348), a Chinese text. However, there is no mention of the python in the Zhuang materia medica (Huang Hanru 2001; Liang and Zhong 2005; Wang Bocan 2006; Zhu 2003), nor in the medical manuals of the Bouyei (Pan *et al.* 2003), Sui (Wang Hou’an 1997), Gelao (Zhao *et al.* 2003), and Yao (Qin and Li 2001). “The Guangxi medicinal animals book is evidently about Chinese (Han Chinese) medicine, and contains no references to minority medical systems” (Holm p.c.).

Fan Chengda (1984), writing in the Song Dynasty, relates that, “The southern people hunt them for their skins, scrape off the scales, and stretch them over drums” (translation by David Holm p.c.). From this it may be inferred that while Chinese interest in pythons

was restricted to practical medicinal value, Tai interest lay mainly in the value of these snakes in ritual (as in the sacred importance of the sound of drums), likely related to Eberhard's depiction mentioned above of snakes in his *Yueh* culture as the subject of myth and veneration. Thus a neat parallel may be seen in the medical importance of the python to the Chinese, in juxtaposition to its spiritual importance to the Tais.

It must be the case, however, since we can assign the gloss of '*Python bivittatus*' to **PT *hnuam**, that Chinese, a northern language, did not have a word for python until their contact, in whatever form, with Proto-Tais (see below).

The flesh of pythons was also consumed, but only selectively. Edibility of pythons and other snakes is not universal. In Western Nung snakes classified as /nguu A4/ cannot be eaten; only the python, not classified as a snake, is deemed edible. For the Yay, no snakes are eaten as they are considered bad omens and if a snake enters the house it will cause illness. The same is true for Black Tai with respect to kraits or king cobras if they are seen during the day (Chamberlain 1981).

V Linguistic Forms for 'Python' in Kra-Dai and Neighboring Languages

By far the best-known terms for 'python' in Tai languages are reflexes of **PT *hnuam** **A**. In general, for the Southwestern branch the initial is always l- and in the Central, Northern branches it is n-. Borrowing into southern Chinese dialects has been assumed by some, for instance Churchman (2016, 158). But Pulleyblank (1991, 264) reconstructs Early Middle Chinese (sixth century) **EMC *ɲiam** [**A**] (the pinyin rendering is *rán*) with a voiced initial, indicating the borrowing must have taken place earlier. For Cantonese, 蟒蛇 *naam*⁴ [=Tai C4 tone] *se*⁴ 'python + snake' is the normal word, also in the voiced series, the C tone suggesting Cantonese may have borrowed directly from Tai, based on pitch contour similarities at the time, as opposed to being a regular development from EMC.

The forms in Be, such as Zhang's /num⁵⁵ A2/, and Savina's *niem*, also suggest early Be voiced initials ***n-** or ***ɲ-** (Ostapirat p.c.), rather than ***hn-** or ***hɲ-** inherited from a hypothetical Be-Tai. The form would therefore seem to derive from a pre-Proto-Tai source.

Furthermore, there is indeed confirmation that borrowing into Chinese must have occurred at a time earlier than EMC. For example, David Holm (p.c.) notes that the 100 CE *Shuowen jiezi* entry for python reads:

𧈧, 大蛇, 可食。从虫𠂔聲。人占切。

Python, a large snake, edible. [Graphic composition] follows ‘insect (虫), with ran (𠂔) as a phonetic element. [Pronounced with the initial of] ren (人) cut with [the final of] zhan (占). (*Shuowen jiezi* 13A: 16a, 1963, 278)

(*Ran*, *ren*, and *zhan* are of course modern Pinyin forms, not reconstructed Old Chinese, and these last three characters of the entry, indicating the pronunciation, were apparently added at a later date.)

An even earlier occurrence of the *ran* character is found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (c. 139 BCE) where it is written, “When the people of Yue get a python they regard it as an item of highest value” (fascicle 18 Jingshen xun 精神訓). Here the character used for python is 𧈧, yet another variant with the same pronunciation.

These would seem to be the source for Zheng Zhang’s OC **njam* 𧈧 ‘python’ (2013, 450). Holm cautions that the character listed in the *Shuowen jiezi* is 𧈧, not 𧈧. The second is a later variant graph first used in the Three Kingdoms period.

Passages from the various post second–third century CE recensions of the *Yi Zhou Shu* 逸周, the original early Zhou text which is no longer extant, are worth examining for their associations of snakes with the Eastern Ou or Ou Yue (Huang Huaixin *et al.* 2007). The chapter entitled “Wang hui jie” 王會解 “The Royal Audience Explained,” fascicle 7, describing the Ou people.

The people of Ou, cicada snakes. Cicada snakes are tame, and delicious to eat.
歐人蟬蛇。蟬蛇順, 食之美。(834)

On this passage, the earliest commentator, Kong Chao 孔晁 of the Wei-Jin period (fourth–fifth century CE), identifies the Ou as a particularly ophiophagous group: “These are the Eastern Yue Ou people. Their snakes are especially numerous even compared with Jiaozhou, and are a high-class delicacy.” The Eastern Ou were located in the Ou River valley near Wenzhou in present-day Zhejiang. They are furthermore considered by some to belong to the Tai linguistic family (see Chamberlain 2016).

Another commentator Pan Zhen 潘振 explains: “The cicada snake is the python. Its tail is round and without scales, and on its body it has spots and stripes, like old dark knotted embroidery” (835). Note that Eberhard (1968, 187), though he provides no details, mentions a “cicada-god” (ch’iung-ch’an) associated with the south.

It is still puzzling nonetheless because the *Huainanzi* and the *Shuowen jiezi* are northern Chinese works, that is, they were compiled north of the Yangtze well beyond the range of the Burmese python. One explanation is suggested by David Holm (p.c.), that pythons, as well as other exotic animals and oddities were sent to royal courts in the north as tribute gifts and that the names of the animals as well as the names of the

people were recorded at these times. Descriptions of such presentations were described in the *Yi Zhou Shu* mentioned above and certainly seem plausible despite problems with the dating. Most importantly, neither the *Huainanzi* nor the *Shuowen jiezi*, nor the *Yi Zhou Shu* recensions make any mention of medicinal use of the python by southern (non-Chinese) peoples.

For Proto-Tai Li (1977) reconstructs **PT *hluem** noting the *l- ~ n-* variation is sporadic and rare in the voiceless series, though in fact the variation is essentially **SWT *hl-**, **CT and NT *hn-**, perhaps implying an initial cluster or a pre-syllable, but more likely a SWT innovation as opposed to an indication of variation at the PT level as in Li. This would imply **PT *hnuam** ‘*Python bivittatus*’ (Ostapirat p.c.).

Vocalic reflexes are:

SW	-ua- ~ ɤɤ- ~ -aa-
C	-u(u)- ~ -ua-
N	-ua- ~ -uuu- ~ -uu-
Be	-ie- ~ -u-

With respect to the vowel, Ostapirat (2013, 203) reconstructs a short diphthong ***ua** based on the correspondence of Siamese *-ua-* and Po-ai *-uuu-* in such words as

	Siamese	Po-ai
moon	duan	nuun
blood	luat	luut
crocodile	ɲwak	ɲuuk

But he also (*ibid.*, 223) notes the possibility of a long labialized diphthong ***wua**: giving:

	Siamese	Yay
boat	rua	rua
salt	klua	kua

In some C and N dialects that show rounded vowels, Ostapirat (p.c) suggests this could be the result of assimilation of the vowel to the point of articulation of the final labial -m, as for example, ***ua** > ua (> u:/u). He notes a similar correspondence in a separate etymon, ***hluam** C ‘brilliant, shiny’ where the Northern dialect Yay has /luam/, as another example.

The occurrence of /laam A1/ in Siamese and Yuan (Sanguan 1969) remains problem-

atical, but could very well be simply a variant that appeared when the early SW Tais came into the territory that is now Thailand where both species were abundant. Given its more northern distribution, we assume that **PT *hnuam** must have referred to *Python bivittatus*. At some point in what is present-day Thailand, the referents of two linguistic forms, /laam/ and /luam/, must have become reversed, though not before the *Thays* (before the establishment of Siam as the nation-state with a Thai autonym) had moved south and applied the /laam A1/ taxon to *Python curtus*, the blood python. As *reticulatus* is found more frequently in and around human habitations, it probably became the default species, replacing *bivittatus*. The Yuan form mentioned for northern Thailand, preserves only the /laam/ variant as the sole word for ‘python’.

Such variation in the same language from a single etymon is reminiscent of the situation in Laos, in the Xam Neua and Pak Xeng dialects of Thay Neua /mii A1/ and /muay A1/ which have come to represent different species of bears, *Ursus thibetanus* and *Helarctos malayanus* (Chamberlain 1977, 126).

Lung Ming, as shall be seen, is another Tai language that retains two distinct etyma for ‘python’ but neither form is a reflex of **PT *hnuam A**.

In this regard a second form needs to be considered, reflexes of **Proto-Central Tai *daaŋ B**, found in Lung Ming, Lei Ping, Lung Chow, and I suspect other locations in southern Guangxi. Notably the words for various species of lizards in Austroasiatic languages contain the form /daaŋ/ or /taaŋ/, for example Khmu Am /daaŋ trpaak/, or Khmu Yuan /tãaŋ lʔiər/ ‘skink’ from an original voiced stop. Savina’s Tay also has *gùng tâng lùm* for a ‘small lizard’. However, since there are no AA speakers in the areas where these Tai dialects are spoken, there would need to be an explanation for how this possible contact form emerged. Finally, some Northern and Central Tai languages, classify skinks as snakes (skinks are long shiny lizards with small limbs), for example Yay /ŋua⁴ sii¹ keem¹/ thereby completing the **snake-lizard-*daaŋ** linkage but leaving us with a puzzle.

I suggest that the answer lies in Kra as its former territory seems to have covered the areas in question prior to the arrival of the Tais (cf Chamberlain 2016). They are also known to share some lexicon with AA (Ostapirat p.c.), hence the Red Gelao form /ma³⁴ ŋ⁴⁴ ʔdaŋ⁴⁴/ for ‘python’ clearly indicates such a connection. It also supports the hypothesis that the Kra spread from west to east. Borrowing from AA could explain the tonal aberrancy as well.

Cantonese tang⁴, (Mandarin téng) 騰 ‘flying dragon’ is most likely not the source as it has a short vowel, the wrong tone class, and difficult semantics. In addition the word seems not to have existed in OC.

Only one source differentiates ***daaŋ B** and ***hnuam A** in the same language, and

that is the Tày Nùng dictionary of Hoàng Văn Ma *et al.* (2006). It is not clear, however, to what extent dialect variation may account for this since both *nurum*, and *lurum* are cited in addition to *taang* indicating considerable dialect differences under the rubric of “Tày Nùng.” And although the glosses for these in Vietnamese are ‘python (*con trăn*)’ and ‘earth python (*trăn đất*)’, the species identification is not provided. The situation is worthy of consideration however since according to the range maps both species co-occur in northern Vietnam.

David Holm and Meng Yuanyao (p.c.) note that /taan/ (dangh) in some areas of Guangxi may mean simply ‘snake’. This type of upward semantic shift, what folk biological systematicists would call a diachronic development from Generic to Life Form taxa, is relatively common, and might even have been anticipated, where one conspicuous and culturally important animal or plant becomes the general term. For example, the word for ‘oak’ becomes the word for ‘tree’ in some Native American languages (Berlin 1972).

Located between Hmong-Mien in the north and Austroasiatic in the south, Kra has an old and mostly unrecognized history. Its name is related to the ancient Chinese states of Xia and Chu (cf Chamberlain 2016, 39ff; Miyake 2018, 18.5.11.23: 59).

Xia (*graʔ C), Chu (*tshraʔ C), and Kra (*khra C)

it appears in a number of important historical contexts in etymologies of which most scholars are unaware, for example:

OC *krâuʔ > Jiaozhi > Giao Chi ‘KEO’

*kra C > *krau C ‘GELAO’ or ‘Ch’ü-lao’ 屈僚 [6th c.]

PKD *khra C > PK *kra C > krau > lau ‘KLAO’ > laau ‘LAO’

Another example of a shared word with AA is Kra/klaan/ ‘hawk’, **PMK *k(a)laan** ‘osprey’.

Lung Ming (Gedney fieldnotes) has yet another word glossed as ‘python’ /ŋow⁴ laan⁶ C4/ which is cognate with Hlai /naan ~ naan C/ indicating a contact to the east, in keeping with the assumed closer alignment of Hlai with Kam-Tai. The word is reconstructed in Proto-Hlai as ***C-naanʔ** (=Tai C tone) but so far cognates in other languages have not been found. Hlai (Li) peoples occupied the coastal regions from Canton to at least as far south as Jiuzhen (Thanh Hoa and south) and the Central-Southwestern Tais (the Luo Yue), and the Northern Tais (the Ou Yue) would have encountered them when they migrated into the area fleeing the Qin and Han invaders. It is generally assumed that Hlai is closer to Tai than Tai is to Kra, so these terms may perhaps descend from a

Proto-Daic root such as ***mlaapʔ**, to use Ostapirat's classification. It is tempting to infer that a suggested Proto-Daic form is the source for **OC *mâŋʔ < *mlâŋʔ** (Schuessler 2007). The tone category matches, and note Amoy: *bóng, báng* 'python' (Douglas 1899). On the Chinese side, I do not know whether reflexes for this form occur in the non-coastal Chinese dialects. It does not appear in the OC reconstructions of Baxter and Sagart (2014).

Sek etyma are of interest as they imply that Sek may have split off from the Tai mainstream earlier than has been assumed. Given that this language preserves so many other archaisms it is puzzling that Sek contains none of the forms mentioned so far. For Sek /ɲua⁴ tloɔ¹/ the origin would seem to be Kri-Mol: Kri: /tālqɑ/ and Mlengbrou: /tāloɔ/ both meaning 'skink' (Chamberlain 2018, 109). But note also Mlengbrou /krəw/ 'python' (*ibid.*, 107). As mentioned above, there seems to be a connection between python and skink in naming practices. The other Sek word /ɲua⁴ tren¹/ is an obvious Kri-Mol (Vietic) loanword, for example Ahlao /luk tälɛn/ from **PMK *t()lan** (Diffloth 1980). Sek and Kri-Mol-Mol languages of Kri, Mlengbrou are located on the Nakai Plateau in the Nam Noy and Nam One river valleys of Khammouane province in central Laos.

In Kam-Sui speaking areas, according to the distribution map, there should be no pythons. Yet in at least two sources, names have been glossed as 'boa': Sui: /hui² caŋ⁵ B1/ (Mahidol University 2003a) and Kam: /sui²¹² ʔaa⁵⁵/ (Mahidol University 2000). (The English gloss 'boa' is incorrect for although members of the family Boidae are also large constrictors, they occur only in the new world.) There is on the map an isolated population of *bivittatus* in eastern Sichuan, but whether it is an original part of the range, for example a northern extension of the Yunnan range, or a human import is not clear. Because of the use of the fat and bile in Chinese traditional medicine, the animal has been widely traded (Churchman 2016, 157–159). The names given seem not to be cognate with any of the words for python found in Tai languages. Note also the recent invasive population of *bivittatus* in the Florida Everglades in the United States, indicating a strong propensity for adaptation to new environments for this species.

With ***hnuam A** emanating from Lingnan it is worth noting that Vietnamese has not acquired this word, either from Be-Tai or from Chinese. The Vietnamese word is *trăn* from **PMK *t()lan** (Muong /klan/ or /tlan/), the closest cognates found far to the south in Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and in Laos (Chamberlain 2018, 107). And although a number of Kri-Mol (Vietic) contact forms are found in Hlai, the word for python is not among them, except perhaps for Swinehoe's nineteenth century form *vang*, and the Tourn-Ruc (Poọng) item *vang vang* 'python' (Gérard Diffloth p.c.). It must also be the case that the Sinitic creoles of the Chinese commanderies at Jiuzhen (Thanh Hoa), Huai Huan (Nghe An), Jiude (Ha Tinh), and Rinan (Quang Binh) were established before

pythons became economically important enough for the local word to have been borrowed into Early Middle Chinese. Indeed we have seen that Sek borrowed its python taxa from Kri-Mol (Vietic).

What Does Not Occur

Sometimes what is not there is just as important as what is. For example, the three main etyma for ‘pythons’ in Kra-Dai, and the Old Chinese word ***prâ** ‘python’ are not found in Sino-Vietnamese (***mâŋʔ** may be found in literary contexts, Thiều Chửu 2001, 586). Cognates for Chinese *rán* are not found in Min even though the range of *bivittatus* includes Fujian. Reflexes for **PT *hnuam A** are not found in Kam-Sui, nor in Pu Yi, nor in Hlai, nor in Kra. And none of the words relate to Proto-Austronesian **PAN *cawa**.

VI Lexicon for ‘Python’ in Kra-Dai and Chinese

PAN *cawa (Wolff 2010)

Found in Philippines, Sulawesi, Old Javanese, Malay, Moken—but not Formosa

Kra

Red Gelao: ma³⁴ ŋ⁴⁴ ʔdaŋ⁴⁴ A ‘python, boa’ (Mazo *et al.* 2011)

Note: Central dialects (see below) show the B tone, the irregularity probably due to borrowing from AA.

Hlai

Proto-Hlai: ***C-naapʔ** (Cun: nɔn³, Baoting: naan³, Lauhut: naaŋ³)
(Norquest 2007) (cf Lung Ming: ɲow⁴ laan⁶ C4)

Be

Savina: niem
Zhang: num⁵⁵ (A2 voiced series)

Kam-Sui

Sui: hui² eaŋ⁵ B1 ‘boa’ (Mahidol University 2003a)
Kam: sui²¹² ʔaa⁵⁵ ‘boa’ (Mahidol University 2000)

Sek

- Gedney: $\eta u a^4 t l o \omega^1$ (older generation)
 (fieldnotes) $\eta u a^4 t r o \omega^1$ (younger generation)
 $\eta u a^4 t r \acute{e} n^1$ (< Kri-Mol, eg. Ahlao: luk tälén, Chamberlain 2018, 107)
 < Kri-Mol: Kri: /tälqɑ/, Mlengbrou: /tälɔɔ/ both mean ‘skink’
 And also Mlengbrou /krəw/ ‘python’

Hainan

- vang* language not known (Swinehoe 1870) but curiously it seems related to Kri-Mol (Vietic), Poŋg /vang vang/ (Gérard Diffloth p.c.), of the Toum-Ruc subgroup of Kri-Mol (cf Chamberlain 2018), spoken in southwestern Nghe-An Province, Vietnam. A number of Kri-Mol terms show contact with Hlai on Hainan, no doubt from the early presence of Li (Hlai) peoples on the mainland.

Tai**PT * η /luam A or * η uam A**

- SW: Siamese: luam A1 ‘*M.r.*’, laam A1 ‘*P.b*’
 Yuan: laam A1 ‘python’ (Sanguan 1969)
- C: Nung: nuom A1 (Li)
 Tay: luam A1 (initial influenced by SW dialects)
 WN: num A1 (author fieldnotes)
 S. Zhuang: num¹, num¹ (Holm and Meng Yuanyao p.c.)
- N: Po-ai: nuuum A1 (Li)
 Yay: nuam A1 (author fieldnotes)
 N. Zhuang: tu² nuum¹ (David Holm and Meng Yuanyao p.c.)

Central dialects only:

- Lung Ming: tuu⁵ taar⁵ B4 (Gedney fieldnotes)
 Lung Chow, NungS: taar⁵ B4 (Gedney fieldnotes)
 Lei Ping: tuu² thaar⁵ B4 (Gedney Field notes)
 NungS: tang (Savina)
 S. Zhuang: tu² taang⁶ B, also ‘snake’ (Holm and Meng Yuanyao p.c.)

Tày (Hoàng Văn Ma *et al.* 2006):

tang ‘python’
(tu) nurum, (tu) lưom ‘earth python’

Northern Branch:

Mashan num¹ ‘python’; taan² B (?) ~ ɲuuu ‘snake’ (Holm and Meng Yuanyao p.c.) [Mashan is situated on the boundary between Northern and Southern Zhuang.]

David Holm (p.c.) notes that within the Southern Zhuang area, the eastern counties such as Yongning, Shangsi, Qinzhou, Fusui and Fangcheng tend to share much of their lexicon with Northern Zhuang, whereas the western counties of Longzhou, Pingxiang, the western part of Ningming, Daxin, Dahua, and Jingxi are solidly Central Tai.

And:

Pu Yi (Bouyei): ɲu² pan² (Mahidol University 2001)

And:

Lung ming: ɲow⁴ laan⁶ C4 (Gedney fieldnotes) (cf. Hlai)

Chinese etyma:

𪚩 ‘python, large snake, edible’ in the *Shuowen jiezi* (1963, 278) [100 CE] [Probably the source for Zheng Zhang, the character 𪚩 was not used until the Three Kingdoms period.]

OC *ɲjam 𪚩 ‘python’ (Zheng Zhang 2013, 450)

rán ‘python’ EMC *ɲiam 𪚩 (Pulleyblank 1991, 264)

naam⁴ (B = Tai C) ‘python’, Cantonese. Seems to have been borrowed from Tai as the tone is wrong, and therefore not directly descended from EMC. The initial agrees with Tai.

OCM *mân? < *mlân? ‘python’ 蟒 (Schuessler 2007)

Amoy: bóng, báng ‘python’ (Douglas 1899)

[Hainan: *vang* language not known (Swinehoe 1870)]

OCM *prâ ‘python’ 巴 (Schuessler 2007)

VII Conclusions

In summary, examination of the Kra-Dai words for python, enables us to infer certain patterns of Tai distribution in relation to the other families in the stock, and to confirm elements of the ordering of separations of these families from each other. It also allows us to infer that at least one of the Old Chinese terms ***niam** was an early loan from Tai, **PT *hnuam A** ‘*Python bivittatus*’, that probably occurred during the Han Period from Eastern Ou Yue in present day Zhekiang, in the vicinity of Wenzhou just slightly to the north of Fujian and no doubt within the range of *bivittatus* at the time. Be forms agree with OC with voiced onsets, and not with Tai. It is the only Kra-Dai languages to do so. As it retains the A tone, the forms are unlikely to be borrowings from Cantonese.

In terms of current geography, reflexes of **PT *hnuam A** extend from the Northern and some Central dialects of Guangxi and northern Vietnam, and on through all of the Southwestern Tai dialects in Laos, Thailand, Burma, Yunnan, and Assam. For Southwestern Tai there is little variation. **PSWT *hluam A** is probably an innovation and can in most cases refer to either *Python bivittatus* or to *Malayopython reticulatus*, the exception being Siamese where the two species are differentiated by variant reflexes of the same root, /laam/ and /luam/. This appears to have resulted from the highly sympatric distribution of the two pythons in western and central Thailand. Elsewhere there are gaps in our data, such as Lakkia and Biao, but for the most part this is the extent of this etymon’s distribution. It has been borrowed into Cantonese, but the Min dialects to the north employ reflexes of **OCM *mânʔ**. Apart from this, the usage and geographical distribution of ***mânʔ** and of **OC *prâ** is unknown. It is suggested however, that the Lung Ming-Hlai correspondence, Lung Ming /laan C4/ ~ **Proto-Hlai *C-naanʔ**, may be an original Daic form that was borrowed into **Old Chinese *mânʔ < *malânʔ** (Schuessler 2007).

Proto-Central Tai *daan reflexes are found in most Central dialects of southern Guangxi and northern Vietnam. It is cognate with Red Gelao /²daŋ⁴⁴/, but the etymon appears to be an AA contact form, used often in lizard names in Khmu and Pramic, and frequently borrowed into Tai languages. The hypothesis here is that Tais received the word from Kra speakers who were the earlier inhabitants of the territory. Kra moving south from Guizhou and points north would have intermingled first with AA peoples along the Sino-Vietnamese border before heading east. There must have been some ethnic confusion between Kra and AA groups when viewed from the outside, to a degree where the term Kra became the exonym for Austroasiatic speakers in the Southwestern Tai languages, both groups residing on upland slopes and practicing swidden cultivation

(for further discussion, see Chamberlain 2016, 43ff).

Thus, we may note the curious associative pattern between AA ‘skink’ and Tai ‘python’ that is manifested in AA *daaŋ ‘skink’ > CT *daaŋ ‘python’ and repeated elsewhere in AA (eg. Kri tālqɑ) ‘skink’ and Sek / tloɔʔ ‘python’. We might speculate, based upon Eberhard’s point mentioned above, that if the word for ‘snake’ (i.e. ‘python’) were taboo, a deceptive surrogate or avoidance term would have been needed and the skink could have been used for that purpose. It has been noted for Black Tai (Chamberlain 1977, 70) that the soul of the *Calotes* agamid lizard /too pɑm sakεε/ is sent to heaven as a substitute for a child’s soul at the birth ceremony /sen soŋ kuaʔ/ to prevent the original parents from reclaiming the infant. It remains a semantic, ethnozoological, and historical linguistic puzzle.

From an examination of the folklore contained in Eberhard and the *materia medica* sources for Chinese as well as for Zhuang, Kam-Sui, and Gelao, it is evident that the Chinese medicinal uses of pythons developed independently and were not borrowed from Tai peoples, while the Ou Yue-Tai (NT) beliefs associated with pythons on the other hand were spiritual in nature. From their naming practices it seems the Central Branch Tais preserve clear evidence of the old taboos. And, from comparisons of the folk biological systems of the three branches, the SWT (Lo-Yue) associations with python may relate primarily to edibility. Pythons in SWT names are classed as snakes, whereas in NT they are not. CT usually avoids the name altogether and substitutes another word.

Other highly conspicuous fauna include the salt water crocodile with a similar coastal range in the north as far as Fujian. But unlike ‘python’ it has Chinese contact forms in both Fujian and Cantonese and is found throughout the Tai family with regular correspondences, **PT** *ŋuak (we do not know whether reflexes occur in Be, but the Sek form is /ŋuak/ with the expected vowel correspondence). It does not occur in Kam-Sui.

Significantly, it is clear that we cannot reconstruct a root form for python of either species in Proto Kra-Dai as might be expected if Proto-Kra-Dais inhabited the territory of Lingnan in present day Guangdong and Guangxi. The range of *bivittatus* includes Fujian and parts of Jiangxi, but this seems to be the northern extreme of its current range. The most common root is reconstructable only in Tai. This can be interpreted to mean that the Tais moved into the core area of Lingnan only after they had separated from Kam-Sui, but before they began their migration to the west. Even Pu Yi does not have a reflex for this root. It also suggests that the origin of the Kra-Dai stock was well to the north of the range of the pythons.

The three etyma for python preserved in Tai well represent links with the other families within Kra-Dai, Hlai to the east, and Kra to the west, and even ultimately with Austroasiatic and Chinese. The northerly coastal range of the Burmese python offers

support to the idea of Tai-Yue common identity expressed both linguistically and in the folklore of the snake cults described by Eberhard. I hope this brief study will lead to an appreciation of the importance of Central Tai lexicon in unraveling the complexities of the python's position in Kra-Dai language, culture, historical geography, and external relationships, as well as of its role in demonstrating the enormous value of multidisciplinary studies.

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Application of Center-Periphery Theory to the Study of Vietnam-China Relations in the Middle Ages*

Nguyen Thi My Hanh**

Based on the generalizations in international researchers' views on the relationship between the center and the periphery, the author maps out a theory on the relationship between Vietnam (as the periphery) and China (as the center of East Asia) during feudalism. On the basis of the theory of central-peripheral relationships and the realities of a diplomatic relationship between Vietnam and China during feudalism, the article proves not only that China considered itself to be the center of East Asia with the role of "educating" surrounding peripheries, but also that surrounding countries were influenced by Chinese Confucian ideologies. For example, Vietnam also followed the Chinese-centric order. Accordingly, acts such as requesting investiture and tribute from Vietnam to the "center" (China) were sustained for a long period, although there was no balance in interest between the two countries. In addition to the subordinate tendency of the periphery in relation to the center, there is a centrifugal tendency because of the asymmetry in interest. In the case of the Vietnam-China relationship at that time, Vietnam's subordinate tendency was relative and superficial, while the centrifugal tendency was mainstream. The author shows that the strong centrifugal tendency led to the transformation of Vietnam's position from a Chinese vassal/peripheral state into a center in relationships with smaller countries in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: center, periphery, subordinate tendency, centrifugal tendency, Chinese-centric order

Introduction

The center-periphery theory and the interaction between the two elements is a well-established research subject. At the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, some scientists of the geography-anthropology school, such as L. Frobenius, F. Ratse (Ratzel 1882), and F. Grabner (1911) introduced diffusionism theory to explain

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the geographic spread of culture. Since then, many researchers around the world have continued to discuss the multidimensional interaction between the center and periphery on a geopolitical level from the perspectives of political sociology (Galtung 1971; Gunder Frank 1971; Naustdalslid 1974) and cultural anthropology (Wissler 1922). Furthermore, several researchers have discussed the cultural interaction between the center and periphery, with the periphery receiving the spread and dissemination of the central culture. In fact, the center-periphery concept is used for different purposes, but all are based on the idea that societal relations can be analyzed using the center-periphery model, and that the relationship between center and periphery is of fundamental importance for an understanding of the society or sector of society one is concerned with (McKenzie 1977, 55–74). Within the scope of this article, the author can only select some of the most prominent works that deal directly with the relationship between the center and the periphery as well as the degree of interaction between them to illuminate a specific case. This case is the diplomatic relationship between the great nation of China (regarded as the center) and the smaller country of Vietnam (considered the periphery) since the beginning of the tenth century.

The period of study begins in 938, when Vietnam gained independence after centuries of Chinese rule, and ends in 1885, when France and China signed the Tianjin Treaty ending the tributary relationship between Vietnam and China. Vietnam was no longer a vassal state of China, nor did it see China as a mother country anymore; instead, it depended on France (*Documents diplomatiques* 1885, 259–260). During this period, the relationship between China and Vietnam was indeed a relationship between two nations, between two sovereign states. At the same time, this was also when Vietnam was a peripheral, or vassal, state in its relations with China and under the tributary system of which China was the center. It should be noted that the periods immediately before 938, when Vietnam was a Chinese district, and after 1885, when Vietnam was a French colony, are not suitable for applying center-periphery theory. This is because the relationship between Vietnam and China just before the tenth century and after 1885 was essentially a relationship between geopolitical entities in which Vietnam was not an independent state that had the right to take the initiative in diplomatic relations with China.

The current study focuses on the following problems: What are the similarities and differences between this central-peripheral relationship at the regional level and center-periphery theory? In addition to being a cultural center, did China cultivate other superior elements to form its own “center” in the contemporary East Asian order? As a peripheral country, was Vietnam somehow attracted to Chinese culture, politics, and economy? Was Vietnam completely absorbed into the orbit of the Chinese center, or did it ceaselessly attempt to be centrifugal, to itself become a center in Southeast Asia with

a similar position to China? In the present context, China's strong rise—coupled with its ambition of establishing an Asia-centric world order in which it is in a global dominant position—is becoming a challenge for many countries in the region and around the world. Therefore, studying the above questions using the center-periphery model is necessary in order to draw lessons that can be applied to the current context.

This article begins with an overview of the center-periphery theory as discussed in the works of prominent scholars such as John Scott, Gordon Marshall, Edward Shils, Samuel P. Huntington, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Brantly Womack. The article does not mention every aspect of center-periphery theory but focuses on the most fundamental issues of the theory that can be applied to relations between Vietnam and China in the tenth to nineteenth centuries. In addition to pointing out the strengths of this theory, the author also points out the shortcomings. Subsequently, this article applies the basic tenets of the theory to the practical study of Chinese-Vietnamese relations from the tenth century to the nineteenth century, a period in which China played a central role and Vietnam acted as a peripheral state. The paper concludes with the parallels between theory and practice, as well as pointing out the contributions and additions of practice to theory.

Center-Periphery Theory

The concept of center and periphery is becoming popular in social science research. In the literature there are many pairs of concepts with similar categories, such as nucleus and periphery, core and periphery, urban and suburban satellite, and urban and suburban. Whatever it is called, no researcher can deny the interaction between center and periphery. As the English sociologists Scott and Marshall said, "The centre-periphery (or core-periphery) model is a spatial metaphor which describes and attempts to explain the structural relationship between the advanced or metropolitan 'center' and a less developed 'periphery'" (Scott and Marshall 1994, 71). Accordingly, it is impossible to determine what an advanced center is if it is not placed in a comparable position with less advanced peripheries. Thus, there is no center without a periphery, and vice versa: there can be no periphery without a center for reference.

The center-periphery theory, born in capitalist countries, is used by researchers to refer to the relationship between developed capitalist societies and developing countries, with the former playing the role of center and the latter existing as peripheries. However, because of the universality of this theory, it is now applied to research not only in the capitalist world but also in various social regimes and in geography, cultural anthropology,

literature, or diplomatic history.

The theory of the relationship between the center and periphery shows three points of view, with almost opposite opinions. The first shows that the relationship is based on consensus rather than confrontation. The typical expression of this opinion was stated by the American sociologist Shils (1910–95) in his “Center and Periphery” (1961). He made a great contribution by introducing the center-periphery concept into the social scientific academic vocabulary. According to Shils, no confrontation exists between the center and periphery: there is always a certain consensus. The center (on a cultural level) is the place where traditional values converge, especially rituals and sacred beliefs, and it receives prestige from peripheral countries. Accordingly, Shils defines the center concept as something that is paramount and extremely sacred in the field of symbols, values, and creeds (Shils 1961a, 117; 1975, 3). He uses the concept of center-periphery when examining the relationship between cities and provinces in a country (Shils 1961a). Through the specific case of cities and provinces in India, he clarifies the relationship between the center (city) and periphery (province). According to Shils, the city is the center of vitality and a cradle of creativity, while the provinces are rude, unimaginative, clumsy, subtle, crude, mediocre, and narrow. He realizes that in order to have “affluent dependence” and not be impoverished, provinces (peripheries) need to be culturally saved by the center (city), which has a respectable culture (Shils 1961b). From that respect, the center causes the periphery to follow it. This thought is the premise for the diffusionism theory, which discusses characteristics of culture and the diffusion of culture from the center to the periphery. The propagation of culture from the center to the periphery was later described by Robert Winthrop in his *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* as being “both contingent and arbitrary” (Winthrop 1991, 83–84).

Contrary to Shils’s point of view, there is a second opinion stream represented by Huntington. Huntington is well known for his work “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1993), which was later developed into a book titled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). In his opinion, “Civilization identity will be more important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations.” These civilizations include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Muslim, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African (Huntington 1993, 22). Thus, Huntington divided the world into seven—possibly eight—civilizations. He states that when looking at the relationship between the center of a civilization and its periphery, he sees no consensus and cooperation like Shils did; rather, he predicts (almost asserts) a clash among them: “Conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world” (*ibid.*, 25).

Not agreeing with the views of either Shils or Huntington, the American scientists

Wallerstein and Womack came up with a fairly neutral view between the two. Although they do not specifically mention center-periphery theory, the asymmetric theory of international relations, which Womack put forward, is essentially about asymmetry in the relationship between the center and the periphery, between larger and smaller countries. From works such as “Asymmetry Theory and China’s Concept of Multipolarity” (Womack 2004, 351–366), *China and Vietnam: Politics and Asymmetry* (Womack 2006), “Asymmetry and China’s Tributary System” (Womack 2012a, 37–54), and *Asymmetry and International Relationships* (Womack 2012b), we see that Womack chose China as the main axis in his study of international relations in Asia. China’s centrality to its neighbors gives it territorial and political advantages in the forms of security, wealth, and economic prosperity, especially in times of weakness and political disorientation among its neighbors (Womack 2012a, 39). In particular, the influence of Chinese Confucian culture on neighboring countries and, consequently, the survival of the tributary system for a long time makes Womack recognize China as a “solid center” in comparison with other centers around the world. In this regard, Womack states: “In contrast to the traditional West that had a ‘liquid center’—the Mediterranean—around and through which regimes swirled, China has been Asia’s ‘solid center’ of greatest productivity and population” (*ibid.*). However, he still has to acknowledge the relative power of the relationship between the center and the periphery, between large and small countries. According to him, it is an asymmetric relationship: the smaller countries always carry their “vulnerability” (Womack 2004, 365). If “larger states are prudent, consultative and cooperative . . . smaller states are less likely to be worried about their vulnerability” and thus will “tend to accept the international order led by the larger state because it is inclusive of their interests” (*ibid.*). Conversely, when large countries do not cooperate with small countries and threaten their interests—actions that make small countries vulnerable—the tendency to become dependent decreases, even to the point of the two sides confronting each other. Thus, Womack affirms, “The key to a peaceful frontier did not lie in dominating neighbors, but rather in managing a mutually acceptable relationship” (Womack 2012a, 42). In addition, he points out that one of the most important factors that can weaken China’s central position is the expansion of other peripheral relationships around the center (*ibid.*, 44).

Wallerstein’s views are similar to Womack’s. In more than 20 books and more than 300 scientific papers, Wallerstein discusses world system theory associated with a central-peripheral perspective. Although his theory is based on the study of European cases and capitalism, many of his arguments are generalized, reflecting the universal nature of central-peripheral relationships around the world through historical periods.

Among his works, the four-volume *The Modern World-System* can be considered the

most representative. In Volume 1, *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Wallerstein 1974), and Volume 4, *Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (Wallerstein 2011), Wallerstein initially shows unequal development relations among countries in the same world system. Specifically, he emphasizes inequality and exploitation between the center and periphery: resources such as capital and labor were exploited in the capitalist society that he lived in. Moreover, he states that the allocation of capital, resources, and labor takes place under unequal competition between the center and periphery, and among central areas. He also initially discusses this asymmetric relationship under feudalism, saying, “During the feudal period, political power of empires was dependent on the economic power of government through commercial monopoly combined with the usage of force from which governed the flow of commerce from Periphery into the centre” (*ibid.*). In Volume 3, *The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s–1840s* (Wallerstein 1989), Wallerstein takes a global economic perspective to assert that Latin America, Africa, and Asia, including China, existed as the periphery in the nineteenth century, while Europe played the role of center.

Continuing in this research direction, he published two works, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (1979) and *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System* (1991) to further illustrate the theory of center-periphery relationships. In the former, Wallerstein analyzes the basic contrasts between the center and peripheries. In his opinion, the unequal distribution of resources in the economy and the “superiority” of institutions in central states are key determinants of the center’s power versus peripheries’. As a result, the center plays the dominant and decisive role while peripheries tend to be isolated and dependent (Wallerstein 1979, 1–164). An asymmetry of interests in the relationship between center and periphery is thus inevitable. Consequently, the periphery is constantly looking to fight insidiously or publicly to change the current order. As V. E. Davidovich, in *Under the Lens of Philosophy*, asserts, “The whole play of world political forces depends on its struggle and confrontation (periphery) with center [*sic*]” (Davidovich 2002, 433). Davidovich emphasizes the unstable nature of the center: in addition to the center and the periphery, there are also semi-peripheral countries. The semi-periphery is in the buffer position between the center and periphery. It constantly tries to improve its position by getting out of its peripheral status and becoming the new center, which is complementary to the original center. Therefore, there are semi-peripheral areas that act as a periphery to the center but are the center of other peripheries. This results in unpredictable changes in the positions of centers, semi-peripheries, and peripheries (Wallerstein 1979, 88–90).

Thus, through the central-peripheral theoretical analysis of a number of scholars,

we find the basic issues that can be applied to a study of the relationship between Vietnam (periphery) and China (center) from the beginning of the tenth century to the late nineteenth century. First, researchers have pointed out the fundamental factors that determine the central location of a large country in a region: natural advantages, geographic location, cultural superiority, economic and political development, and the ability to provide security for smaller countries. These advantages of the center make peripheral countries respect it and accept the international order it leads.

Second, researchers have shown that the relationship between the center and the periphery is an asymmetric one of powers and interests. This gives peripheral countries a feeling of “vulnerability” that no country can eliminate (Womack 2004, 365).

Third, while Shils asserts that the relationship between the center and periphery is based merely on consensus with no confrontation, Huntington makes a negative forecast about the inevitable confrontation between the center and periphery. Based on prior research and historical facts, Womack and Wallerstein reevaluate it as a two-sided relationship. According to them, the periphery depends on the center out of respect and because it seeks cultural, economic, and institutional salvation from the center to escape from poverty. On the other hand, the periphery and center are always in covert or overt confrontation because of the centrifugal tendency and expectation of escape from the dependence of the periphery on the center. Among these two trends—centrifugal and dependent—when was the centrifugal trend and confrontation stronger in the context of Vietnam-China relations? When was the trend for dependency stronger? What factors influenced the strengths and weaknesses of these two trends? These are questions that emerge from existing scholarship that this study hopes to clarify when looking back at the reality of Vietnam-China relations during the period of feudalism.

Application of the Theory to the Study of the China-Vietnam Relationship from the Early Tenth Century to the Late Nineteenth Century

Factors That Make China's Position Central

The relationship between big country and small country, and between center and periphery, has always been a core issue in international relations. The word “small” or “big” in terms of “small country, big country” is only relative. A country is smaller when compared to countries with a larger territory that are more populated or have stronger military, economic, political, or cultural ability to influence and control other countries. A country may be bigger than one country but smaller than another one. Similarly, the terms “center” and “periphery” are also relative. A country can be considered the cen-

ter of certain peripheral countries, but it can be a peripheral or semi-peripheral country in relation to another center. In these relationships, the center often has many plans and options to induce peripheral countries to follow it. Meanwhile, small and peripheral countries are vulnerable: “The vulnerabilities of small nations have been demonstrated countless times throughout history” (Goodby 2014, 32). Therefore, it is not random that Thucydides, in *The Peloponnesian War*, stated that “the strong do what they want to do and the weak accept what they have to accept” (Thucydides 1954, 358–366). Although this statement is not true in every case, it reflects the superiority of the center and the vulnerability of small countries (i.e., peripheries).

At least until 1860, China was considered the center of East Asia. The year 1860 was when China formally accepted diplomatic relations directly with the Western powers after its defeat in the Second Opium War of 1856–60 and reluctantly abandoned the tributary system, although the last remnant of the tributary system lasted until 1885 in Vietnam and 1894 in Korea. China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 lost it its last tributary country—Korea (Kim 2008, 35–56). Surrounding the center (China) and its civilized space, peripheral countries were divided into two rings. The inner one was next to the Hua Xi center and included BaiYue (百越/百粵) in the south, Beidi (北狄) in the north, and Xirong (西戎) in the west. The second—outer—ring included countries influenced by the Han civilization, such as Japan, North Korea, and Vietnam.

To gain the central position, China had to have certain advantages over its smaller neighbors. The first advantage came from territory and geographical position. China had the largest territory and population. In addition, it is in a geographically central position, sharing a border with more countries than any other country in the world (it shares a border with 14 countries). Accordingly, China holds a position of “respect,” at least in terms of geography.

In terms of economy and politics, China’s favorable natural conditions give it another advantage: it has developed a relatively strong agricultural production. Since ancient times, China has reached a high level of socioeconomic development compared to other nations. China was a highly centralized state during the ancient and middle ages. As a centralized feudal political institution and an administrative and social organization model, China became the model for Vietnamese feudal dynasties, and many other countries in the region learned from China and followed it. Therefore, China had a preeminent political position in the region during the feudalism period. It had such a strong position that other countries did not want to oppose it.

Chinese culture was at that time considered “one of the brightest flames in the East” (Đặng Thai Mai 1994, 30). Due to its advantages of being rich in material resources as well as a large country with a large population, China soon reached a relatively high

socioeconomic level compared to other nations. Very early in its existence, under the Han Dynasty, it developed norms of lifestyle, ethics, human behavior, social order, family order, and social order. These norms were called Confucianism. Standards were set by the center and spread to the peripheries, including Vietnam. Among the ideological determinants must be mentioned the unique idea of China's position in the galaxy. At that time, the Chinese ruling class called its own clan "Huaxia." *Hua* means "essence of the universe," and *xia* means "strength" (Nguyễn Anh Dũng 1982, 91). After that, the concept of "inside are the Xia, outside are the Yi" was introduced, where Huaxia played the central role while the peripheral countries were Nanman, Dongyi, Xirong, and Beidi (Four Barbarians in the Four Directions). The Chinese emperor implicitly attributed to himself the role of granting prestige and virtue to all. He used the Huaxia culture to teach the Beidi and Dongyi (also known as "Use Huaxia to change Beidi and Dongyi"; Lê Tấn 1961, 43–45). Liam Kelley, in his book *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, asserts that in a nutshell, at least since the Shang Dynasty (eighteenth to eleventh century BC), peoples classified as "Chinese" have felt that their society, scripts, and complex rituals are superior to those of wandering desert dwellers, people living in the grasslands in the north and northwest, as well as those living in the rain forests in the south (Kelley 2005). Therefore, it is logical for Chinese to have hierarchical relationships with others. Those who want to have relations with China must recognize the superiority of the Chinese ruler—the Son of Heaven—by kowtowing and offering presents (*ibid.*, 9–23). Obviously, China does not consider itself as the center solely in order to educate peripheral people. Those who are influenced by Chinese Confucian ideology maintain the superior and inferior positions between them, between the larger country and the smaller one, in accordance with the Theory of Righteousness and the Command of Heaven. Peripheries themselves admit the central role of China. In the case of Vietnam, Alexander Barton Woodside in *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* does not hesitate to affirm that the Vietnamese court was under "Confucian rather than Nationalist" influence (Woodside 1988, 21) and that in Vietnam, as in China, it was commonly believed that men received their nature or their endowment of abilities and aptitudes from heaven, which was the ultimate source of all things. This belief made the Son of Heaven the humanly incarnated source of education and economic sustenance, the "father and mother" of the people (*ibid.*, 13).

Vietnamese dynasties did not formally acknowledge Chinese emperors as their rulers, but they expressed submission through activities such as offering presents and requesting investiture. In a letter to the Qing Emperor, Gia Long—the first King of the Nguyen Dynasty—wrote: "Although people have a lack of allegiance, I still did not know

the opinion of Heaven. I assigned Le Quang Dinh and Trinh to bring along presents to show our honesty to rank in the list of vassal states” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2002, 510). From this point of view, a common Confucian cultural linguistic circle or a system of centrally orientated regional order was established, where “all peoples at one level or another are subject to the influence of Chinese civilization” (Konrat 1997, 59).

Vietnam was one of the countries most influenced by Chinese culture, especially with regard to Confucianism. If Japanese elites had an attitude of respectful rejection when it came to Confucianism, then the Vietnamese elites in the Ly-Tran Dynasties had an attitude of resistance and non-refusal (Trần Quốc Vượng 1991, 32–44) while the Vietnamese elites during the Le-Nguyen Dynasties had one of resistance and imitation. The Vietnamese Confucians tried to show that Confucianism in Vietnam was similar and not inferior to Chinese Confucianism. They considered this as something to be proud of and a way for them to affirm Vietnam’s position in relation to other countries in the region. The influence of Chinese Confucian culture on its neighbors, including Vietnam, contributed to making China a “hard center,” a “solid center” in relation to other centers in the world as identified by Womack (Womack 2012a, 39). Under the influence of Confucianism, especially the ideals of “mandate of heaven” and “righteousness,” the Vietnamese Kings constantly strove to fulfill their duties according to the rites and rules of a vassal in relation to the center, China (i.e., righteousness).

The Subjection to the “Center”—China—of the Periphery—Vietnam—through Requesting Investiture and Tribute

The recognition and respect for China’s central role in all aspects, especially its cultural superiority, and the acceptance of Confucian influence from the cultural “salvation” of the center, had the inevitable consequence of obedience of the center by peripheral countries. Thus, Vietnam voluntarily joined the ranks of peripheral countries that China considered as vassals despite knowing that there could be no symmetry of interest in this relationship. This was a root cause for the activities of requesting investiture and tribute that were sustained for a long time in the feudal Vietnam-China relationship.

Requesting investiture and tribute in the feudal Vietnam-China relationship indicated a special relationship, which was found only among China and neighboring countries. Vietnam was often considered a typical example, with all its complexity (Tạ Ngọc Liễn 1995, 49). Researchers have classed Vietnam’s activities as part of the “tributary institution.” According to J. K. Fairbank and S. Y. Teng in “On the Ch’ing Tributary System,” this tributary institution was “the medium for Chinese international relations and diplomacy” and “a scheme of things entire . . . the mechanism by which barbarous non-Chinese regions were given their place in the all-embracing Chinese political, and

therefore ethical, scheme of things” (Fairbank and Teng 1941, 137, 139). In that environment, the Emperor felt the need to “civilize” the populace in order to maintain a stable social order. Some Chinese scholars view the term “tributary system” as a Western invention, dating back to at least the nineteenth century, which was then translated back into Chinese as *chaogong tixi* (Yang 1968; Liu 2010; Suisheng 2015). The terms *chao* and *gong* do appear in the Chinese historical sources, but the Chinese had no conception of such a system (Feng 2009, 545–574). However, it is undeniable that there was a hierarchical system where China played a central role and neighboring countries (which China considered as Nanman, Dongyi, Xirong, Beidi), such as Vietnam, were classified as vassal-peripheries. Liang and Khilji in *China and East Asia’s Post-Crisis Community: A Region in Flux*, assert that “China, the primus inter pares state in this tribute system, constituted the core together with Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, with the system extending to southeast Asian States in varying degrees” (Liang and Khilji 2012, 2). Thus, one of the principles for creating and sustaining the tributary system was that China had to consider itself as a center and be willing to accept investiture and tributary activities from peripheral countries such as Vietnam. This activity was considered a way to prevent the central-peripheral relationship from being cut off. On the one hand, the existence of vassal-peripheries like Vietnam served China’s political and economic interests; on the other, it helped to prevent attacks on China by other countries, creating a stable external environment to maintain domestic stability.

From the Vietnamese perspective, Vietnam remained close to a feudal China so that it could learn from that country. Maintaining a relationship with the center was considered by Vietnam to be necessary for its own survival. In fact, Vietnam felt a need to maintain a relationship with China not only during the feudal era but throughout its history. As stated by Tuong Vu in “State Formation on China’s Southern Frontier: Vietnam as a Shadow Empire and Hegemon”: “The threat of assimilation and annexation by ‘China’ is often portrayed as the paramount existential problem confronting all ‘Vietnamese’ throughout their history who have yearned to preserve their independence even while adapting to the ‘Chinese’ culture and worldview” (Tuong Vu 2016, 39). Thus, the “Chinese world order” could not be “merely a unilateral” effort as viewed by Yu Insun (2009, 84); it was actually based on demand from both China and Vietnam. Accordingly, Vietnam’s tributes and requesting of investiture from China were born and maintained for a long time.

Table 1 lists the times Vietnam requested investiture from China between 938 (when Vietnam gained independence after centuries of Chinese rule) and 1885 (when France and China signed the Tianjin Treaty, which ended the tributary relationship between Vietnam and China).

Table 1 Times When Vietnam Requested Investiture from China (938–1885)

Name of Dynasty	Vietnamese Missions Going to China to Request Investiture	Titles That Chinese Emperors Bestowed upon Vietnamese Kings
1. Ngo Dynasty	954: Ngo Xuong Ngap sent a mission to the King of Southern Han requesting investiture.	Ngo Xuong Ngap was ordained as naval generalissimo.
2. Dinh Dynasty	972: Dinh Tien Hoang sent his son Dinh Lien to the Song Dynasty for ordination as a King.	Dinh Tien Hoang was ordained as Giao Chi King. Dinh Lien was ordained as Annam naval generalissimo. 975: Dinh Tien Hoang was ordained as Nam Viet Vuong, and Dinh Lien was ordained as Giao Chi King.
3. Earlier Le Dynasty	980: King Le Dai Hanh sent two envoys—Giang Cu Vong and Vuong Thieu To—to the Song Dynasty for ordination as King. 985: King Le Dai Hanh sent a mission to the Song Dynasty applying for chief.	Song Dynasty did not approve. Song Dynasty agreed to ordain Le Dai Hanh as a chief. 993: Song Dynasty ordained Le Dai Hanh as Giao Chi King.
4. Ly Dynasty	1010: King Ly Thai To sent his people to the Song requesting investiture. 1055: King Ly Thanh Tong sent his people to the Song requesting investiture. 1138: King Ly Anh Tong sent a mission to the Song requesting investiture.	1010: Ly Thai To was ordained as Giao Chi King. 1028: King Ly Thai Tong was ordained as Giao Chi King. 1038: King Ly Thai Tong was ordained as Nam Binh Vuong. 1055: King Ly Thanh Tong was ordained as Giao Chi King. 1074: King Ly Nhan Tong was ordained as Giao Chi King. 1130: King Ly Than Tong was ordained as Giao Chi King. 1138: King Ly Anh Tong was ordained as Giao Chi King. 1175: King Ly Anh Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1177: King Ly Cao Tong was ordained as Annam King.
5. Tran Dynasty	1229: King Tran Thai Tong sent a mission to visit the Song. 1368: King Tran Du Tong sent a mission to visit the Ming.	1229: King Tran Thai Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1262: King Tran Thanh Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1368: Tran Du Tong was ordained as Annam King.
6. Ho Dynasty	1403: Ho Han Thuong sent a mission to the Ming Dynasty requesting investiture.	1403: Ming Dynasty ordained Ho Han Thuong as Annam King.
7. Primitive Le Dynasty	1427: King Le Thai To sent a proposal to the Ming Dynasty requesting investiture for Tran Cao. 1429: King Le Thai To sent a mission to the Ming Dynasty requesting investiture. 1434: King Le Thai Tong sent a mission mourning Le Thai To and requesting investiture. 1442: King Le Nhan Tong sent a mission mourning Le Thai Tong and requesting investiture. 1460: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission requesting investiture. 1497: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission mourning Le Thanh Tong and requesting investiture. 1504: King Le Duc Tong sent a mission mourning Le Hien Tong and requesting investiture. 1510: King Le Tuong Duc sent a mission requesting investiture.	1427: Ming Dynasty ordained Tran Cao as Annam King. 1431: King Le was ordained as the Annam national advocate. 1435: Ming Dynasty sent messengers to inform the King to take care of national affairs. 1443: Ming Dynasty sent messengers to take the decree to ordain the King as Annam King. 1462: Ming Dynasty sent messengers to take the decree to ordain the King as Annam King. 1499: Ming Dynasty sent messengers to ordain the King as Annam King. 1506: Ming Dynasty sent messengers to ordain the King as Annam King. 1513: Ming Dynasty sent messengers to ordain the King as Annam King.
8. Mac Dynasty	1540: Mac Dang Dung sent a mission carrying sea produce to Yenqing requesting investiture.	1540: Mac Dang Dung was ordained as the Annam ambassador.
9. Restored Le Dynasty	1597: King Le The Tong sent a mission to the Ming Dynasty requesting investiture. 1637: King Le Than Tong sent a mission to the Ming Dynasty requesting investiture.	1598: King Le The Tong was ordained as Annam governor. 1647: King Le Than Tong (now retired Emperor) was ordained as Annam King. 1667: King Le Huyen Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1683: King Ly Hy Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1719: King Le Du Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1734: Ordained King Le Thuan Tong as Annam King. 1761: King Le Hien Tong was ordained as Annam King. 1778: King Le Chieu Thong was ordained as Annam King.
10. Tay Son Dynasty	1789: King Quang Trung sent a mission to the Qing Dynasty requesting investiture. 1792: King Quang Toan sent a mission to the Qing Dynasty mourning King Quang Trung and requesting investiture.	1789: King Quang Trung was ordained as Annam King. 1792: King Quang Toan was ordained as Annam King.
11. Nguyen Dynasty	1802: A delegation led by Le Quang Dinh applied for ordination to King Gia Long. 1820: A delegation led by Ngo Vi applied for ordination to King Minh Menh. 1841: A delegation led by Le Van Phuc applied for ordination to King Thieu Tri. 1848: A delegation led by Bui Quy applied for ordination to King Tu Duc.	1804: A Chinese delegation led by Sam Nghi Dong carried the decree and the national seal to Thang Long, proclaiming Gia Long as Annam King. 1822: A Chinese delegation led by Phan Cung Thi carried the decree from the Emperor of China to Thang Long to confer on Minh Menh the title of Annam King. 1842: A Chinese delegation led by Bao Thanh carried the decree from the Emperor of China to Thang Long to confer on Thieu Tri the title of Annam King. 1849: A Chinese delegation led by Lao Sung Quang carried the decree from the Emperor of China to Hue imperial city to confer on Tu Duc the title of Annam King.

Sources: Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn (2002; 2004; 2007d; 2007e); Hongnian (2006); Phan Huy Chú (2007).

Clearly, such beseeching activities started in the tenth century (from the time of Ngo Xuong Ngap [r. 951–54]), after Vietnam had broken free of Chinese feudalistic rule and regained full independence. It was only through military defeat that China returned Vietnam its sovereignty and admitted its new King. In other words, the peaceful relationship through the beseeching of investiture between the center—China—and periphery—Vietnam—existed only when China could not expand to or occupy Vietnam. If pre-modern Sino-Vietnamese relations are divided into the three states of interaction outlined by James A. Anderson—Strong China/Weak Vietnam, Weak China/Strong Vietnam, and Strong China/Strong Vietnam (Anderson 2013)—the requesting and receipt of investiture took place only when the two countries were in the second (Weak China/Strong Vietnam) or third (Strong China/Strong Vietnam) state. Only in the second or third state would China become a “benevolent big brother” of Vietnam (Tuong Vu 2016, 53). This was the reality of the Vietnam-China relationship during feudalism. Phan Huy Chu, in his *Dynasty's History*, also noted this characteristic:

Our country started to communicate with China since the Hung King, but with small title and not to participate in the ranks of the vassals gathered in the “Ming Tang” to meet the Emperor. Then our country was conquered by Zhou Tuo, the Han assigned him as South Viet King which was considered as a Chinese vassal rather than being a country. Then our country was turned to be a district in the Han Dynasty. After Dinh Tien Hoang swept away missions, recovered and expanded the territory, the beseech investiture was received from China to be a country. (Phan Huy Chú 2007, 534–535)

Since then, through the dynasties of Dinh (968–80), Earlier Le (980–1009), Ly (1009–1225), Tran (1225–1400), Ho (1400–7), Primitive Le (1428–1527), Mac (1527–92), Restored Le (1533–1789), Tay Son (1789–1802), and Nguyen (1802–1885), the requesting of investiture in accordance with the regulations became particularly important in diplomatic relations between Vietnam and China. Most of the Vietnamese dynasties requested investiture with China.

According to normal practice, when Vietnam's King died his successor sent an ambassador to China to announce the funeral, and a mission began to apply for the King's investiture. In response, China would assign a mission to ordain the King of Vietnam. In such cases, the Vietnamese King was “soft” and implemented solemn rituals to be ordained and receive the title from the Chinese Emperor (*Friends of Hue Ancient Capital* 1993, 306). Even after those rituals, Vietnamese dynasties had to give presents and hold parties for Chinese missions (*ibid.*, 90–92).

Along with beseeching investiture, the vassal Vietnam tried to implement many tribute activities to show respect to the “upper country” and assure its own national security and sovereignty. In some dynasties, such as the Nguyen, this was also a way to

ensure the value of investiture that the Emperors of China granted the Kings of Vietnam. This assurance was necessary for the legitimacy and independence of the dynasty. This is something that the Nguyen Dynasty had not had since its inception. Tributary activity was considered by both Vietnam and China as a means of exchanging products due to the natural needs of the two countries' economic development. Obviously there was a real match between reality and Shils's, Womack's, and Wallerstein's theories, as they acknowledged the reverence of peripheral states toward the center and the humility of the periphery while maintaining a relationship that was interdependent with the center even if it was an unequal interest relationship.

From the Dinh Dynasty, Earlier Le Dynasty, and Ly Dynasty in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, Vietnamese missions were sent to the Song Dynasty; they did not carry tribute but brought presents for building friendships and showing gratitude. It was not until the thirteenth century, when Tran Thai Tong sent a mission to China, that the rule was made about a tribute every three years; this is when the Chinese tribute regime by Vietnam is considered to have started. However, Table 2 shows that due to various reasons (on both the Vietnamese and Chinese sides) the tribute did not always follow the rules. However, tribute was always a diplomatic activity dictated by the Vietnamese feudal dynasties because it was an indispensable means of communication in maintaining diplomatic relations with the center—which was China at the time.

When assessing and explaining the long-term existence of tributes between central China and peripheral countries in a vassal position, such as Vietnam, Kelley states that there must have been a logical reason why the outward kingdoms accepted the inferior relationships, which Western countries did not accept in the nineteenth century when dealing with China. According to him, the above tribute activities from Vietnam represented a state of "self-consciousness," not a "defensive strategy." Therefore, they might have been just a formality (Kelley 2005, 9–23). After Kelley, Fairbank, Teng, and Keith Taylor emphasized the dual nature of the tribute system. Taylor said, "Vietnam is doing so based on a realistic assessment of strategic interests, especially when there is always a choice between accepting the unfair terms of tribute system and bearing the risk of attack from the centre" (quoted in Lam 1968, 165–179). According to Taylor, these activities on the part of Vietnam were "pretending" in order to maintain independence and harmony and avoid a bloody war (Taylor 1983, 271).

Independence, Centralization of the "Periphery"—Vietnam—in Relation to the "Center"—China

There are two opposite views when evaluating tributary activities between Vietnam and China. However, if we observe the evolution of these activities, especially their specific

Table 2 Years in Which Vietnam Went to China for Tribute (938–1885)

Name of Dynasty	Years in Which Vietnam Went to China for Tribute	Frequency of Tribute
1. Ngo Dynasty (938–67)		0
2. Dinh Dynasty (968–80)		0
3. Earlier Le Dynasty (980–1009)		0
4. Ly Dynasty (1009–1225)		0
5. Tran Dynasty (1225–1400)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1258: King Tran Thai Tong sent envoys to take tribute to China. The two sides decided on the frequency of tribute: once in three years. – 1275: King Tran Thanh Tong sent envoys to take tribute to the Yuan Dynasty. – 1292: King Tran Nhan Tong sent envoys to take tribute to the Yuan Dynasty. – 1331: King Tran Hien Tong sent envoys to take tribute to the Yuan Dynasty. 	4
6. Primitive Le Dynasty (1428–1527)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1444: King Le Nhan Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1447: King Le Nhan Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1450: King Le Nhan Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1453: King Le Nhan Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1462: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1471: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1474: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1477: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1480: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1483: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1486: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1489: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1492: King Le Thanh Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1498: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1501: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1504: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1510: King Le Tuong Duc sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1513: King Le Tuong Duc sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. 	18
7. Mac Dynasty (1527–92)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1542: Mac Dang Dung sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1548: Mac Phuc Nguyen sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1580: Mac Mau Hop sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1584: Mac Mau Hop sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. 	4
8. Restored Le Dynasty (1533–1789)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1595: King Le The Tong sent a mission to offer tribute but failed. – 1596: King Le The Tong sent a mission to offer tribute but was not approved by the Ming Dynasty and returned. – 1597: King Le The Tong sent a mission to take local produce as tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1606: King Le Kinh Tong sent a mission to take two tributes to the Ming Dynasty. – 1613: King Le Kinh Tong sent a mission to take two tributes to the Ming Dynasty. – 1619: King Le Than Tong sent a mission to take two tributes to the Ming Dynasty. – 1626: King Le Than Tong sent a mission to take two tributes to the Ming Dynasty. – 1630: King Le Than Tong sent a mission to take two tributes to the Ming Dynasty. – 1637: King Le Than Tong sent a mission to take two tributes to the Ming Dynasty. – 1646: King Le Chan Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Ming Dynasty. – 1663: King Le Huyen Tong sent a mission to take local produce as tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1667: King Le Huyen Tong sent a mission to take local produce as tribute to the Qing Dynasty and applied to offer tribute as in the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty: tribute was offered once every six years. – 1673: As a rule, King Gia Long sent envoys to take two tributes to the Qing Dynasty. – 1682: King Le Hy Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1685: King Le Hy Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1690: King Le Hy Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1697: King Le Hy Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1702: King Le Hy Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1715: King Le Du Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1721: King Le Du Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1726: King Le Du Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1729: Hon Duc Cong (Le Duy Phuong) sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1741: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1747: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1753: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1760: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1765: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1771: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1777: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1783: King Le Hien Tong sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. 	30
9. Tay Son Dynasty (1789–1802)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – April 1789: King Quang Trung sent a mission to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – September 1789: King Quang Trung sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. 	2

10. Nguyen Dynasty (1802–85)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1804: King Gia Long sent his envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty, replacing the tributes of 1803 and 1805. – 1809: As a rule, King Gia Long sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1813: As a rule, King Gia Long sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1817: As a rule, King Gia Long sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1824: As a rule, King Minh Menh sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1828: As a rule, King Minh Menh sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1832: As a rule, King Minh Menh sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1836: As a rule, King Minh Menh sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1844: King Thieu Tri sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1849: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1853: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1857: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1860: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1868: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1872: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1876: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. – 1880: As a rule, King Tu Duc sent envoys to take tribute to the Qing Dynasty. 	17
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Sources: Ngô Sĩ Liên *et al.* (1993a; 1993b); Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn (2002; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d; 2007e; 2007f); Hongnian (2006); Phan Huy Chú (2007, 570–608).

movements in each historical period through the feudal dynasties in Vietnam, we see that no matter how strict, activities of Vietnamese Kings were dependent on the strength of Vietnam in relation to China, as well as the potential and positions of the two countries. After Dinh Tien Hoang (r. 968–79) and Quang Trung (r. 1788–92) took the throne, missions were sent to China to ask for investiture. However, in many cases it was the Chinese imperial court that sent missions to ordain the head of the Vietnamese state. Instances of these are during the reigns of Tran Thai Tong (r. 1225–58), Tran Thanh Tong (r. 1258–78), and Tran Nhan Tong (r. 1279–93). These periods are associated with Dai Viet’s great military victories over invasions. These Kings assigned the throne to each other rather than going to China to beseech investiture.

Even though the Vietnamese mission knelt in the presence of the Chinese Emperor in Beijing, the head of the Vietnamese state still claimed to be the Emperor of the Vietnamese people and the smaller surrounding countries. Clearly, the use of the Sino-Vietnamese title of Emperor by Vietnam was a deliberate decision. It showed simultaneously the tendencies of “Heavy sinicization” and “Heavy cultural resistance” coexisting in Vietnam until the end of the monarchy (Woodside 1988, 13).

According to Tsuboi Yoshiharu, the Nguyen Dynasty—Vietnam’s last feudal dynasty—had cultural self-respect because they regarded themselves as having a better tradition than the Qing Dynasty and an orthodox Confucianism protector (Tsuboi 1992, 134). Therefore, if the Qing did not behave appropriately, the Nguyen Dynasty immediately expressed their dissatisfaction. For example, in 1840 the Ministry of Rites reported to King Minh Menh that the procession of envoys to the Qing Dynasty had been arranged by the Qing Dynasty behind the envoys of Goryeo (North Korea), Nan Zhang (Laos), Siam, and Liu Qiu and asked how to respond. Minh Menh immediately replied:

This is due to the negligence of the Ministry of Rites of the Qing Dynasty. Goryeo is the country of culture, Nan Zhang is our vassal offering us tribute, and Siam and Liu Qiu are barbarian countries (夷狄). This is unacceptable. If anything like this happens, get out of the row; it's better to be punished. (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007c, 872)

Minh Menh's national pride came from his view that Vietnam was a civilized country and therefore this mistake by the Ministry of Rites toward the Qing Dynasty was a great insult to Vietnam (Yu 2009, 93). Even the ability to express the linguistic and cultural qualities of Vietnamese ambassadors in the Chinese court was an important way to show that Vietnam was a "civilized" country and did not need China's "modernization" (Taylor 1983, 298).

It is noteworthy that until 1838, without being approved by the Qing Dynasty, King Minh Menh decided to change the name of the country from Vietnam to Dai Nam (Great South) to signify a strong southern country. As Minh Menh explained: "Now we have the South, the wider territory, an eastern strip to the South Sea, around the West Sea, our people belong to the map, forests and beaches belong to us." Thus, changing the name to Dai Nam was suitable, "showing the scale, while keeping the word Viet" (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007c, 276). In his explanation for naming the country Dai Nam, Minh Menh also cited the Qing Dynasty's naming of China: "To the Qing Dynasty once called Manchuria, then renamed Great Qing, is the right thing to do" (*ibid.*). This explanation reveals Minh Menh's high self-esteem and is "an expression of Minh Menh's antagonism toward the Qing dynasty and his reaction to the 'Ta Qing' (Great Qing) designation" (Yu 2009, 103). From here on, the country was called Dai Nam; all vocatives, documents, even diplomatic documents were required to adhere to it and "not to say Dai Viet" (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007c, 277).

It has been suggested that Vietnam's submission to China was self-sacrifice rather than pretense, as Kelley has commented. However, according to Kelley, if this were the case then Vietnam would not have achieved true independence. Obviously there is no logic in the requesting of investiture and tribute, just survival behavior between the center and periphery in the contemporary context. Such behavior is wise in the context of a small country interacting with a bigger and stronger one. Hence, a nominal "pretender" (also known as the pretense, according to Taylor) may accept a vassal, peripheral role rather than confrontation, as that was clearly beneficial for Vietnam. It was because of that pretense, when the fate or honor of the country was violated, that Vietnamese dynasties did not hesitate to declare their own existence. The resistance war against the Song during the Ly Dynasty (1009–1225), two resistance wars against the invasion of the Yuan by the Tran Dynasty (1225–1400), the resistance war against Ming invaders during the Ho Dynasty (1400–7), and the resistance war against the invaders of the Qing

in the late eighteenth century (1788–89) clearly proved the independent trend of the periphery Vietnam. Although it was an act of soft, humble submission through the requesting of investiture, tribute, and offerings to the center (China) to maintain peaceful relations between the two, when the fate of the nation was threatened, Vietnam was ready to stand up and fight to defend its independence. Obviously, smaller countries like Vietnam are always “vulnerable” (Womack 2004, 365). If large countries like China cooperate with Vietnam, Vietnam will be less worried about its vulnerability and tend to accept a world order driven by China because it achieves its own interests by doing so (*ibid.*). Conversely, when a large country like China does not cooperate and threatens the interests of the smaller nation, thereby making the latter vulnerable, the trend of dependence becomes increasingly loose and the two countries may even confront each other, producing a conflict and maybe a war like the examples mentioned above. As a result, the borders of peace that have been built on a “mutually acceptable relationship” (Womack 2012a, 42) between the two sides are inevitably disrupted.

A centrifugal effort to change the national status of the Nguyen Dynasty Kings was vividly demonstrated in the setting up of a new center in the South, similar to the Chinese one in the North, where Southeast Asia, a region that China had few relations with, had to recognize Vietnamese moral values and greatness in the same way that the Nguyen Dynasty acknowledged the Chinese court. In fact, in the first half of the nineteenth century countries to the southwest of Vietnam such as Chenla (Cambodia), Van Tuong (a part of Central Laos, bordering Nghe An north of Vietnam today), Nam Chuong (in the west of Hoa Binh province and in northern Thanh Hoa province of Vietnam today), Thuy Xa (in western Phu Yen province of Vietnam today), and Hoa Xa (a tribe in the west of Thuy Xa, also in the west of Phu Yen province of Vietnam today) carried out tribute and “beseech investiture” for the Nguyen Dynasty. Clearly, in its relations with many other Southeast Asian countries at that time, Vietnam played the role of a center (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 1994; 2002; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d; 2007e; 2007f). This is in line with Womack’s theory, which points out that one of the most important factors that can weaken China’s central position is an increase in relations among peripheral countries (Womack 2012a, 44). Not only is it consistent with Womack’s theory, it also coincides with Wallerstein’s insight that an asymmetry of interest in the relationship between center and periphery will cause the periphery to move, to fight for centrifugation and escape from dependence on the center, changing the current order publicly or insidiously. That centrifugal tendency led to the formation of new centers complementing the original center, like the case of Vietnam in the nineteenth century.

Difference between “China-Centered” and “Vietnam-Centered” Models

It is worth mentioning that although Vietnam still used the Chinese world model, Vietnamese authorities had a different viewpoint. The North and South were divided in two, with one side celebrating China and recognizing China's world order, and the other keeping its own world order. Hence, despite receiving the title of King from Chinese Emperors, the heads of Vietnam proclaimed themselves as Emperor to their own people, placing themselves at the same level as the Emperor of China. This was also a manifestation of Vietnam's independence in its relations with China. For example, in the relationship between Vietnam (center) and Champa (periphery), if Champa delayed or neglected to fulfill its obligation to contribute, Vietnam as a “mother country” could even rebuke Champa and ask it to pay tribute. This was seen in 1094, when King Ly Nhan Tong sent the academic Mac Hien Tich to Champa to claim tribute (Ngô Sĩ Liên *et al.* 1993a, 283), and in 1346, when King Tran Du Tong sent Pham Nguyen Hang to Champa to ask about the lack of annual tribute (Ngô Sĩ Liên *et al.* 1993b, 130). In 1435, when the Champa envoys went to Vietnam, King Le Thai Tong immediately asked, “Why don't you offer annual tribute?” According to the King, it was a manifestation of “Failure to keep the rite of a small country to a big country” (*ibid.*, 333). Obviously, this was a straightforward rebuke. In many cases when Champa offered tribute, the Dai Viet court brought troops to fight Champa. For example, under Ly Thanh Tong, in 1065–69, Champa did not pay tribute and King Ly Thanh Tong brought the army to fight (Ngô Sĩ Liên *et al.* 1993a, 274–275). In July 1176, after not receiving tribute, offerings, or any other gestures from Champa for a long time, the Ly Dynasty again sent General To Hien Thanh to fight Champa. In October of that year, Champa hurried to offer tribute to ask for peace (*ibid.*, 324). Obviously, the peacetime relationship between Vietnam and Champa at that time was deeply influenced by the theories of Son of Heaven, the Mandate of Heaven of the Chinese-style world order. The Vietnamese dynasties had to make dependents like Champa periodically send envoys and offer tribute to the Vietnamese court to acknowledge their devotion to the Sino-Vietnamese culture (Woodside 1988, 234). Symbols (such as Heaven, Son of Heaven) and the formula of the Chinese tribute system were also used by Vietnam to justify the King's reign and the existence of a Vietnam-centered order.

Although the two orders coexisted, the order of the “China of the South” was much looser than “the real Chinese one” (*ibid.*). Unlike China, Vietnam was never the largest “center” in East Asia. Vietnam was always subjected to invasions from China and promoted a spirit of harmony to subdue the weaker countries around it to make them respect it and rely on its protection. Vietnam did this in order to achieve a relative balance of power in its relations with Great China. On the other hand, if the Chinese world-centered order was operating in strict accordance with the principles of Confucianism—principles

that were deeply imbedded in both China and its vassal countries—in the world order in which Vietnam played a central role, there was no common bond of Confucian ideology. Many vassal states within Vietnam, typically Champa, were more deeply influenced by Hinduism than Confucianism. Thus, the two sides of the Vietnam-Champa relationship did not have the ideological unity found in Vietnam-China relations. Accordingly, beseeching of investiture and tribute, which were considered a duty and responsibility that the vassals (peripherals) needed to perform in relation to the master (center) to ensure the latter's honor and position according to Confucianism, were not fully and regularly implemented by Champa and were often ignored for a very long time, as seen in the complaint of King Ly Thai Tong (r. 1028–54) (Ngô Sĩ Liên *et al.* 1993a, 263).

Following the evolution of relations between Vietnam and small (peripheral) countries in the West and South in the nineteenth century, we see that the Nguyen Dynasty followed a foreign policy of “being soft for the far.” This means that they implemented soft and clever policies for peripheral and distant countries (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 1994, 355). The “being soft for the far” foreign policy made the Nguyen Dynasty sympathetic toward vassals. For instance, after the 1824 tribute ceremony, when Van Tuong was at war, King Minh Minh (1820–41) exempted all ceremonies. Sympathetic to the distance and the difficult situation of the “vassals,” the Nguyen Dynasty often exempted other countries' missions from going to the capital Hue to provide tribute. For example, when the Chenla ambassador went to Gia Dinh province in 1832, the Emperor sent an exemption, rewarded him, and allowed him to go back home (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007a, 315). And in 1834, when Chenla had to deal with Siamese invaders, King Minh Minh gave it permission to not provide tribute and let it “combine two times into one next year”; by doing so, the King showed the kindness of the Nguyen court toward vassals (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 1994, 1776). In addition, in 1852, when the countries of Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa sent missions to provide tribute, the Tu Duc King allowed them to perform a ceremony in Phu Yen province (rather than going to the capital Hue) because of the distance of their trip and the poor crop the previous year (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007e, 248–249). These are actions that were not encountered in the relationship between China and Vietnam from 938 to 1885.

Clearly, Vietnam's attitude toward small countries and its surrounding periphery was not to act as the big guy or big country. It remained nonthreatening. In fact, the big country of Vietnam was supportive and helpful and even protected and sheltered small countries that were endangered and annexed. For example, in 1313 King Tran Anh Tong immediately sent his troops to save Champa when it was invaded by Siam (Ngô Sĩ Liên *et al.* 1993b, 99). This was an act of responsibility by the superior to the vassal/periphery, the rite prescribed by Confucian thought. Under the Nguyen Dynasty, King Minh Minh

used to send the following message of support to vassals: “If neighbors cause catastrophe, we will have the way to manage, don’t worry” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007a, 545). That statement was proven by Minh Menh’s concrete actions during his rule. For example, in 1822 when Chenla experienced a severe famine, Minh Menh did not hesitate to open stockpiles of food and deliver rice to the hungry people of Chenla (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 1994, 1748). In 1833, when Chenla encountered a crisis with Siam, the King of Chenla had to flee with his wife and children into the interior of Vietnam. Once again, Minh Menh showed his sympathy by providing rice and money. He also sent troops to Chenla to fight the Siamese enemy and escorted the Chenla King back to his country (*ibid.*, 1775). In 1840 Chenla faced an internal rebellion led by Tang Ke, which was a problem it could not solve. The King sent his envoy to Vietnam to ask for troops to help rescue the kingdom. Minh Menh honored the responsibility of a master and immediately sent troops to the rescue, cutting off the head of Tang Ke and making the rebels surrender. Minh Menh also left some soldiers to protect Chenla and escorted the arrested rebels for the King of Chenla to punish (*ibid.*, 1745–1746). These were all noble gestures and show the benevolence of the King of the Nguyen Dynasty at the time. On the other hand, they also show the sense of responsibility felt by the superior Vietnam toward its vassals when the latter were in jeopardy.

Smaller countries like Van Tuong, Chenla, Thuy Xa, and Hoa Xa worshipped Vietnam partly because of their desire to be “civilized” and educated. As King Minh Menh said when Hoa Xa went for tribute in 1834:

Their country is far from overseas, knotted to mark main things, plowing the field to eat, be backward, but they also have teeth, hair like everyone else; there is also conscience, and virtue, why we cannot do the same thing together? So he used Chinese religious ceremony to convert habits, teach politeness and reason, and was increasingly penetrated by the Kinh people’s culture. (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn 2007b, 306)

According to Shils’s, Womack’s, and Wallerstein’s theories, the allegiance of small states (i.e., peripheries) comes from an attitude of respect for the political, economic, and cultural potential of the center in addition to security concerns. It was very important for China, Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries to contribute to maintaining the activities of beseeching investiture and tribute between China and Vietnam, and Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries for a long time.

It is worth noting that in their central role, China and Vietnam behaved differently toward their peripheral countries. While Vietnam was soft in its conduct, willing to share responsibility and help peripheral countries when needed, China was stricter in demanding tributes and sacrifices from vassals; during feudal times China even threatened and

directed troops to invade the periphery Vietnam on several occasions. Especially when Vietnam was under the Nguyen Dynasty, China failed to fulfill its responsibility by abandoning and “selling” its vassal Vietnam to France in exchange for selfish interests through a series of peace treaties with France in the second half of the nineteenth century. The treaty for “peace, friendship and trade” in Tianjin (commonly known as the Tianjin Treaty) was signed on June 9, 1885 between the representatives of France—Jules Patenotre—and China—Li Hongzhang. At the beginning, when outlining the reasons for signing, the treaty expressed a spirit of compromise for the benefit of both France and China on the issue of Vietnam:

The President of the Republic of France and the Emperor of China desiring to end the difficulties of intervening each one in the internal affairs of Annam, restoring and improving the existing friendship and trade relations between France and China, decided to sign a new treaty to meet the common interests of the two countries. (Documents diplomatiques 1885, 259–260)

Accordingly, each side was asked to maintain security in its territory adjacent to the border, and the militaries of the two sides were asked to not cross the border into the territory of the other. China once again acknowledged France’s dominance in Vietnam and pledged no harm to France’s pacification program there. The signatories to the treaty agreed to respect present and future treaties, conventions, and agreements signed between France and Vietnam (Article 2 of the Tianjin Treaty of 1885) (*ibid.*, 260–261). Obviously, China sold its vassal Vietnam to France based on its own selfish interests. After that, it was inevitable that the formalism and “pretending” in the tribute and beseeching investiture of Vietnam to China was bolder than these activities from the Southeast Asian countries to Vietnam. Accordingly, Vietnam’s centrifugal tendency to break out of the influence of the Chinese center was also stronger and more drastic than that of the Vietnamese vassal states at the time. The birth of a new, centrally located order that coexisted with the old-centric order was an inevitable consequence of this strong centrifugal tendency.

Conclusion

The center-periphery theory is born of real life, and in turn it serves the realities of life, especially in explaining phenomena taking place in practice. In this particular case, the theory is used to help us understand the expressive and substantive aspects of the Vietnam-China relationship during feudalism. Specifically, from Shils’s, Womack’s, and Wallerstein’s theories, we know that the factors that made China the center were its

superiority in politics, economy, military, and culture. China's great advantages, especially its dominant cultural tradition, made smaller countries such as Vietnam respect and rely on protection or "civilizing" from China for a long time. This was particularly true under the influence of Chinese Confucianism, especially the notions of "mandate of heaven" and "righteousness." Not only did China place itself at the center to educate people from the peripheral countries, but these peripheries—influenced by Confucian ideology—respected the upper and lower order between the great country and the small country to be compatible with righteousness and the rules of heaven. This explains why the requesting of investiture and tribute in the relationship between China and Vietnam was maintained from the tenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. It is the persistence of this tributary system based on Confucian ideology that has contributed significantly to China being a "hard center" and "solid center" in relation to other centers of the world (known as Womack's discovery) (Womack 2012a, 39).

It may be said that maintaining the requesting of investiture and tribute for a long time to keep the harmonious relationship between the two sides is the most important manifestation of the dependence of the periphery (Vietnam) on the center (China). However, based on the theory of Womack and Wallerstein, we get a better understanding of the duality of the relationship. As they noted, besides the trend of dependence of the periphery on the center, there is a centrifugal or confrontation trend between them because of asymmetries of interest. However, the theorists have not pointed out these two tendencies, in which situation one plays the leading role and why. When looking at the Vietnam-China relationship of this period, we see that the dependence of the periphery is relative; the centrifugal trend is the dominant one. This is also the contribution of research practice, clarifying some issues that the center-periphery theory has not addressed. As the asymmetry of benefits between the center and the periphery increases, the position of the periphery gets stronger, and the responsibility and assistance of the center for the periphery decreases, the centrifugal tendency of peripheral countries increases. Therefore, in many cases when Vietnam's position became higher after the great military victories before China's aggression, the Chinese court had to actively send people for ordination and Vietnamese Kings did not go to China requesting investiture. For instance, Kings Tran Thai Tong (r. 1225–58), Tran Thanh Tong (r. 1258–78), and Tran Nhan Tong (r. 1279–93) of the Tran Dynasty ceded the throne to each other and did not go to China requesting investiture. And though Chinese Emperors ordained them as Vietnamese Kings, Vietnam's heads of state still claimed to be Emperors or "Son of Heaven" in relation to people in the country and smaller countries around, in the way that the Emperor of the Chinese court claimed. In addition, the centrifugal tendency of the periphery was manifested in Vietnam's willingness to fight as the destiny of the nation

was threatened by the center. Thus, despite Vietnam's posture of humility, softness, and tribute to China in order to keep the "borders of peace" on the basis of a "mutually acceptable relationship" (*ibid.*, 42), when the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties invaded, Vietnam was willing to resolutely fight to maintain its independence. This centrifugal trend was vividly shown by the construction of a new order in the South (Vietnam-centered) on a par with the North (China-centered), in which Vietnam simulated how to operate the new order through the tributary system as China did with its peripheries, despite the "Chinese order of the South" being looser than the true Chinese order.

Clearly, just as the theory has shown, there is no permanent center because the positions of the center and periphery are always changing. It is this positional shift that explains why the periphery, Vietnam, became the center in its relationships with smaller countries in Southeast Asia. The coexistence of the two orders (a China-centric order and a Vietnam-centric one) helped Vietnam achieve a balanced position in comparison with neighboring China for a long time.

At some point, when the center no longer represents the progressive forces of the times, it will be replaced by other centers. This has been vividly confirmed in the East Asian region. Since the end of the nineteenth century, China has no longer been the only major center of influence in East Asia. There are new centers, such as Japan, Korea, and advanced countries in the West. That has required Vietnam to reselect the center. The reselection does not mean that Vietnam completely renounces China, because it cannot be denied that Vietnam and China are neighbors. Whether Vietnam wants to or not, it cannot deny that the development and growth of China at present, especially in the context of globalization, has a great influence on other countries in the region and around the world and Vietnam is no exception. Vietnam can still use active resources from the center, China, without being dependent on it in all respects, and should choose other centers to set up partnerships with. This is extremely advantageous in today's flat world, where geographic distance no longer plays a decisive role in establishing a center-periphery relationship. It is important to take advantage of active resources from centers around the world while constantly moving to escape the peripheral position (or the centripetal tendency, as stated by Wallerstein). This will allow Vietnam to become a center alongside China, Japan, and Korea. This is an issue that needs to be resolved to ensure the sustainable development of Vietnam at present and in the future.

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Regional Cooperation in Higher Education: Can It Lead ASEAN toward Harmonization?

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The internationalization of higher education over the last two decades has transformed the education sector into a globalized, interconnected knowledge-based society. Higher education institutions and national governments have been compelled to pay more attention to academic relations and knowledge exchange opportunities with partners in other countries, particularly in the same region. The current study aims to investigate the role of higher education internationalization in Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN) for the development of a more harmonized region. Previous research has revealed that less developed countries in the ASEAN region are far behind in the race to globalization and transformation of the education industry. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the policies and strategies enacted by the ASEAN administration and determine what it lacks to achieve this goal. An exploratory comparative approach has been used to identify and investigate recent internationalization trends in ASEAN member countries. The internationalization of higher education is a compelling and logical approach to increasing harmonization at the intra-regional and interregional levels.

Keywords: harmonization, higher education institutions,
internationalization practices, globalization, ASEAN region

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education is a process that recognizes the significance of global education and the establishment of a knowledge-based society¹⁾ in which the activities and practices of higher education, mobility, and collaboration can be easily facilitated

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1) "Knowledge-based society" refers to a society that is well educated and therefore relies on the knowledge of its citizens to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and dynamism.

and enhanced. It refers to the process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the mission, goals, and delivery of higher education (Knight 2004). In the era of internationalization, countries around the globe are engaged in an effort to establish a systematic mechanism to address the issues of higher educational access, equity, participation, and quality (Dreher 2006; Chou and Ravinet 2017). Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries aim to promote academic excellence, accessibility, quality, and international cooperation in higher education to achieve a resilient, dynamic, and sustained ASEAN community. As Vongthep Arthakaivalvatee, deputy secretary-general of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, stated:

As we continue to encourage free movement of goods, services and people in ASEAN, it is imperative to assure that the quality of our higher education is at par with agreed international and regional standards; and that our education systems thrive in a culture of quality and credibility. (ASEAN 2016)

Various studies have focused on the development of harmonization and regionalization in the ASEAN region, although most of them have concentrated on economic integration, trade facilitation and immigration policies, labor standards, and supply chain connectivity (Lloyd 2005; Ayudhaya 2013; Chia 2014; Jinachai and Anantachoti 2014; Menon and Melendez 2017). However, regional integration through the internationalization of higher education is also an important element in achieving regional unification and harmonization (Altbach and Knight 2007; Knight 2012; Khalid 2018). Thus, the current study aims to explore recent trends in the internationalization of ASEAN higher education aimed at harmonization among all member nations. In addition, the study attempts a comparative analysis of the internationalization practices followed by ASEAN nations and suggests practical approaches for globalization to bring about harmony and unity in the region.

ASEAN: An Overview

ASEAN was established on August 8, 1967 by five founding members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. The region, which has an area of around 4.5 million square kilometers, had a combined population of about 600 million in 2011 (Keling *et al.* 2011). As of 2017, ASEAN had 638.62 million people (US-ASEAN 2017). ASEAN is a dynamic region with great diversity among member countries in terms of geography, culture, official languages, literacy rates, population density, GDP per capita, level of socioeconomic development, information and communication technology

development, education policies, systems, and structures (Moussa and Kanwara 2015).

This diversity has led to a richness of culture and resources. Despite their differences, the ASEAN countries share a common emphasis on the development of higher education for the development of the nation and region and to enter the global knowledge-based economy (Ratanawijitrasin 2015). Both the diversity and similarities impact the development of internationalization within and among higher education institutions (HEIs) in these countries and challenge educators to develop measures and collaborative strategies to assure quality higher education in the region, especially in its focused movement from regionalization toward internationalization (Armstrong and Laksana 2016).

Several research studies recognize the importance of higher education in enhancing regionalization, cultural harmonization, and integration among nations (Neubauer 2012; Knight 2013; Lo and Wang 2014; Shields 2016). Globalization of higher education has the potential to give a boost to institutions that are unable to compete with current challenges, by providing opportunities for research collaboration, attracting talent from other countries, and opening overseas branch campuses. Increasing efforts have been made to build an ASEAN knowledge community by promoting both regionalization and integration among members. The organization aims to promote harmonization among its members with the aim of building a knowledge community supported by a range of supporting organizations, for instance, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN). The plans for an ASEAN Community toward the end of 2015 demanded that institutions of higher learning take action in accomplishing the goals of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), embedded in ASEAN Vision 2020, through which awareness, mutual understanding, and respect for the various cultures, languages, and religions could be nurtured. The ASCC also envisions economic integration as an ultimate goal—that is, it aims to create a single market and production base to make ASEAN countries more dynamic and competitive (ADB 2012).

Motivation for the Study

Notwithstanding the efforts made by the ASEAN leadership to achieve harmonization and regionalization by promoting the internationalization of higher education within the ASEAN community, it is still a challenging and demanding process to gain the cooperation of all members. This situation raises a number of practical questions when dealing with the promotion of internationalization at the regional level. The present study is based on the following research questions:

- (1) What are the internationalization policies and plans implemented by ASEAN to bring about harmonization within the region?
- (2) What are the recent trends in internationalization, and how can internationalization lead the ASEAN community toward harmonization?

To answer these important questions, the current study critically examines and analyzes a range of key ASEAN internationalization policies, recent developments within varied academic settings, and existing plans and strategies to develop a culture of integration within the ASEAN region. It also seeks to investigate the usefulness of internationalization practices as a means of enhancing harmonization among ASEAN member nations.

For the most part, the study provides an exciting opportunity to advance the understanding of harmonization within ASEAN through mutually beneficial and innovative internationalization practices. The study aims to contribute to the growing area of research on internationalization in higher education by exploring the issues and challenges faced by developing countries to compete in the global education marketplace. Several important streams within the study are identified that could prove helpful for ASEAN leaders and policy makers, as the study emphasizes the shared visions and synergized membership of ASEAN countries with the intention to strengthen the human capital of member countries rather than promoting competition.

In Southeast Asia there has long been a shared aspiration to coordinate and promote higher education within the region. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) was established in 1967 to promote regional cooperation in education, science, and culture. Promoting student, faculty, and staff mobility has also been a key priority. Enhancing student mobility was one of four key areas identified for regional higher education harmonization. However, regional disparities pose significant challenges. These include gaps in national policy and funding support; lack of infrastructure, facilities, and human resources; diversity in HEIs; and varying levels of research competency (Dang 2015; Khalid *et al.* 2017). Interregional student mobility is central to the post-2015 vision of ASEAN, which centers around creating a “politically cohesive, economically integrated, socially responsible and a true rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN” (ASEAN 2015). The potential benefits are significant. As European economies slow down, many ASEAN and other Asian economies are on the rise. Thailand has become a manufacturing hub, and Korean and Japanese companies have been quick to take advantage of trade and investment opportunities within the region.

Mobile students are more likely to become mobile workers, taking advantage of economic opportunities in the region and bringing benefits to their home nations

(Gribble and Tran 2016). The heterogeneity of the ASEAN community poses challenges. The member countries range from Singapore, one of the world's most competitive economies, to Myanmar, where a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line (Yang 2014). Finance is a significant constraint. Language is another key barrier. While a growing number of institutions in the region offer programs for international students in English, the English language proficiency of students in many ASEAN member nations remains low; and boosting language tuition is considered a necessary strategy for encouraging greater mobility. There are major regional disparities, with Singaporeans undertaking most of their education in English and students in other ASEAN countries having limited exposure to English during their schooling (Yue 2013).

Student exchange plays an increasingly important role in the planning of ASEAN higher education. Following the Fourth ASEAN Summit in 1992, the AUN was developed in 1995 in order to "strengthen the existing network of co-operation among leading universities in ASEAN" by "promoting co-operation and solidarity among ASEAN scholars and academicians, developing academic and professional human resource(s), and promoting information dissemination among ASEAN academic community" (NUS 2016). Among its primary activities are student exchanges involving 30 universities in the region (AUN 2018). SEAMEO RIHED (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development) and the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have also expanded another student mobility program named M-I-T, launched in 2009, into the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme (SEAMEO RIHED 2018). The Ministry of Education of each country offers financial support to its own students for AIMS (KMUTT 2014).

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows: The next section discusses the harmonization and internationalization of higher education. After that, a comparison of ASEAN countries on the basis of internationalization practices is presented by dividing the countries into three categories based on their number of HEIs: low, medium, and high. The paper ends with a discussion, recommendations, and suggestions for future studies.

Harmonization through Higher Education

There is no question that the internationalization of higher education has transformed the higher education landscape in the last two decades. The increasingly globalized and interconnected world in which we live has compelled HEIs, educational organizations, and national governments to pay increased attention to academic relations and opportu-

nities with partners in other countries (Knight 2013). Harmonization is interlinked with regionalization. The regionalization of higher education was previously implemented by central governments through national policies. This process started in Sweden in 1977, failed within the decade (Premfors 1984; Clark and Neave 1992), and then was taken up by Spain with the Organic Law on Higher Education of 1983 (Neave 2003). Subsequently, regionalization emerged in Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom. The regionalization process has changed the role of nations beyond their boundaries to develop networks with neighboring countries. The past decade has seen a growing East Asian dimension to internationalization that is visible at the institutional, national, and regional levels. For instance, the number of Vietnamese students going to China and Malaysia to further their studies has been increasing (Welch 2010).

Some researchers argue that the trend of regionalization is already visible in the EU, the Caribbean, and ASEAN (Forest 1995). However, others assert that nationalism acts as a counterforce and places boundaries that cannot be crossed through regionalization (De Witt 1995). Years ago Clark Kerr, then president of perhaps the largest regional HEI in the world—the multi-campus University of California—proclaimed that there were two laws of motion active in opposite directions: the internationalization of knowledge and learning, and the nationalization of higher education (Kerr 1990). According to J.N. Hawkins (2012), there are two phases of regionalism in the Asian region, which he terms “old” and “new.” The old phase spanned three decades from 1950 to 1980 and consisted of country groupings of intra-regional interactions, peer economies, security, trade, and education. Since 1980—the new phase—neoliberalism, economic liberalism, and market deregulation have given rise to interregional organizations such as the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and ASEAN+3. Educational regionalism has been developed through organizations such as SEAMEO, the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, and RIHED (Hawkins 2012). These organizations’ core focus is on a diverse set of higher education aspects such as quality assurance, teaching and learning, collaborative research and development, and inbound/outbound student mobility (Shameel 2003; Robertson 2007).

Europe also went through several regionalization phases. In the mid-1980s to 1990s, two plans were adopted that focused on student mobility: the Socrates and Erasmus programs. They engaged not only HEIs but also Europe-wide professional associations and technical colleges, which were considered to be essential in the regionalization process. By 2000 the Comenius and Grundtvig programs had further developed the above two programs. Their focus is on various forms of harmonization such as mobility, faculty, students, policy reforms, and European university systems. In 1998 the Bologna Process began, which magnified the goal of the Magna Charta for the European Higher Education

Area. The core focus of the Magna Charta was on mobility, while the Bologna Process aimed at harmonizing other aspects of European higher education.

Harmonization and Internationalization

The increase in internationalization and globalization of higher education, particularly the rapid development of cross-border higher education, has underlined an urgent need to establish robust frameworks for quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications (Altbach and Knight 2007). With the introduction of regionalism, the challenges for HEIs go beyond the concept of globalization (MacLeod 2001). The main concern is how HEIs and the national governments of regional member countries can adjust to cope with regionalized education in a manner that welcomes harmonization. The AEC faces a similar challenge to ASEAN HIEs. The education systems in ASEAN countries are diverse; therefore, students involved in intra-regional mobility face many problems in terms of cultural diversity, language and communication barriers, instructional practices, and curriculum incompatibility (Ramburuth and McCormick 2001).

Methodology

The current study is an exploratory qualitative study with a comparative approach based on an analysis of the published literature, e.g., journal articles as well as organizational and national reports. A comparative approach is especially valuable in academic research as higher education and HEIs worldwide have many common traditions and characteristics (Altbach and Peterson 1999). For a better understanding, researchers have divided the ASEAN nations into three groups based on their degree of demonstrated internationalization practices at the national and institutional levels: low, medium, and high. This division gives a clearer perspective to assist readers' understanding of current trends influencing the internationalization of higher education in ASEAN member countries.

Findings

High Group

Only Singapore is placed in the high group for the current study. Singapore, being considered an education hub, has developed effective internationalization plans and strate-

gies. The government of Singapore is focused on the nation's being a global leader in the educational market (Owens and Lane 2014). It is expected that Singapore will actively contribute to the research clusters within ASEAN. Already by 2012, the director of the Science and Technology Postgraduate Education and Research Development Office in Thailand could state, "Singapore is in the premier league, while we (Thailand and Malaysia) are first division. They will have to cooperate with us in the spirit of ASEAN or they will be isolated" (Huang 2007).

Singapore's government policies have been designed, reviewed, and implemented to promote a range of student attributes as well as values including intercultural engagement and awareness, developing a competitive edge, and creating a sense of global citizenship. All of these are accomplished through an internationally designed curriculum that works to meet the country's industrial manpower requirements and to develop Singapore as an international education hub (Daquila 2013). Singapore's universities, particularly the National University of Singapore, have implemented plans and activities to promote internationalization abroad as well as at home.

Medium Group

For countries in the medium group, internationalization discussions and policies are organized more around issues of student and staff mobility. The main rationales linked with internationalization activities for the governments of these countries are political and economic. These countries consider student and staff mobility as a way to further skills learning as well as trade (Lohani 2013).

Malaysia, on its way toward becoming a regional educational hub, has focused on multiple internationalization practices, particularly student mobility/exchange and research collaboration (Tham 2013). Malaysia has branches of eight foreign universities, mainly from the UK and Australia (Sengupta 2015). Similarly, Thailand has drawn noticeable interest from foreign campuses. Stamford University, originally from Singapore and Malaysia, and Webster University from the United States are two prominent international campuses in Thailand. Thailand has integrated higher education internationalization into its development plans since 1990. Internationalization was seen early on as an opportunity in Thailand for economic development; however, during the economic crisis it came to be viewed as an external threat. The government faced the dilemma of balancing these two divergent views and decided to try having it both ways (Lavankura 2013). At the institutional level, both public and private universities are attempting to develop "international teaching programs," not only to serve the range of students' demands but also to earn fee income.

An increasing internationalization trend can be observed in the Philippines, Indone-

sia, and Brunei, which are also striving to be more competent within the global education industry. In the Philippines, the need for internationalization plans has been recognized by the Commission on Higher Education to gear up HEIs, including both state and private institutions, to operate at an international level (Cinches *et al.* 2016). The commission's mission includes improving institutional quality assurance and requiring HEIs to implement the necessary mechanisms to ensure that graduates are competent within a speedily changing globalized world (Laguador *et al.* 2014).

Indonesia views the internationalization of higher education as a challenge, and the government emphasizes the need for universities to develop internationalization strategies. Internationalization was included in the National Education Strategic Plan and the Higher Education Long Term Strategic Plan 2003–10. Various other programs were developed, including workshops/seminars on internationalization and avenues for network formation such as the Global Development Learning Network and the Indonesia Higher Education Network (Soejatminah 2009). However, a lack of capability at the institutional level has slowed down the process. Improving the basic factors shaping internationalization, for instance proficiency in English and information and communication technology, may boost the progress of internationalization in Indonesian higher education (Marginson 2010).

Low Group

Internationalization is a hallmark of ASEAN higher education at both the global and regional levels (Mok and Han 2016). For Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, internationalization is often perceived as improving the quality of academic staff and research (Council 2013; Mathuros 2013; UNESCO 2014). As trained staff and PhD-holding professors are scarce in these countries, developing international partnerships with overseas universities is a significant way to bring knowledge from the outside to filter in for both staff and professorial ranks. Studies by the Asian Development Bank have touched on the critical issue of brain drain in these countries, where low faculty salaries fail to bring back students who have left to pursue graduate degrees abroad. Vietnam is expecting new international recognition in the global education market as five of its universities are listed in the 2019 QS Asia University Rankings. Vietnam National University, Hanoi takes the lead among the five Vietnamese universities, claiming 139th place, while Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City is in the 142nd position.

In ASEAN-wide meetings, paying lip service to increase the capacity of economically weaker countries is often part of the friendly dialogue; however, there has been little effort on the part of the stronger countries to share power and to form and administer a knowledge society (Feuer and Hornidge 2015). Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam

need more vigilant strategic engagement to play their role in ASEAN regionalization and harmonization.

ASEAN Efforts toward Building an ASEAN Knowledge Economy

Despite their differences, the ASEAN countries agree that internationalization will allow for the better development of technology and research and enhanced regionalization and harmonization. ASEAN has implemented several plans, as shown in Fig. 1, to achieve the target of building an ASEAN knowledge community.

Internationally collaborative research will allow many countries with an inferior infrastructure to become more capable of innovating for production and growth. ASEAN continuously puts forth efforts toward developing a more harmonious and unified ASEAN knowledge economy. The efforts of the ASEAN administration toward developing higher education in the region are noticeable. However, countries already rich in technology as well as financial resources are receiving the real benefit of such strategies.

Comparison of Higher Education Internationalization in ASEAN Countries

ASEAN member countries in general have high numbers of HEIs. Table 1 provides the number of HEIs in each of them.

Regionalization or harmonization through mobility and collaboration of learning processes in higher education is not an end in itself. It is important that the awareness of a shared higher education area, and the linked benefits for individual universities, be com-

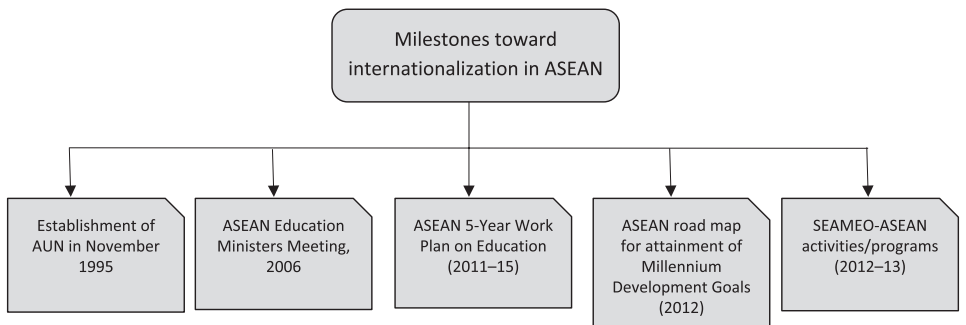


Fig. 1 Internationalization in ASEAN

Source: ASEAN Secretariat (2013).

municated at all levels of the higher education system. Quality assurance is the process of promoting cooperation among HEIs and assisting with educational harmonization at the national and international levels. AUN is a platform involved in several AUN-QA programs through which joint initiatives with other organizations can be established. AUN-QA offers an assessment of universities and their educational offerings, and shares best practices relating to quality assurance. Table 2 shows the number of AUN member universities and identifies the corresponding external quality assurance agencies operating in these countries.

Table 1 Number of HEIs in ASEAN Member Countries

Country	No. of HEIs	Year
<i>High</i>		
Singapore	11	2016
<i>Medium</i>		
Indonesia	4,400	2016
Malaysia	111	2016
Brunei Darussalam	5	2016
Philippines	2,299	2016
Thailand	155	2016
<i>Low</i>		
Cambodia	121	2016
Lao PDR	211	2015
Myanmar	163	2016
Vietnam	419	2014

Sources: UNESCO (2014); KOICA Cambodia (2016).

Table 2 Internationalization of Higher Education: A Comparative View of ASEAN Nations

Country	AUN Member Universities	External Quality Assurance Agencies
<i>High</i>		
Singapore	3	Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education
<i>Medium</i>		
Indonesia	4	National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education
Malaysia	5	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
Brunei	1	Brunei Darussalam National Accreditation Council
Philippines	3	Commission on Higher Education
Thailand	5	Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment
<i>Low</i>		
Cambodia	2	Accreditation Committee of Cambodia
Lao PDR	1	Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education
Myanmar	3	Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Upper Myanmar
Vietnam	3	General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation, Ministry of Education and Training

Sources: AUN (2018); SHARE (2018).

Higher Education Internationalization Trends in ASEAN

ASEAN, being a diverse region, has numerous strengths and weaknesses that vary from country to country. Based on the findings of this study, an increasing interdependence can be seen among ASEAN countries, particularly on policy collaboration and economic integration. Regionalization might be considered as an intentional process that reveals a desire to move toward a more planned rather than ad hoc form of association. Regionalization and harmonization among nations can be enhanced by encouraging internationalization of activities at the intra-regional and interregional levels. Individual ASEAN governments have increased public investment in the higher education industry to support the overall structure of ASEAN higher education and the region's growing knowledge economy. Internationalization is viewed as a substantial stimulus to strengthen the performance of ASEAN universities across a wide range of indicators, such as exchange of students/staff, research integration and collaboration, development of branch campuses, and internationalized curricula. These measures also pave the way for enhancing integration between universities in the region, improving the overall status of Asian universities.

The findings of the present study are summarized in Table 3, which presents higher education internationalization trends in ASEAN countries.

Table 3 Higher Education Internationalization Trends in ASEAN

Country	Trends
<i>High</i>	
Singapore	Increasing public expenditure Promoting international academic cooperation Emphasizing cutting-edge R&D and innovation Emphasizing international profile and partnerships Hosting overseas branch campuses
<i>Medium</i>	
Indonesia	High demand from international students enrolling in Malaysian HEIs
Malaysia	Emphasizing education quality
Brunei	Lowering public expenditure by shifting cost to students
Philippines	Recruitment of international faculty/researchers
Thailand	Emphasizing international research-oriented policy Controlled/limited overseas branch campuses
<i>Low</i>	
Cambodia	Threat to education quality
Lao PDR	Less access to equity
Myanmar	Lack of human resources and financial support for international activities
Vietnam	Limited international faculty and staff Limited enrollment of international students More opportunities for private HEIs

Discussion

ASEAN: Successes and Failures

The drive toward ASEAN harmonization seems to be on track. ASEAN member countries are motivated to move forward, and actions have been taken to support the integration of higher education. The ASEAN community acknowledges the need to create a common but not standardized or identical ASEAN Higher Education Area that can facilitate the mobility of students and faculty and comparability of degrees within Asia. However, there are political and sociocultural differences that result in variations in curricula, programs, instruction, and degrees. These can be managed in ways that allow for the creation of communal ASEAN quality control structures, degree structures, and credit transfer systems.

ASEAN's achievements are greater in the security and political areas than in education. With increased confidence and dissipating mutual suspicion among members through cooperative activities and frequent meetings, ASEAN has enriched Southeast Asia with impressive economic growth. In order to create further harmonization through higher education, enhanced connections among ASEAN universities—via improved research and collaboration opportunities, and inbound/outbound mobility flows supported by increased prosperity—will assist in developing a mutual awareness and greater sense of regional harmony.

Undeniably, the regionalization programs and strategies implemented by ASEAN have the potential to generate considerable benefits such as knowledge sharing, intensification of cross-cultural understanding, and regional unification and peace. However, when looking at the situation as a whole, the data reveal a fragmented landscape of mutually exclusive and overlapping intraregional and cross-regional political and economic interdependencies. These uncoordinated dynamics may cause geopolitical tension, as regional networks are characterized by political maneuvering and other posturing behaviors. Thus, the execution of harmonization plans is not without its challenges. Importantly, steps are needed to increase student readiness. Language and communication barriers must be conquered. Adjustment problems occur with student mobility, particularly with respect to curriculum differences, differences in instructional practices, cultural diversity, and differences in language, the last of which in and of itself is a great barrier to cross-cultural learning. An ASEAN-wide integrated quality assurance mechanism is required; thus, the ASEAN Qualification Agency (AQA) needs to build links between the various national quality assurance systems. Confidence and mutual trust should be developed between the different systems.

Internationalization Matters: Making It Work

The internationalization of higher education has the potential to contribute to the development of a harmonized ASEAN region. The Bologna Process is a good example of this strategic mission; focusing on modernization of the international relationships of partner countries' universities, it enhances academic mobility and correspondingly increases the attractiveness of higher education systems in European countries. In the context of ASEAN, consistency is required in internationalization and regional development policies, based on the principles of equity and enhanced academic mobility among member countries. A comprehensive international approach at the institutional, national, and multi-regional levels can boost harmonization among nations with diverse cultures, norms, and languages. Through extensive networking, partnerships, and digital transformation of HEIs (Khalid *et al.* 2018), ASEAN nations can come together to one higher education forum, which may lead toward unification and harmonization. Universities in ASEAN must recognize and acknowledge that “academic Institutions are always been [*sic*] part of the international knowledge system” (Altbach and Umakoshi 2004) and in the transformation and digitalization age they are more interconnected to global trends.

Conclusion

The current study explores contemporary trends, challenges, and opportunities in the ASEAN region toward developing a culture of harmonization among all nations and determining how the internationalization of higher education can assist in this process. The researchers found that internationalization practices—student/staff mobility, exchange programs, research collaboration, and regional scholarships—could lead to a more harmonized ASEAN community. The more developed countries—Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines—are actively developing their education systems to compete in the global knowledge society. In contrast, lesser developed countries—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam—are not competitive globally at this point due to a lack of sufficient resources for internationalization practices, language barriers, low funding and limited regional scholarships, and ineffective national and institutional policies to implement internationalization. Therefore, these countries need to increase their collaboration and research activities within the region and mobilize the inbound/outbound flow of students by providing financial assistance. It is necessary for ASEAN leadership to engage all nations equally to build a harmonious and unified ASEAN community.

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Politicizing the Fear of Crime in Decentralized Indonesia: An Insight from Central Lombok

Yogi Setya Permana*

In the study of contemporary local politics and the dynamics of decentralization in Indonesia, there is insufficient research on how political actors integrate both psychologically and emotionally as a strategy to gain power at the local level. This paper explores the way in which the emotion labelled “fear of crime” embodies local power, specifically in the Central Lombok District of West Nusa Tenggara Province. Efforts have been made to investigate how the fear of crime emerged and was disseminated, as well as how the politics of fear appeared and functioned in a social setting. This paper argues that fear can be socially constructed through talk of crime and politicized in the context of local elections by elites through informal security groups or individual *datu maling*, two entities that I refer to as “fear entrepreneurs.”

Keywords: fear, crime, informal security groups, local politics, violence, local election

Introduction

This study investigates the link between politics and the fear of crime. The author analyzes how elites in Central Lombok use fear when seeking power, such as in local elections for the heads of districts. Along with the implementation of decentralization and regional autonomy as well as direct local elections of local government heads (*pemilihan kepala daerah* or *pilkada*) in Indonesia after 1998, the dynamics of local politics have been in the spotlight in academic debates about political transition and democratization.

Scholarship on fear of crime and politics suggests several salient points on how the former influences power competitions such as elections. However, there has been no research scrutinizing the link between the fear of crime and the outcome of local electoral politics in Indonesia. Most studies of local politics in post-New Order Indonesia have focused on contestation among political actors at the local level who used various strategies, resources, and networks, including religious sentiment (Buehler 2016), vote buying

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and money politics (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2016), mobilizing kinship structures (Savirani 2016), bureaucracy (Choi 2014), customary institutions (Van Klinken 2007), women's organizations (Dewi 2015), and violent vigilante groups (Wilson 2015; Bakker 2016).

However, research is lacking on how political actors use psychological and emotional strategies to gain power at the local level. The psychological factor referred to in this research is fear, especially the fear of crime. The fear of crime in post-Suharto Indonesian local politics has not been widely studied. This is surprising, as crime has been documented as being prevalent in Indonesian daily life. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS 2016), the nationwide crime clock for 2015 reads 00.01"29'", which means that a crime occurs every 1 minute 29 seconds.

Central Lombok is an appropriate place to more deeply investigate the link between electoral politics and fear of crime. This is because Central Lombok has a high crime rate and an extensive informal security network, both of which are conducive for disseminating the fear of crime. The issue of crime and the existence of informal security groups in Lombok's political environment have been cited by scholars of the region. Although not explicitly discussing the link between the emotional aspect and electoral politics, prior studies provide significant insights into the existence of informal security groups in Lombok local politics. They explain how these groups intertwine with politicians to gain power in the region.

John McDougall (2007) conducted an in-depth observation of the intersection between underground crime networks and informal security groups such as AMPHIBI and Buru Jejak Kumpul. His empirical research has contributed to a contextual understanding of the emergence and political economy of violent groups in Lombok. His work also describes the economic networks in addition to historical and cultural insights into crime, particularly regarding theft in Lombok. J.J. Kingsley (2012) focuses on the link between religious leaders called Tuan Guru and informal security groups such as AMPHIBI and Hezbollah in local politics. Adam Tyson (2013) analyzes the effects of decentralization on the existence of a faith-based vigilante group named AMPHIBI. AMPHIBI has become significant in political contests where the organizational network can be used effectively as an instrument to mobilize political support. Kari Telle (2013; 2015) examines how informal security groups in Lombok obtain significant influence and recognition in social life so as to more easily access state resources.

Communities in Central Lombok District, where the primary livelihood derives from agriculture, encounter problems that threaten their assets, especially livestock. At the time of the political transition in 1998, the number of criminal cases in Lombok increased drastically—the number of cases registered in the Lombok court system doubled from 1997 to 1998 (Kristiansen 2003, 122). The social unrest during the political transition

impacted the tourism industry in Lombok, which saw a decline in the number of foreign visitors. The unemployment rate on the island was high, with only 17 percent of workers employed in the formal sector (*ibid.*). This contributed to increased crime on the island. The police, as the state agency with authority over security, were relatively ineffective in dealing with burglaries. The number of thefts in Lombok remains high to this day.

When the state failed to provide adequate security, informal security groups emerged to fill that role. It is no coincidence that Lombok is reputed to have the highest number of informal security groups of any region in the Indonesian archipelago. The largest number of groups is located in Central Lombok, where approximately 25 percent of adult men are active members of such groups (McDougall 2007; Telle 2015). Lombok communities prefer informal security groups to resolve their security problems. Some members of these groups are also famous for their magical abilities that can allegedly be used against thieves. In the eyes of local communities, these informal security groups legitimately capture and punish thieves, conducting this community-sanctioned violence outside of state frameworks.

In a situation where there is a collective fear of crime, political actors who provide solutions to security problems become very influential in the community. Once direct local elections were introduced, individuals elected as district heads became closely connected to informal security groups. This background suggests that investigating how the fear of crime is employed in the local political context remains essential to exploring the ways in which fear of crime shapes local power. To fulfill this main objective, this paper will discuss how fear of crime is constructed in society and how the politics of fear emerges and functions in social life, as well as the ways in which the consequences of this fear have changed recently. I argue that fear can be socially constructed through talk about crime and politicized in local elections by the elites through informal security groups and individual *datu maling*, two entities that I refer to as “fear entrepreneurs.”

Theorizing the Linkages of Politics and Fear of Crime

Fear of crime can be applied as a source of legitimation for successful social and political control (Svendsen 2008, 111; Dammert 2012, 31). If crime can be converted to general political interests, it can become a crucial issue in elections. Response to crime is one of the most important criteria for evaluating a government’s performance (Dammert 2012, 31). Elites typically take advantage of public anxiety about crime to serve their political interests. In the West, politicians have often used the threat of crime to win support at election time. In the 1979 UK election Margaret Thatcher politicized the fear

of crime to achieve victory. She used the tagline “Feeling safe in the streets” as a campaign theme that successfully attracted British voters (Jackson *et al.* 2006, 8).

Fear of crime as a topic of scholarly discussion and public debate began to appear in the 1960s (Furedi 2006; Jackson *et al.* 2006). In the decades until the 1980s, governments made a significant effort to understand and control this kind of fear, especially in the United States and United Kingdom (Jackson *et al.* 2006, 3). As US President Johnson noted in the presidential report on crime in 1965, the US government needed to conduct studies and surveys to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The observation was triggered by political and social contexts such as increasing social protests, racial discrimination, assassinations of political leaders, and the stigma about young, poor African Americans as perpetrators of crime (Dammert 2012, 29). A similar situation was observed in the UK, where inner city riots in the 1980s initiated massive media coverage of crime and its implications for British society (*ibid.*, 30).

In the constructivist sense, fear is socially constructed through language. Humans circulate fear socially through language, using language to internalize and express their feelings about fear, particularly in their interactions with each other. This means that the experience of fear is different for humans compared to animals. Specifically, it means that a sense of danger can be communicated over a great distance. A distant danger can be accepted as a direct threat to human well-being. As communication of this kind of threat depends on words, which may be misinterpreted, human beings can end up creating an imaginary threat (Svendsen 2008, 25). In turn, this imaginary threat can create a fear that shapes cultural norms within a specific community. Fear influences how people organize their everyday life so that they can anticipate potential threats. Routine action to anticipate threats transforms into a standardized practice of living. Moreover, repetition of stories about fear can influence general perspectives on life. It is even possible for specific fears to become a culture’s basic characteristic (*ibid.*, 19).

As fear is social and relational (Barker 2009, 267), it can be contagious (Svendsen 2008, 14)—that is, it can be transmitted socially. For instance, hearing the story of a criminal being discussed by other people can lead to feelings of fear (Barker 2009, 267). Fear is created from people’s testimony about threats. Moreover, people tend to exaggerate threat, with the consequence that rumors often portray danger as more acute than the actual situation warrants.

Like other forms of fear, fear of crime spreads in daily life through ordinary discourse, rhetoric, routines, and the mass media (Lupton and Tulloch 1999, 513). As suggested by Teresa Caldeira (2000, 19) in her research on “talk of crime” in Sao Paulo, Brazil, fear can arise from everyday conversations, commentaries, discussions, narratives, and jokes with crime as their subject. Thus, the general contagion effect of fear

applies strongly in the fear of crime.

In his classic work on fear during the 1789 French Revolution, Georges Lefebvre (1973) emphasizes the role of what he calls “relays” in spreading the fear of crime discourse across a wider area. As he writes, fear could reach almost all the regions of France only because of the help of these relays, which included doctors, dancing masters, merchants, priests, couriers, postmen, municipal officers, military commanders, and militia members. Traveling up to hundreds of kilometers, these people distributed stories of crime to the people they met on their journeys (Lefebvre 1973, 161).

The talk, rumors, and even myths about crime that circulate in certain communities do not exist only in relation to crime. They also reflect the broader political situation (Lupton and Tulloch 1999, 512). Discourse about fear of crime influences how people define whom and what they should fear (Barker 2009, 267). Based on Caldeira’s research in Sao Paulo, public discourse through narratives of crime creates stereotypes and prejudices about groups of people called *nortenos* as being perpetrators of crime. Similarly, public discourse engineered by the ideology apparatus during Suharto’s New Order Indonesia created a long-lasting stigma toward former members of the Indonesian Communist Party, which was crushed in the bloodshed of 1965 (Heryanto 2006). They came to be perceived as ghosts that needed to be feared but eliminated at the same time. Thus, there is a need to understand how power is involved in constructing discourse, and it is essential to understand the political interests involved in the fear of crime discourse.

The Social Construction of Fear in Central Lombok: Talk of Crime

People in contemporary Central Lombok are concerned over the pervasiveness of theft. Not only livestock but also motorcycles are common targets of theft. Motorcycle theft occurs in all areas, including remote villages. In addition, people fear the sadistic behavior of thieves. The strong impression that the police are incapable of offering protection only serves to exacerbate people’s fears.

Based on statistics from the local police and the Statistics Office of Central Lombok District, theft cases consistently dominate Central Lombok’s list of crimes. Theft dominated the criminal case list for the entire Central Lombok region from 2004 to 2013. The highest percentage occurred in 2006, when theft accounted for 58 percent of the 52 types of criminal cases handled by police (BPS Lombok Tengah 2006, 274). In 2007, Central Lombok Police received 103 reports of motorcycle theft, of which only three cases were resolved as seen from Table 1. Table 1 shows that the high incidence of motorcycle theft continued until 2010, reaching 252 cases in that year. The police were

Table 1 Criminality Rate in Lombok Tengah District 2006–10

Types of Criminality	Year				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Theft of cattle, goats, buffalo	85	118	38	52	151
Motorcycle theft	26	103	22	35	252
Violent theft	18	26	16	12	77

Source: BPS Lombok Tengah (2006; 2010).

able to resolve only 33 of these cases (BPS Lombok Tengah 2010, 233).

Limitations on the number of police personnel is often cited as a reason for their inability to overcome rampant motorcycle theft.¹⁾ Central Lombok Police officers numbered about 800 in 2013. They are responsible for security in a region with over 800,000 inhabitants (BPS Nusa Tenggara Barat 2014, 259). This ratio is well below the ideal ratio of 1:400 police to civilians specified by the United Nations.

However, the most crucial issue is people's reluctance to report crime to the police due to complicated, long, and costly bureaucratic processes. Many victims of crime are ordinary farmers who rarely deal with bureaucratic systems and are consequently wary of involvement with the police. An exception to this is the increasing practice of hiring mediators to help victims at police stations. These mediators mostly come from NGOs and are already accustomed to dealing with police under the banner of "people's advocacy." People assume that asking for help from NGO activists will facilitate their dealings with the police.²⁾ NGO activists are believed to ensure that the investigation process will be shortened and not involve any additional cost. Many local people believe that asking an NGO activist for help is much cheaper and easier than going to a police station on their own.³⁾ They only give the activist a small amount of money or offer goods as a sign of gratitude, but they experience no coercion from the activist.

The rampant criminal acts committed by young thieves in Central Lombok frighten all members of society. Younger thieves are reputed to be more sadistic in the way they conduct their operations. There have been several cases of theft and robbery accompanied by sadistic violence. On July 29, 2015 cattle thieves (allegedly 10 individuals) killed a man named Sumirat in Kateng village when he attempted to pursue them. Sumirat was stabbed several times and sustained injuries on different parts of his body, including his hands, waist, chest, and thighs (LombokPost.net 2015).

1) Interview with Lalu Sugiartha, Security and Intelligence Office–Central Lombok Police, May 29, 2013.

2) Interview with Ikhsan Ramdhani, local NGO activist, July 3, 2015.

3) Interview with Ikhsan Ramdhani, local NGO activist, July 3, 2015.

Instead of information about crime being spread through mainstream communication channels such as television or newspapers, the primary medium for spreading fear is a traditional construction called the *berugak*. *Berugak* are usually located in front of the house and are used instead of a living room. There is no concept of a separate space for a living room in the architecture of traditional Lombok houses. Therefore, the *berugak* functions as a place to receive guests and strangers. The use of *berugak* is influenced by the high incidence of robbery or theft in Lombok, a pattern that has historical precedent. By receiving guests in the *berugak*, a householder reduces the opportunity for outsiders to see valuable property inside the house.

The *berugak* is a place to exchange information, including stories about criminal cases. Locals discuss brutal murders in these spaces, and this information passes from *berugak* to *berugak* in different villages. By the time they are delivered, most stories are already filled with distortions. Each person adds to or modifies the story based on their own interpretation. In *berugak* conversations I was often encouraged to share stories of crime related to the villagers' experience. I discussed my concerns about the safety of personal belongings, especially after the theft that occurred in the house where I had been staying.

Berugak talk of crime not only spreads fear but also produces it. Everyone is free to speak about criminal cases with their own personal interpretation. Fact and fiction become mixed in *berugak* crime talk. People in *berugak* do not question the validity or accuracy of the crime stories they hear from others. On the contrary, everything is assumed to be true; people are more excited about discussing crime stories if they are more frightening than usual.

Recently, people in Central Lombok have been concerned with cases of violent criminal acts carried out during robberies. Thieves have not hesitated to hurt or even kill their victims. Residents in the village of Jago reported that they preferred to stay in their homes even if their neighbor was being robbed and screaming for help. They preferred to save themselves rather than helping to capture the thieves. An informant told me that a few nights after he had helped to capture a thief, his house was terrorized by the thief's associates. He could not bear this intimidation and decided to go to Malaysia as a migrant worker.⁴⁾

A criminal case that was much discussed in *berugak* and attracted a great deal of public attention in Lombok was the heartless murder of Sumirat, mentioned above. Sumirat was an ordinary farmer from Kateng village, in the subdistrict of southwestern Praya. His killing caused great anxiety among residents because they felt that this sort

4) Interview with Jago village resident, confidential name, June 30, 2015.

of tragic incident could happen to anyone at any time.

People in *berugak* also discuss which areas are considered crime-prone or dangerous. These discussions can transform into intense debates. Everyone is free to agree or disagree with the opinions of others. Such talk can affect understandings of the level of security in a particular region. On one occasion in a *berugak*, I told people about my travels around the Central Lombok region, particularly the dam near Batujai village. Initially I thought it was safe as I did not experience any crime. However, people in the *berugak* warned me that the area was notorious for crime, especially motorcycle theft.

The stories discussed by people in *berugak* are passed on through families. Family members pass them on to neighbors, schoolmates, or friends in their prayer group. The stories spread quickly from house to house and village to village. In the end, *berugak* talk of crime can spread to the entire Central Lombok region. Distances between towns are small enough that residents meet each other easily.

With the high incidence of crime in Central Lombok, fear spreads quickly through discussions about crime, especially discussions held in *berugak*. Conversations about crime that are held in everyday life cause people to worry constantly. Although not everyone experiences crime directly or becomes a victim, the circulation of crime stories generates the emotion of fear. *Berugak* structures are a primary node for enabling the spread of fear, leading to a collective phenomenon. Fear in society has the potential to be exploited in local politics and provide benefits for certain political actors.

The Rise and Fall of Lalu Wiraatmaja a.k.a. Mamiq Ngoh, Kingpin of Central Lombok's Informal Security Groups

When Lalu Wiraatmaja ran in the 2005 Central Lombok direct elections for local government head (*pemilihan kepala daerah* or *pilkada*), he understood very well the advantage of using informal security groups as part of his political machine. Better known by his nickname, Mamiq Ngoh, he was a pivotal figure in Central Lombok's informal security groups. He was widely reputed to have a close relationship with Buru Jejak Kumpul. Mamiq Ngoh is an aristocrat from the Praya House of Nobles. He inherited a standing as the leader of the local aristocracy, and his family are traditional leaders in Central Lombok. The founder and leader of Buru Jejak Kumpul, Amaq Raisah, has been loyal to the Praya aristocratic families. Amaq Raisah's family served as the trusted guards of Praya aristocrats in the past. Due to his influence, Mamiq Ngoh was appointed as the chairman of the Informal Security Groups Communication Forum when it was established in 2004. He became an adviser and protector of various informal security groups through-

out Central Lombok.

Buru Jejak Kumpul is the oldest informal security group in Central Lombok. It has branches, called units, in hundreds of villages around the region. A coordinator leads each of the units, which have varying numbers of members ranging from the dozens to the hundreds. Unit coordinators use amateur radio to communicate with members who are spread across villages, and to communicate with headquarters in Bilelando village. They use amateur radio as it is cheaper and more efficient than other types of communication, including mobile phones. Radio amateurs only need electric power and an antenna. Buru Jejak Kumpul became an organization prototype that was subsequently imitated by other emerging informal security groups, such as Elang Merah (Red Eagle) and Pakem Sasak.

Local people request these groups to provide security for their cattle. However, there is a price to be paid. For each head of cattle, people pay an annual fee of 250,000 rupiah to Buru Jejak Kumpul. Thus, if a person has five head of cattle he has to pay 1.25 million rupiah annually. A cow is worth around nine million rupiah. In accepting this payment, informal security groups accept responsibility for the assets' security. If cattle is stolen, the group is obliged to hunt down and recapture it. Protected clients are given a sticker with a Buru Jejak Kumpul logo to attach to the front of their houses. The group does not hesitate to use violence. Captured thieves are routinely taken to a location, usually the group's headquarters, to face a "trial" and punishment. Most forms of punishment involve physical violence, such as amputating parts of the body or even extrajudicial killings.

Mamiq Ngoh became the point of reference for informal security groups, obtaining an influential position among them. He was the person to whom these groups would address complaints if they faced problems. Almost every night Mamiq Ngoh's house was crowded with members of various informal security groups, who came with problems ranging from internal organizational issues to relationship difficulties among groups. Mamiq Ngoh did not hesitate to mediate between conflicting groups to make peace. He also frequently became a mediator for groups facing problems with local authorities and the police.⁵⁾ This close relationship with informal security groups was the primary element in Mamiq Ngoh's strategy of contesting in local elections.

Mamiq Ngoh was elected as the head of Central Lombok District in the 2005 local elections. This was the first direct election of a local government head in decentralized Central Lombok. Many leaders of informal security groups joined Mamiq Ngoh's campaign team, some of them officially registered with the Regional Election Commission.

5) Interview with Mamiq Ngoh, Central Lombok District head 2005–10, May 29, 2013.

Thousands of informal security group members demonstrated their explicit support for Mamiq Ngoh by escorting him when he registered as a candidate at the Regional Election Commission office (*Lombok Post* 2005). The informal security groups intimidated other candidates and their supporters with a series of public campaigns involving thousands of members. It was a public show of force in the streets of Central Lombok.

Informal security groups secured votes for Mamiq Ngoh at the grassroots level in ways other than the public show of force. It appears that Mamiq Ngoh used informal security groups to mobilize voters at the village level.⁶⁾ He ensured that the population would vote for him through the network of informal security groups that spread into remote villages. His supporters did not hesitate to intimidate other candidates' supporters, disrupting their campaigns.

Mamiq Ngoh also used security as a central propaganda element in his campaign to attract votes in Central Lombok villages. He used the citizens' fear of criminal acts and theft as a way to attract support, creating the impression that he could ensure security in Central Lombok better than the other candidates could. Mamiq Ngoh himself cannot be separated from the image of a tough guy or *jago*. A member of his campaign team told me that Mamiq Ngoh had been a famous thug when he was young and fought with many people.⁷⁾ This is why his supporters believed he was the only candidate who could deal with violent crime in the region.⁸⁾ There was a strong belief that if the people wanted to be safe from crime, they should vote for Mamiq Ngoh.⁹⁾

By utilizing security as the central theme for campaign propaganda, Mamiq Ngoh aroused concerns among local people: they worried about their safety if they did not vote for him. They were intimidated by threats from members of informal security groups.¹⁰⁾ If Mamiq Ngoh was defeated in a particular village's election, that village would receive no protection from thieves. Voters understood that no one would provide security for them if they did not follow the group's directions. Neither could any institution guarantee the safety of their cattle, apart from these informal security groups.

However, there were two factors that led to a dramatic decline in the number of votes for Mamiq Ngoh in 2010: the rivalry among informal security groups and public distrust over the issue of crime. Mamiq Ngoh's image of providing a solution to the security problem was in tatters. The political machine that he previously relied upon, informal security groups, began to be viewed negatively. People started questioning

6) Interview with former secretary of Buru Jejak Kumpul, confidential name, June 4, 2013.

7) Interview with a former member of Mamiq Ngoh's campaign team, confidential name, July 3, 2015.

8) Interview with Bustomi Taefuri, a former NGO activist and politician, July 3, 2015.

9) Interview with a local journalist, confidential name, July 31, 2015.

10) Interview with a local journalist, confidential name, July 31, 2015.

their integrity when many thieves joined these groups and even sought their protection. Although the crime rate was still high, Mamiq Ngoh could no longer plausibly use it to attract votes.

Rivalry among informal security groups and public distrust over the issue of crime have led to a decline in the popularity of informal security groups over the last six years. Conflict among informal security groups is common as they each protect their members from thieves. Conflicts occur also when a thief belonging to a particular informal security group is caught by members of another group. The thief's friends then demand his release. They do not hesitate to attack each other to protect their friends if caught. If the captured thief has already been subjected to violence, his friends take revenge. The rivalry among informal security groups was triggered also by Mamiq Ngoh's favoritism toward Amaq Raisah when it came to resource distribution. According to several informants from informal security groups, Mamiq Ngoh paid attention to channeling resources (such as financial support) only to Amaq Raisah. He showed no concern for other groups even though they had also contributed to his 2005 success. This led to dissatisfaction among several informal security groups.

It can be seen that the social position of informal security groups has drifted a long way from their original rationale. The initial purpose of the groups was community-based self-protection, as police could not be relied upon to provide effective security against crime and theft. Gradually many thieves themselves became members of these groups.¹¹⁾ A thief whom I interviewed claimed he had joined various informal security groups.¹²⁾ He joined them because he wanted protection from other groups. He was afraid of the violence and torture that was inflicted by members of informal security groups on captured thieves. He took care of his obligations to other group members, such as paying a certain amount of money at particular times. Local sources told me that thieves were initially allowed to join the groups so that they could be controlled; however, in the end this was impossible.¹³⁾ The informal security groups ended up supporting the thieves.

After thieves began to join informal security groups, members of the public increasingly came to doubt the integrity of the groups. Initially the public supported the presence of informal security groups, as they believed they would provide protection despite their brutal behavior. However, public distrust developed as the groups began providing shelter for thieves, who continued their depredations. Theft and crime continued, but this

11) Interview with Lalu Syamsir, former state prosecutor and vice chairman of West Nusa Tenggara Province Legislative Council 2009–14, June 23, 2015.

12) Interview with a criminal perpetrator who had just been released from prison, confidential name, June 27, 2015.

13) Interview with Lalu Syamsir, former state prosecutor and vice chairman of West Nusa Tenggara Province Legislative Council 2009–14, June 23, 2015.

time they also involved informal security groups, either directly or indirectly.

Widespread public distrust of the informal security groups was not beneficial for Mamiq Ngoh's political career. Informal security groups were the backbone of his 2005 campaign: he won votes by portraying himself as a figure capable of restoring security to Central Lombok. As a patron of informal security groups in Central Lombok, he could not be separated from the presence of these groups. When doubts arose regarding the integrity of informal security groups, this also eroded trust in Mamiq Ngoh. This distrust reflected the fact that the crime rate did not diminish significantly after he became district head. Theft still dominated the criminal cases handled by police one year after Mamiq Ngoh had been elected (BPS Lombok Tengah 2006, 274). The high rate of motorcycle theft lasted until the end of Mamiq Ngoh's term in office in 2010. The police managed to solve only 33 cases of motorcycle theft out of the total of 279 cases in the entire Central Lombok region (BPS Lombok Tengah 2010, 233).

The Changing Contours of the Security Landscape: The Existence of *Datu Maling*

Things have been different from the early 2000s, when people no longer completely trusted informal security organizations but rather shifted their hopes to individual figures who were considered to have more integrity. These individual figures, popularly known as *datu maling*, tend to avoid affiliation with any particular informal security organization. Therefore, they can be more independent and flexible in determining their political direction.

A *datu maling* is a senior thief who has stopped stealing. He is usually someone who was renowned for courage and strength when still active as a thief in his youth. With the protection and security they provide, *datu maling* are influential as local strongmen in the neighborhood, both in everyday social life and in politics. *Datu maling* also protect the population in inter-village conflicts, often leading villagers who want to attack another village. Therefore, they are respected not only by the local people but also by younger thieves.

The strong influence of *datu maling* in Central Lombok relates to Lombok's historical precedent of defining thieves as respected and feared persons. This situation may have resulted from the Balinese occupation of Lombok in the precolonial period. Lombok people could not resist the Balinese in the eighteenth century, and Balinese aristocrats consolidated their power over large areas of Lombok (Van der Kraan 2009, 5). In these circumstances the theft of Balinese property emerged as a form of resistance, with

thieves targeting the property of Balinese nobles. During the Balinese occupation the people of Lombok did not consider stealing a criminal act. Thieves were regarded as taking back their property (reclaiming rights) that had been forcibly taken from them by Balinese aristocrats.

This historical precedent from the time of the Balinese occupation has influenced present-day local perspectives toward stealing. As some of the informants pointed out, the Balinese occupation enabled the development of local values—particularly among Sasak men—which place a premium on efforts to seize something rather than asking for it. Stealing or theft became a sort of initiation process into adulthood for some people. Stealing is highly appreciated since it requires courage, strength, and self-defence capabilities. Within this context, men with practical skills to steal things are thus perceived to be capable of looking after a family. While this argument might not represent the whole picture of local perspectives on stealing, it is not rare to find such a point of view among Sasak men. Hence, regardless of historical and sociological accuracy, it provides some of them with cultural justification for stealing.

The work of *datu maling* is similar to that of informal security groups when it comes to providing security services to residents. According to my local informants, people who want to secure their livestock (such as cows) make a mutual agreement with *datu maling*. These agreements include profit sharing. This sharing between the client and the *datu maling* is varied in form and usually agreed on through a process of negotiation. Usually the *datu maling* receives a share of the fees from the sale of livestock. The client also provides the *datu maling* with household goods such as cigarettes and sugar each week, in addition to an extra bonus once a year on Eid Al-Fitr.¹⁴⁾ If a motorcycle is stolen, the client asks the *datu maling* to track it. The types of people who use a *datu maling* for security services are not just local farmers and ordinary villagers; many of them come from the highly educated middle class. An informant who works as a lecturer at the local university shared that he had asked a *datu maling* for help securing his cattle in the village.¹⁵⁾

With their position as protectors and providers of security, *datu maling* have become highly respected and feared figures. Therefore, these individuals have symbolic capital that allows them to earn money and prosperity even though they have retired from stealing. In some villages in the southern regions of Central Lombok, several *datu maling* have noticeably large houses compared to their neighbors. Their houses are mostly located in prime locations, such as on a hilltop. This reflects the respect that *datu maling* receive from local society.

14) Interview with Alfian, lecturer at Universitas Mataram, July 1, 2015.

15) Interview with Alfian, lecturer at Universitas Mataram, July 1, 2015.

Their symbolic capital brings *datu maling* financial benefits not only from ordinary people but also from the political elite. With their respected social status, individual *datu maling* become reference points for local people when choosing their political orientation. In the current Indonesian electoral system, candidates who run for election take advantage of notable figures such as *datu maling* to mobilize votes. A *datu maling* will ask residents in the neighborhood, and the people whom he protects, to vote for a particular candidate. This arrangement is similar to those of informal security groups in the past. People worry that if they refuse the directions of a *datu maling* their safety will be threatened. *Datu maling* can be described as “vote brokers” who are ready to mobilize votes on demand. Candidates in direct local or legislative elections lobby for *datu maling* to join their campaign team, and they compete to get the largest number of *datu maling* on their team. Candidates who have many *datu maling* on their team are more confident of winning.

However, *datu maling* are quite different from informal security groups when it comes to loyalty to particular political figures. A *datu maling* is not tied to a single patron or political figure, as was the situation with informal security groups, especially the Buru Jejak Kumpul group. *Datu maling*’s political calculations are based on pragmatism and profit. Informal security groups operated under an organizational banner, so they were relatively dependent and inflexible in their political maneuvers. In contrast, *datu maling* operate alone, without any specific organizational label, and without hundreds of members to be accommodated. Thus, a *datu maling* experiences more freedom and independence in determining his political preferences.

The independent political orientation and pragmatism of *datu maling* can be illustrated by the case of Mamiq Rahman (pseudonym). In the 2005 Central Lombok election he supported Mamiq Ngoh, who was elected as district head. However, in the 2010 election Mamiq Rahman shifted his support to Suhaili even though he came from southern Central Lombok, a region considered to be a support base for Mamiq Ngoh. As Mamiq Rahman revealed to me, Suhaili himself came to Rembitan village to ask for his support, inviting him to join his campaign team.¹⁶⁾ Suhaili provided financial assistance and campaign equipment to Mamiq Rahman for use in the village. Suhaili’s personal visit to Mamiq Rahman’s house was effective in changing his political orientation. Suhaili was more serious about approaching Mamiq Rahman than Mamiq Ngoh, whom Mamiq Rahman had supported in the 2005 election. Mamiq Rahman ended up asking villagers to follow his decision to vote for Suhaili rather than Mamiq Ngoh. He told the people he could not ensure Rembitan’s security if they did not vote for Suhaili. Since the region

16) Interview with Mamiq Rahman (pseudonym), a *datu maling*, July 31, 2015.

where Rembitan village is located is prone to criminality, many local people there worry about security. In the end Suhaili won in the village, and Mamiq Rahman received a payment and was invited to a celebration at Suhaili's house.¹⁷⁾

Datu maling provide support to politicians or candidates who offer the most attractive deal. Based on information from my local sources, the pay-off varies from money and recognition to protection and legal assistance.¹⁸⁾ Therefore, money is not the only objective sought by *datu maling*. A local politician told me that the deal he made with the *datu maling* who supported him in the election for local parliament members in 2014 was not based on financial assistance. Rather, it was based on protection.¹⁹⁾ By his admission, he did not give money to any of the *datu maling*. Instead, some of the *datu maling* contributed to financing his nomination process.²⁰⁾ Those *datu maling* hoped that if a politician was elected they would obtain assistance for any legal problems. Almost all *datu maling* have low education levels, so they feel they need help from politicians in any legal process. They also want to receive recognition from society. Politicians are expected to help *datu maling* gain recognition, for instance, by arranging public events that involve them.

Preliminary Conceptualization of Fear Entrepreneur

The Central Lombok case is an example of how some people use fear of crime as a strategy to gain an electoral advantage. These people seek both financial benefits and political privileges. In Central Lombok, security, which should be a public good provided by the state, has been "privatized" by certain individuals and groups. Individuals and informal security groups sell security to those who are willing to become customers. These security sellers do not hesitate to use violence in their work. In this way, private individuals have largely replaced the state as a legitimate entity by monopolizing violence. Violent civil groups seem to enjoy legitimacy to perform acts of violence against criminals in the name of public security.

Individual figures or groups that provide security services are not unique to Lombok. They can be found in many places in Indonesia, such as Jawara in Banten and Forum

17) Interview with Mamiq Rahman (pseudonym), a *datu maling*, July 31, 2015.

18) Interview with a member of the legislative council from southern Central Lombok, confidential name, July 12, 2015.

19) Interview with a member of the legislative council from southern Central Lombok, confidential name, July 12, 2015.

20) Interview with a member of the legislative council from southern Central Lombok, confidential name, July 12, 2015.

Betawi Rempug in Jakarta. Political changes that occurred after the fall of Suharto resulted in the state losing significant control as the center of power over violence and coercion. Social groups took on the state's role when it came to controlling violence, positioning themselves on the blurred line between legal and illegal activity (Bakker 2015).

Mainstream explanations for the emergence of these so-called vigilante groups suggest they are a consequence of the political transition after the New Order ended and democratization policies—such as decentralization and local direct elections—were implemented (Hadiz 2010, 133; Wilson 2015, 2). The most prominent explanations present them as predatory vigilante groups seeking economic resources, especially in the informal economy. Whereas criminal gangs in Suharto's era were generally perceived as unconnected to religious groups, in the Reformasi era observers became conscious of criminal gangs with an overtly Muslim orientation and notions of morality. They adapted to the new political system to maximize the profits from predatory economic objectives and express their political ideology (Wilson 2008).

However, previous explanations are not adequate to portray specific practices that occurred in the Central Lombok case. Hence, I prefer the term “fear entrepreneur.” Like business entrepreneurs, fear entrepreneurs aim to collect as much profit as possible. Individual figures such as *datu maling* and informal security groups use people's fear for the sake of accumulating benefits, which include money and other privileges. Within this system, they can achieve prosperity and access to political elites. Through established relations with politicians, they can access resources from governmental authorities.

Conclusion

Fear is not only a consequence of the body's biological or metabolic workings but is also socially constructed. Fear of crime can spread collectively. Fear became contagious and spread in Lombok through the “talk of crime” that took place, especially in the *berugak*. These *berugak* were scattered in many places. Local people discussed stories, rumors, and even gossip about theft and criminality. Even if they had not experienced criminal action directly, people involved in such talk became afraid. Through the talk of crime, the discourse about crime and theft (including considerations of what constituted crime and how it should be responded to) were discussed freely. *Berugak* were a primary node that enabled fear to spread widely, so that it became a collective phenomenon.

In 2005 informal security groups seemed to be the dominant force in Central Lombok electoral politics. They were both a source of fear and an assurance to the public of

protection against greater fear. They have not disappeared, but they have fragmented and no longer form a coherent political bloc. They were undone by the contradiction between their criminal role and their role as protectors against criminality. *Datu maling* have taken their place, but the same contradiction applies to these newly important figures. It is expected that they too will become less significant in the future.

In conclusion, politicians must fulfill the demands for civil groups in the context of decentralization and direct local elections. Ultimately, people at the grassroots level are the most disadvantaged. By relying on private individuals and organizations for public requirements like security, they are vulnerable to abuses of power. The state should be able to provide decent security services and monopolize the use of legitimate violence, in line with the principles of democracy and human rights.

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Revitalization of Tradition through Social Media: A Case of the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket, Thailand

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This paper analyzes the influence of social media in the revitalization of tradition. The case studied here is the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket, Thailand. This festival has been promoted as the largest local tourist event since the tourism industry became a dominant business in the 1990s. Through this festival, Chinese people whose ancestors migrated from Fujian have gained an opportunity to strengthen their Chinese identity, which was oppressed in the era of Thai nationalism. However, only some dominant groups have been accepted by the local government as knowledgeable enough to portray the authenticity of the Vegetarian Festival. As a result, a master narrative (Cohen 2001) explaining the history of the festival has been published by the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The narrative gives prominence to dominant shrines in Phuket, where various regulations were created to preserve the original traditions of the festival. Subsequently, younger generations who questioned the authenticity of the practices of the dominant shrines found that the festival had its origins in Taoism. Due to social media, online counterpublics emerged where counter-narratives were circulated among subordinates who were excluded from the public sphere of Phuket's dominant shrines.

Keywords: social media, revitalization of tradition, counterpublics,
Vegetarian Festival

Introduction

This paper explores the influence of social media in creating significant changes in local traditions. Although the Internet is a global phenomenon, it has distinctive effects when applied to a local setting. An analysis of its components, its social structure, and the interaction among participants is vital for understanding its role in effecting changes in the religious practices, cultural traditions, political standing, or social aspects of the society in question. In the case of the Vegetarian Festival, the main factors that drove participants to utilize social media for their negotiations were inequality in authority,

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variation in knowledge, and unbalanced resource access. Such a process subsequently resulted in the revitalization of tradition.

Revitalization of Tradition and Social Media

A revitalization of tradition tends to occur when the society involved undergoes events such as migration, social disputes, or political conflict. Today Internet technology, widely used since the mid-1990s, affects the way in which people located in different places communicate with one another. The Internet allows information about local culture to be circulated, homogenizing the day-to-day practices of people so that they conform to the modern market, mass consumption, and popular culture. The revitalization of tradition is possibly accelerated through the use of the Internet as well.

Revitalization refers not only to the revival of neglected traditions but also to the creation of a new meaning or function out of established traditions (Wallace 1956, 265; MacClancy and Parkin 1997, 76). Changes in the meaning of a tradition are brought about in two ways: first, when the government utilizes the tradition to impart a national identity to its citizens and the tradition becomes an invented one (Hobsbawm 1983, 4); second, when members of society make use of a new traditional function because antecedent functions are inappropriate to their modern way of life (Kurtz 2012, 228). The former is a top-down process, while the latter is a bottom-up one. This paper focuses mainly on the bottom-up process of revitalizing tradition.

The Phuket Vegetarian Festival is examined as a case in which social media plays an important role in the dynamic process of revitalization. In the top-down revitalization process, a cultural change is effected by the broadcast media, which usually transmits cultural content in a one-way fashion (Osorio 2005, 44). In the bottom-up revitalization process, social media facilitates the circulation of information about traditions among members of society in accordance with Web 2.0¹⁾ technology, which supports two-way communication.

The main functions of social media—such as sharing news, posting text and photos, tagging friends, sending private messages, and responding with comments and emoticons—potentially transform stories of mundane activities into a social identity (Thurlow

1) The preceding static Web technology based on HTML computational language, called Web 1.0, was less concerned about social function, while Web 2.0, first developed in the early 2000s, provided users with additional functions to communicate among their friends and eventually became the rudimentary component of present social media applications. The core concept of Web 2.0 is encouraging users to create their own content, including text, photos, videos, tags, and captions, while that of Web 1.0 was to allow the content owner to create the main data (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008).

and Jaworski 2011, 245; Aguirre and Graham 2015, 4; Nair and Aram 2014, 469). Social identity is a basic framework used to identify characteristics of different online communities whose members aggregate in groups because of common interests, profession, gender, age, class, lifestyle, social role, or occupation (Castells 2010, 7). This online information then becomes a form of social capital that is used by social media users to access the network of a dominant group (Miller *et al.* 2016, 134).

Use of social media can be seen as an influencing factor on how members of society interact with one another. Sending texts via online channels becomes a “discourse”²⁾ (Dahlberg 2013, 29) when such texts connote hidden and/or unspoken meanings that stimulate interaction among people. Through a common agreement in certain discourses, people gather in a group and then start their communal activities. This process fosters new forms of collectivity, with the result that society is multiplied in accordance with the mode of interaction among members (Postill 2011, 102). These multiple communities are initially established through social media, but afterward their activities continue in offline social settings. As a result, online and offline activities are integrated. A part of the exchange through online communication is religious discourse, a religious practice that is different from standard norms or orthodox doctrine (Mallapragada 2010). Such information can lead members of society to establish their religious communities. This paper aims to understand the process of revitalization as it is influenced by the religious practices of such communities and their communication via social media.

Social Media and Counterpublics

Ideally, the opinions of members of the public are equal in the public sphere and result in a common agreement (Habermas 1992, 12; McCarthy 1996, 67). However, this public sphere can become exclusive if a certain social group has the authority and ability to subjugate others. The former then becomes the dominant public voice, while the latter become subordinates who opt to leave the public sphere and establish their own distinct sphere of communication and interaction, called a counterpublic (Fraser 1996, 123). A counterpublic, therefore, can be referred to as an alternative sphere where subordinate voices can freely express their arguments. In the context of the revitalization of a tradition, the dominant social group strives to preserve the tradition by regulating the practices of all members of society, while the subordinates, who do not agree with such regulations, try to maintain their practices in the counterpublics.

2) Discourse communicates an implicit meaning that can be interpreted by understanding a particular culture and history of society. For example, group members may use particular words in order to connote their social status and the group they belong to. Then, others who understand those words and speak in a common language style can become acquaintances of such people.

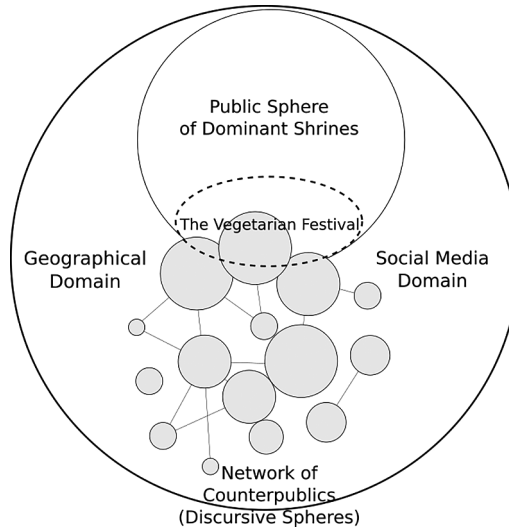


Fig. 1 Theoretical Framework

Counterpublics can be established through the use of social media, which supports subordinates who seek to exchange information and create a network among their members (see Fig. 1). Basically, the circulation of texts addressed to subordinates strengthens the process of creating counterpublics (Warner 2014, 90–91). Through the interpretation of texts, societal members who perceive themselves as sharing a collective identity are stimulated to establish counterpublic groups (Brooks 2005, 88–89), such as American black people (Whaley 2010), social movements (Palczewski 2001), feminist movements (Shaw 2012), immigrant workers (Sziarto and Leitner 2010), and indigenous groups (Johnston 2000).

Counterpublics consist of multiple groups rather than a single one, and these groups are interconnected as a network (Sheller 2004, 50). Through such networks, discourses aimed at discussing particular issues are disseminated, and the counterpublics are transformed into interconnected discursive domains (Asen 2000, 424). Therefore, counterpublics should be regarded as dynamic domains that are created, developed, associated, dissociated, and obliterated over time. By utilizing a network of counterpublics, subordinates are able to exchange resources and increase their power to negotiate with dominants (Andersson and Gun 2016, 42). This paper aims to clarify how the use of social media facilitates the process of revitalization in which there are negotiations between subordinates and dominants.

The Case of the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket

In this paper, the ninth-day ceremonies conducted by descendants of Chinese in Phuket—in an event called the Vegetarian Festival—will be discussed as a case of revitalization. The Vegetarian Festival, conducted by Chinese people whose ancestors migrated from Hokkien Province in China, aims to venerate the Nine Emperor Gods (Hokkien: Kiu Hong Tai Te 九皇大帝). The festival is a hectic event comprising four types of ceremonies—the welcome ceremony, cleansing ceremony, chanting ceremony, and sending-off ceremony (Liu 1992, 35)—that are initially conducted at the beginning of the ninth lunar month for nine days.

In these ceremonies, the main participants are the spirit mediums (Thai: *mah-songs*), ritual specialists (Hokkien: *huatkuas*), and devotees (see Fig. 2). *Huatkuas* conduct the ceremonies and invite the Chinese deities to possess the bodies of *mah-songs*. *Mah-songs*, while in a trance, speak in tongues in Hokkien-Chinese dialect and join the *huatkuas* in conducting the ceremonies by reciting prayers and blessing the devotees. A devotee who is faithful to a particular *mah-song* can choose to become a companion providing financial support and voluntary labor during an important ceremony. *Mah-songs* also play the main role in the street procession, a well-known component of the Vegetarian Festival (see Fig. 3). In this procession a myriad of *mah-songs*, companions, and *huatkuas*



Fig. 2 A *Mah-song* (in the Red Apron with Long Needles Piercing His Tongue), a *Huatkua* (Standing behind the *Mah-song*), and Devotees at the Street Procession of Naka Shrine (October 14, 2015)



Fig. 3 A Companion (Left) Wipes Blood off a *Mah-song*'s Wound, while Another Companion (Right) Raises a Black Flag (*Orleng*) to Protect a *Mah-song* from the Sun (October 4, 2014).

walk along the street from a shrine to a coastal area called Sapan-Hin to commemorate the event in which an incense urn, a symbol of the Nine Emperor Gods, was brought from China to Phuket. Along the path of the procession, devotees set up street altars and wait to worship the Chinese deities who have possessed the bodies of *mah-songs*.

In the 1990s the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promoted the Vegetarian Festival as a tourist event due to the emergence of the tourism industry in Phuket. Promoting the festival via broadcast media and publications was a challenge since TAT officials did not have much information about the festival. Thus, the officials opted to gain information from members of Kathu, a shrine believed to be the oldest in Phuket. Chaiyut Pinpradub, a local scholar from Phuket and one of Kathu Shrine's committee members, explained:

the practice of the festival was brought from Mainland China by a group of Chinese performers who came to Phuket in 1825. There was an outbreak of epidemic disease around the tin mining area at that time, hence the Chinese performers suggested to conduct the festival in order to cease this predicament. Before the Chinese performers left Phuket, they offered Kathu Shrine the images of three deities—Ti-Hu-Nguan-Soi (註府元帥), Lee Lochia (李哪吒), and Sam-Hu-Ong-Iah (三府王爺)—which became main deities of the Vegetarian Festival. Several years later, Kathu Shrine's committee arranged for one person to travel to the shrine in China for the purpose of bringing back with him the incense urn, the symbol of the Nine Emperor Gods. From Mainland China, not only the urn was brought back to Phuket but also a book of prayers, which is considered

as the authentic book in which the way of conducting the festival is written. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, Phuket Office 2013)

This narrative became the “master narrative” that strongly influenced the beliefs of the local people and gave Kathu Shrine prominence over other shrines (Cohen 2001). Consequently, *mah-songs* of the three deities whose names appeared in the master narrative received a high rank in the shrine community and came to play an important role in managing the festival. Some Phuketians even believe that only Kathu Shrine possesses the original book that is used to conduct the authentic festival. Any deviation from the master narrative is considered controversial. One such issue is the existence of female *mah-songs*: dominant shrine members believe that there were no female deities participating in previous festivals.

Through its promotion by the TAT, the Vegetarian Festival became a popular ceremony. However, due to this popularity, divergent opinions arose among different members of society. Many shrine members argued that certain groups of *mah-songs* wanted to encourage tourists to commit faith to their Chinese deities and make a donation to a shrine. They claimed that *mah-songs* changed the traditional festival into a spectacle by wearing colorful attire and showing their supernatural power by penetrating their bodies and faces with objects such as swords, glass, and motorcycle parts. Hence, shrine members, especially from the three main shrines³⁾—Kathu, Juitui, and Bangniew—embarked on a mission to preserve the conventions of the festival and regulate the practices of *mah-songs*. Now, *mah-songs* who want to participate in the festival have to register with a particular shrine and pass an exam conducted in the Hokkien-Chinese language. Elder *huatkuas* personally interview *mah-songs* while the latter are in a trance. The *mah-songs* become certified if they can answer the questions in the Chinese language. At Juitui Shrine, an identification card is given to registered *mah-songs*. In order to maintain their status as official members, *mah-songs* have to obey regulations such as dressing in proper attire and using only permitted traditional paraphernalia. *Mah-songs* who violate the rules can be banished from the shrines and may not be accepted by Phuket shrine communities.

Many *mah-songs* and *huatkuas* do not agree with the regulations of the dominant

3) Based on an observation of Phuket’s shrines in 2017, there are 49 of them but only 21 are able to conduct the Vegetarian Festival and register with the Chinese Shrine Club, which was established to be an intermediary between Phuket shrines and local government organizations such as the TAT, municipalities, and the Phuket Cultural Council. Every year the Chinese Shrine Club conducts a meeting among members in order to create a coalition for managing the Vegetarian Festival. The committees of Kathu, Juitui, and Bangniew Shrines usually play an important role as high-ranking members of the Chinese Shrine Club since these shrines are believed to be the oldest in Phuket.

shrines and the master narrative. By being oppressed under the authoritative power of the dominants and being restricted in exercising their practices in the public sphere of dominant shrines, they become subordinates. When the Internet was introduced in Phuket, counter-narratives arguing against the authenticity of dominant shrines were circulated among various subordinates. In 2005 the website phuketvegetarianfestival.com was created, with a Web board serving as a venue for exchanging information about the festival and related Chinese culture. Members of the Web board also posted various counter-narratives such as the real origin of the festival inherited from a Taoist monastery in China, biographies of various Chinese deities whose names were not written in the master narrative, and the use of paraphernalia that did not conform to Phuket shrine regulations. Sometime between 2006 and 2008 Phuketians started to use social media, especially Facebook, which functioned as a platform for friends to communicate without reservations and restrictions. Most communities use Facebook as the main platform to connect with a wider group of people. Based on online observations from 2014 to 2016, there were 91 social media groups where more than 1,000 members circulated information about Chinese shamanic cults⁴⁾ and the Vegetarian Festival. The practices of shamanic cults also expanded in Phuket, and social media became an important mechanism in the revitalization process.

The Religious Form of the Phuket Vegetarian Festival

In order to analyze the changes in the Vegetarian Festival's meaning, the amalgamated form of the festival's religious beliefs should be discussed. The Vegetarian Festival integrates Theravada Buddhism, Brahmanism, and the religious belief of Chinese migrant Taoism. In the practice of Taoism, people venerate the deities of nature and ancestral spirits on various festive occasions (Coughlin 2012, 106). The Chinese ceremonies inherited and conducted by Chinese descendants in Phuket are the following: Chinese New Year and the lantern festival in February, the ceremony of visiting ancestors' graves in April, the worshipping of the spirits of the dead in July, and the veneration of the deities of the North Stars or the Vegetarian Festival in September. Because of national Thai policies, however, the practices of Taoism have lost their originality since the culture of

4) Since Theravada Buddhism has become a national religion, many Thai people do not accept the practice of shamanism. The worshipping of Chinese deities and inviting such deities to possess the body of *mah-songs* have thus become practices specific only to people who are Chinese descendants. The term "Chinese shamanic cult" used in this paper refers to the belief in shamanism that has been inherited by the local people in Phuket.

Chinese descendants has been assimilated into Thai culture.

The political system of Thailand changed when a group of mid-level civilians and military officials seized power from King Rama VII and established the first constitution in 1932 (Charnvit 1974, 26). The concept of “Thainess” was then used to unify various groups of local people to be Thai citizens. Between 1939 and 1940, the office of the prime minister announced a series of 12 cultural mandates called *ratthaniyom* in line with the promotion of nationalism, which demanded the dissemination of ideas of cultural change through mass media such as radio, dramas, fictional history, and advertising. Under these mandates, Thai citizens were required to speak the Thai language and dress in Thai contemporary costume (*ibid.*, 38). This development caused a drastic change in the way of life for ethnic Chinese inhabitants. Their children were even prevented from studying the Chinese language until they were 14 years old (Landon 1939, 92).

The national identity of Thailand is made up of three pillars: nation, religion, and kingship. Although the term “religion” is not defined, it refers to Theravada Buddhism because the Thai monarchy has maintained a relationship with the Buddhist monastery as a defender of religion since the establishment of Rattanakosin, currently known as Bangkok (Ishii 1986, 65). Based on the beliefs of Theravada Buddhism, the King is perceived among Thai citizens as both the *devaraja* (the King who is god) and *dharmaraja* (the King who has virtue) (Fong 2009, 688). This Buddhist belief is vital in supporting the authority of the King. Thus, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who was the prime minister of Thailand from 1957 to 1963, promoted Buddhism (Reynolds 1977, 276) and revived Brahman ceremonies as national events (Ishii 1968, 869) where the role of the King was emphasized.

The practices of Thai Buddhist devotees written in the Buddhist treatise *Traibhumikatha* are based on the system of merit (Thai: *bun*) and sin (Thai: *baab*). The accumulation of merit causes a spirit to progressively regenerate on 31 different planes of existence ranging from heaven to hell (Satiankoset 1975). In order to accumulate merit, Thai people generally give alms to monks, meditate, and donate part of their income to temples. However, the activities of making merit are ambiguous since people also commit other acts that have a positive purpose, although such activities are viewed as elements of other religious beliefs. This view has led to an amalgamation of religions in Thai society under the Buddhist merit system.

Thai people explain the existence of various spirits by utilizing the Buddhist *Traibhumikatha* treatise, although such spirits stem from the beliefs of Taoism, Hinduism, animism, and Islam. Since there are different planes of existence in Traibhumi cosmology, spirits are believed to be reborn in a particular world according to the amount of their merit. Stanley Tambiah conducted research on the belief in the spiritual world

of the people in northeast Thailand, which can be used to explain the religious beliefs of Phuket people as well. According to his research, people believe that the spirits of the dead (Thai: *winjan*) become malevolent spirits (Thai: *phii*) or guardian spirits (Thai: *chao phau*) depending on the merit accumulated while they were alive (Tambiah 1970, 263–264). The negative power of the *phii* is opposite to that of the *thewada* (godlike spirit), whose power is used to diagnose such malevolent spirits and to assist them in communicating with a *mah-song* in a shamanic ritual (*ibid.*, 60).

Although Taoist and Buddhist philosophies both accept the existence of spirits and deities, they have some important differences. Thai Buddhists recognize that deities have the power to decide their future, but they still believe in the law of karma, which emphasizes the power of self-determination to make merit (*bun*). Buddhist philosophy accepts the occurrence of certain circumstances that cannot be anticipated due to outside forces but believes that people, by themselves, can predict the consequence of their action and its merit (Goodman 2002, 369; Gier and Kjellberg 2004, 284; Federman 2010, 13). In other words, people are able to decide their own future by committing good or bad deeds, which eventually produce positive or negative results. In contrast, Taoist philosophy believes that the power of people to decide their future is limited. Jean DeBernardi used the term “moral luck” (Williams 1981) to explain the Taoist belief that good behavior has limits in obtaining good results. Thus, devotees need luck, bestowed by Taoist deities, to have their fate determined in a positive way (DeBernardi 2008, 54). In order to receive luck, Chinese people have to offer money—by burning fake paper money—to Chinese deities. By doing this, they can receive not only luck but also longevity and prosperity in return.

Although the basic concepts of Taoism and Buddhism are different, the Taoist practices of the Vegetarian Festival are amalgamated with Theravada Buddhism. Taoist spiritual concepts such as possession by Chinese deities are explained by the law of karma written in Traibhumi cosmology. Phuket people believe that they will receive *bun* by abstaining from meat products and participating in the Vegetarian Festival. They wear white garments—white is usually regarded as a color of cleanliness in Brahmanism—rather than black, which represents power in Taoism. The knowledge of the law of karma can be used to explain why Taoist deities have to come to possess the body of *mah-songs* in the earthly world. As one female spirit medium said:

Chinese deities have to make merit through a human body, so the deities have to possess a human body and support people to overcome a difficulty. Then, the deities can gain enough *bun* to regenerate in a higher level of heaven. (Interview with Tukta, 65-year-old spirit medium, September 11, 2015)

Through the amalgamation of various religions, the religious form of the Phuket Vegetarian Festival has become blurred between Taoism and Buddhism. Because Phuket people adopt religious activities as customary shrine practices if they bestow merit upon devotees, the meritorious activities of Phuket shrines have become nonreligious activities (Kataoka 2012). Despite this amalgamation, the law of karma is still the prevailing core logic. In everyday life, Phuket people participate in Buddhist ceremonies conducted in Thai temples. They also give alms to Buddhist monks in the morning in order to receive *bun*. They believe that the worship of deities at Chinese shrines will accelerate the efficacy of *bun* and that without any amount of *bun* even Chinese deities cannot bestow positive fortune upon them.

This amalgamated religion influences the practices of various religious groups in Phuket. According to the Phuket shrine community, there are three religious groups: the first is a group of devotees who mainly carry out making-merit activities under Theravada Buddhism and occasionally participate in Taoist ceremonies; the second is a group who mainly worship Taoist deities and participate in Buddhist ceremonies on Buddhist holidays; the last group, smallest and scattered around Phuket, is a group of people who only practice Taoism.

The first group maintain their religious activities in both Thai temples and Chinese shrines. Their home altars are only for private worship of the images of deities and Buddha. The second and third groups are members of Phuket shrines. They are members of shrine committees, *mah-songs*, or *huatkuas* who have knowledge about Taoism and Chinese incantation. These groups worship various Chinese deities depending on their personal beliefs and the principal deities of the shrines they belong to. Exchanges among these three groups usually occur in the vicinity of shrines. *Huatkuas* provide a service to devotees by conducting ceremonies and communicating with Chinese deities who have possessed the bodies of *mah-songs*. Also, well-known *mah-songs* and *huatkuas* can be invited to conduct private Taoist ceremonies at the homes of devotees. Devotees provide financial support to *mah-songs* and *huatkuas*. Banknotes placed in sealed envelopes are given to *mah-songs* and *huatkuas* at the end of the ceremony. The amount of money is not revealed. Some devotees maintain that renowned *mah-songs* of Kathu Shrine earn up to 2 million baht per year (Interview with Yai, March 12, 2017).

Devotees have a close relationship with shrines near their homes. They are required to donate to these shrines, which gives them a chance to be chosen as Tao-Kae-Lor-Ju, the only person who can enter the secret area and conduct a service to the highest deities of the festival—or the Nine Emperor Gods—once a year. Phuket people believe they can receive much merit in return for doing such a service.

The authority of members of the second and third groups is not equal among the

Phuket shrine community. It depends on two factors: the reputation of the shrine they are members of, and their knowledge of how to communicate with Chinese deities in the Hokkien dialect and the way they conduct the Taoist ceremonies. Members of Phuket shrines worship different deities. Some deities are widely known because their name has been written in the master narrative, and some of them are believed to possess great magical powers. Among the 49 Phuket shrines, there are only 21 at which the Nine Emperor Gods are worshipped and where a secret room for them is constructed. These shrines are registered with the Chinese Shrine Club and therefore receive financial support from the local government. They are advertised in media posts featuring the festival as a tourist event. A large amount of income can be generated for shrines that are able to participate in the Vegetarian Festival. The above-mentioned 21 shrines have become well known among devotees in Phuket. The principal deities⁵⁾ of these shrines are widely worshipped, while the deities of the other 28 shrines⁶⁾—the deities of other families as well as female deities—are seemingly neglected and have become a minority. *Mah-songs* who are possessed by the deities of the 21 shrines have gained more popularity as well.

The younger generations, who are mostly members of the second and third groups, strive to challenge the authenticity of Phuket's dominant shrines. Since there was a gap in Thai history when the Chinese language was not widely used, many shrine members cannot read and write Chinese characters fluently. Most Phuket *huatkuas* and *mah-songs* can only speak some of the Chinese words used in ceremonies. The younger generations, who have the opportunity to learn Mandarin Chinese in high school and study the Hokkien dialect by themselves, have attained Taoist knowledge from books brought from China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. They claim that their knowledge is more authentic than the master narrative and practices of the oldest shrine, Kathu, because they can read the historical information written in the Chinese language. Initially they tried to disseminate their knowledge in nearby shrines in the hope of being accepted by devotees and thus gaining an important position in the shrine community. However, most Phuket devotees still believe in the master narrative disseminated by the dominant shrines, due to two reasons. First, it is important that the person conducting a service to the Nine Emperor

5) There are various Chinese deities worshipped by different Phuket families and communities. The 21 shrines registered with the Chinese Shrine Club mainly worship Jiu Huang Da Di 九皇大帝, Dou Mu Yuan Jun 斗母元君, and Yu Huang Tai Di 玉皇太帝. They also worship high-ranking deities such as Li Nezha 李哪吒, Guan Yu 關羽, Tu Fu Yuan Shuai 杜府元帥, and San Fu Wang Ye 三府王爺.

6) Only small groups of people worship deities such as Tai Shang Lao Jun 太上老君, Wang Shun Da Shi 王孫大使, Xuan-Tian-Shang-Ti 玄天上帝, Jiu Tian Xuan Nu 九天玄女, Qixing Niangniang 七星娘娘, and Tu Di Po 土地婆.

Gods during the festival be chosen by a shrine committee. Thus, the devotees need to maintain a relationship with the shrine committee. Second, the elderly members of Phuket shrines feel that pure Taoism,⁷⁾ the practice that younger generations are striving to revitalize, involves the use of black magic and can therefore have a negative influence. In contrast, *bun* is believed to positively influence the destiny of devotees. Since younger generations want to disengage Taoism from Buddhism, they are not accepted by Phuket's dominant shrines, where the master narrative and shrine regulations are important in preserving the religion.

Phuket shrine members want to preserve this form of amalgamated religion as their tradition. Chaiyut, a 70-year-old committee member of Kathu Shrine who wrote the master narrative, stated that a standard set of practices should be created for the Vegetarian Festival in order to show the homogeneity and identity of Phuket culture. For this reason, the difference between Taoism and Buddhism should be put aside (Interview with Chaiyut, October 28, 2015).

Thus, the younger generations have to leave the public sphere of Phuket shrines and establish counterpublics at their home altars. They conduct various Taoist ceremonies to worship deities whose names are not included in the master narrative. Hence, in the privacy of their homes they practice pure Taoism. However, interaction among devotees, *huatkuas*, and *mah-songs* is still needed.

The Emergence of Counterpublics in Social Media

Disputes among groups participating in the Vegetarian Festival have emerged since the festival was transformed. In some areas of Thailand, preserving the original Chinese practices has been a challenge. The Chinese tradition may have lost its authenticity in Krabi, where Chinese descendants are in a minority and ceremonies are conducted by a Thai spirit medium instead (Cohen 2008). In Hat Yai upholding the Chinese tradition has been difficult due to efforts to preserve the Thai national identity (Cohen 2012), since members of Chinese shrines have to conduct Taoist ceremonies in order to celebrate King Rama IX.

In contrast, Phuket is the first province where the identity of Chinese descendants

7) The term "pure Taoism" in this paper refers to the practices disseminated by younger generations that have been brought from Taiwan, Malaysia, and China. These people believe that their practices are original and authentic. However, pure Taoism is selective because it cannot be a representation of Taoist practices that have been passed through the generations in China over more than a thousand years.

has been emphasized. The Vegetarian Festival is one of the first local traditions to be promoted via broadcast media in order to exhibit its cultural value to tourists. However, the identity of Phuketians has been built under the guidance of supposedly knowledgeable members of Phuket's three main shrines—Kathu, Juitui, and Bangniew. Consequently, the master narrative of Kathu Shrine plays an important role in asserting the originality of the festival. This supports the belief that the Phuket Vegetarian Festival is more authentic than the Vegetarian Festivals in other provinces, and thus it creates a tension between dominant shrine members and their subordinates. The subordinates utilize social media to communicate with people who question the originality of Phuket shrines' practices. They are able to attract other members even though they are restricted from proselytizing in public, particularly in the shrines.

Thanks to social media, subordinates have the opportunity to declare pure Taoism through the dissemination of counter-narratives such as information on the real origin of the festival as a Taoist ceremony, the release of biographies of Taoist deities whose names are not mentioned in the master narrative, and the use of paraphernalia that does not conform to dominant shrines' regulations. From 2014 to 2017, 25 social media sites disseminated information that influenced the practices of the Vegetarian Festival. A handful of social media administrators have the proficiency to write counter-narratives, while other groups of administrators have the role of redistributing them. One example of a prominent group among the subordinates is the Young Huatkua Club. Noppol, a leader of this club, wrote on his Facebook page that Taiwanese practices were more authentic than practices in Phuket (Noppol, Facebook, January 14, 2013). Noppol shared information on those practices with his group. For example, he posted a message questioning the authenticity in the way of conducting the Chia-Hoi ceremony, which aims at inviting the sacred fire of the Nine Emperor Gods (Hiao-Hoi) to the shrine. Phuket shrine officials normally conduct this ceremony in the coastal area of Sapan Hin, in order to commemorate the place where the Kathu Shrine member who voluntarily traveled to Fujian later returned to Phuket with the sacred fire. Noppol posted the following on the Facebook wall of the Young Huatkua Club as his argument:

In Taiwan, the Chia-Hoi ceremony is not conducted at the seashore. Rather, it is a ceremony in which members of a new shrine have the opportunity to visit members of old shrines and bring back the sacred fire from the old shrines. Members of the new shrine light their oil-wick lanterns at the old shrines. (Young Huatkua Club page, Facebook, April 17, 2013, translated from Thai)

This post initiated further discussion through personal messages and public posts, with Noppol receiving many messages asking about the details and origins of this ceremony. He posted an additional explanation on his Facebook page one year later in which he

wrote, “I translated the information about Chai-Hoi from resources written in the Chinese language, and a story narrated by my Taiwanese friends. Please give me a comment if you have any opinion.” One reply to this post was “My ancestors were from Hokkien,” implying that Phuket people were not descendants of Taiwanese. Noppol then answered, “Taiwanese people have followed the practices of Hokkien tradition, and you cannot see the old traditions of Hokkien people in China today because of the Cultural Revolution” (Noppol, Facebook, February 6, 2014).

On some occasions, the Young Huatkua Club was criticized by people who believed in the traditional practices of Phuket’s dominant shrines. *Mah-songs* of Bangniew Shrine did not agree with the practices of the Young Huatkua Club and made various negative comments such as the following:

“Don’t ruin our tradition which has been inherited from our ancestors. You don’t have an authentic knowledge. Who is your teacher?”

“What was happening with Young Huatkua Club? I don’t understand.”

“They conducted the ceremony in a wrong way.”

(Young Huatkua Club page, Facebook, May 25, 2014)

The Young Huatkua Club did not delete these negative comments and continued to share information about its practices, such as the proper way to arrange the altar and use festival paraphernalia. This online group became a venue where members could ask questions, post photos of Chinese deities, ask about the deities’ biographies, and discuss how to properly venerate the deities.

The traditional way to identify deities is for elder *huatkuas* to interview *mah-songs*. However, many *mah-songs* choose to learn about the biographies of their deities from social media rather than ask the *huatkuas* of the dominant shrines. This is probably because there have been instances when *huatkuas* interviewed the *mah-songs* and judged these *mah-songs* as fake. Thus, these *mah-songs* prefer asking questions about their practices in their social media group, where they receive support from other *mah-songs* who are facing the same difficulty. An example of this is the case of a transgender *mah-song* who initiated a discussion about her possession:

Q: “I am a woman. Can I be possessed by Agong [grandfather] who has three eyes [the spirit of the male deity Lao Jian (Hokkien: 杨戩)]? He chooses me to be his *mah-song*.”

A: “It is impossible. The spirit of the warrior never chooses to possess a body of a female *mah-song* because women have a menstruation period. This spirit may be a female minion of Lao Jian who is pretending to be the deity.”

However, some *mah-songs* came forward to support her:

A: “Both male and female can be a *mah-song* of a male deity. The decision is not dependent on us, but on the deity. The deity will not come to possess the body of a *mah-song* if he thinks such a body is polluted by menstruation.”

A: “It is possible to be a *mah-song* of Iao Jian. I am also a *mah-song* of the male deity Lo-Chia [she wants to show that female *mah-songs* can be possessed by a male deity].”

(*Mah-songs* of Krabi, Facebook, January 17, 2016)

The authenticity of the dominant shrines has also been challenged on social media. Members of the Young Huatkua Club once conducted a meeting on the theme “What is the origin of the Phuket Vegetarian Festival?” They invited anyone interested in the topic to participate in the meeting and to register via Facebook. The meeting was conducted on August 23, 2014, and photos were posted on the Young Huatkua Club’s Facebook page. One photo showed Kathu Shrine along with information on how it was not the oldest shrine but was actually constructed in 1904 at Rommanee Street with the aim of worshipping or venerating the mother of the Big Dipper constellation or Dou-Mu-Yuan-Jun. This veneration is part of a shamanic cult inherited among the members of a secret society and was not only brought to Phuket by Chinese opera performers in 1825 as mentioned in the master narrative. This information is not only disseminated by the Young Huatkua Club but is also widely communicated among social media users.

The Facebook page เทพเจ้าจีน (Chinese deities), which has 4,282 members, also posted an argument regarding the authenticity of the practices of the dominant shrines:

If shrine officials invite the Nine Emperor Gods to the festival, they have to invite the three deities of the stars (Leng-Guan, Lam-Tao, and Pak-Tao) who have a relationship with the Nine Emperor Gods [the nine gods are also the deities of the stars]. However, the most important deities participating in the festival are not the Nine Emperor Gods. The main deity should be Dou-Mu-Yuan-Jun, who is believed to be the owner of the shrines at which the Vegetarian Festival is conducted. Thus, the practices of many shrines that invite only the Nine Emperor Gods are wrong. (Chinese Deities, Facebook, October 6, 2017)

This post questions the authenticity of the dominant shrines’ practices since these shrines’ officials never mention the name of Goddess Dou-Mu, who is considered to be the principal deity of the festival. Through discussions on social media, many people realized that the counter-narratives tended to be more authentic than the master narrative of Kathu Shrine. Many online groups then started to disseminate the origins of the festival. The narrative of Dou-Mu-Yuan-Jun was shared on many Facebook groups, such as the groups of ศาลเจ้ากวนอิมตะกั่วป่า (Kuan-Yin-Takuapa Shrine) on August 27, 2016; เจียะฉ่าย (食業) ภูเก็ต (Eating vegetarian foods, Phuket) on August 27, 2016; ชมรมศรัทธาเทพเจ้าจีน นครศรีธรรมราช (Club of devotees who give faith to Chinese deities, Nakhonsithammarat) on March 8, 2015; and ชมรมม้าทรงศาลเจ้าสามฮ่องฮู้ (*Mah-songs* of Sam-Hong-Hu Shrine Club)

on September 29, 2016. The narrative of secret societies was also shared on many groups: สมาคมต่อต้านสิ่งงมงาย (Resistance of idolatry club) on October 16, 2015; ประวัติศาสตร์จีน (中國歷史) (Chinese history) on May 4, 2017; and กิมฮาด้าว (Kim-Ha altar) on October 12, 2016.

Another point of contention is the authenticity of the book that is used to conduct the Vegetarian Festival, which Kathu Shrine members declare has been kept only at Kathu Shrine. Kathu Shrine members also argue that other shrines' officials just duplicate their practices. However, the authentic book is widely disseminated and sold today via social media. Online shops such as ร้านศิวกอร์ 西瓦功金身 (Siwakorn shop), ชมรมมนต์จีน (Chinese-magical-prayer club), and หนังสือตำราศาลเจ้าจีน (Books, textbooks, and Chinese shrines) sell the authentic book at around THB250–750 (around USD7.70–23.10). Some *huatkuas* and *mah-songs* even share information from the authentic book for free. Magical prayers inviting Kuan-Yin and Lo-Chia to possess the body of a *mah-song* are also shared, in ชื่อชายพระ เทพเจ้าจีน (Images of Chinese deities trade). Members of Kathu Shrine still believe that prayers should be handed down in the traditional way, but other people have different opinions. One of them said:

It is such a pity that there is no one who can openly teach the Chinese magical prayers to younger generations who are interested in such prayers. Everyone says that the prayers should be inherited from elder *huatkuas*. But I argue that the practices inherited from them are still wrong because they want to keep it a secret, and they don't want to teach all the knowledge to the younger generations. Elder *huatkuas* do not concentrate on teaching their students; they always think about how to profit from providing services to others. Even young *huatkuas* of Kathu Shrine commit wrong practices. Today, people have lost their faith in the practices of this oldest shrine because of this reason. (Phuketvegetarian.com/board/data/1076-1.html, October 25, 2012)

Based on the above discussion, it is safe to say that social media has become an open forum for posting arguments. Central to the idea of social networking is that the information is addressed to certain persons whose beliefs conform to the writer's opinion. People can choose to either leave or join any Facebook group created by shrine members, *huatkuas*, *mah-songs*, or even merchants who just want to sell their paraphernalia online. Each group has its normative framework, mostly constructed by the narrative and practices of the dominant shrines owing to their long history, and is certified by government organizations. Participants who have practices that differ from those of the dominant shrines also have the opportunity to construct their own group and freely circulate counter-narratives like the story of the mother of the Big Dipper constellation, the origin of the festival as a practice of a secret society, and the authentic book of Chinese prayers.

When members post pictures of *mah-songs* and *huatkuas* conducting ceremonies in private places, especially at home altars, they temporarily convert the places into public

spaces, and the use of various attires and paraphernalia that are not acceptable to the three main shrines can be seen in many groups. The norms that are used to justify whether those practices are right or wrong are actually dependent on the common belief of the members of the groups. In many cases, the activities of the *mah-songs* in the pictures are condemned as inappropriate when the pictures are posted in a group with members whose customs are mismatched. In this regard, conflicts can occur on social media within the group, which can result in the disintegration of the group and members being let go. However, an online group is easy to create through the use of social media apps such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. New pages and groups are created monthly, although sometimes their activities cease when the number of members stops growing.

Social Media and the Revitalization of the Vegetarian Festival

In the revitalization of the Phuket Vegetarian Festival, the use of social media becomes a mechanism enabling participants to meet one another not only online but also offline, in venues such as home altars and minor shrines. Through integration between these two social settings—online and offline—subordinates are able to strategize to expand their social network. The expansion increases their chances of disseminating pure Taoism, properly exchanging resources, and demonstrating their ability to conduct Chinese ceremonies. The subordinates also earn a good reputation in the counterpublic spheres when they perform their roles as *huatkuas*, *mah-songs*, or even mere companions.

This section reveals information about prominent groups of subordinates who use social media to signify their roles among the counterpublics. Two groups have been selected as representative cases based on their way of using social media. First, the Young Huatkua Club is a counter-narrative creator. Members of this group have knowledge of the Chinese language, Taoist incantation, and the history of the Chinese shamanic cult. They have initiated a circulation of counter-narratives against the narrative of the dominant shrines. Second, the group of female *mah-songs* acts as an intermediary or agent that distributes the counter-narratives written by groups of content creators such as the Young Huatkua Club. This group of female *mah-songs* potentially influences the practices of other *mah-songs* by reproducing such narratives in social media. Through this cycle of production and reproduction, counter-narratives become significant and eventually influence the process of revitalization.

The ethnographic data for this study was gathered through participant observations and interviews conducted periodically from 2014 to 2017.

Young Huatkua Club: The Social Network of Ritual Specialists

The Young Huatkua Club is a group of people in their 20s to 30s residing in Phuket who learned Mandarin Chinese in high school and then used the language to further study the Hokkien dialect. Knowledge, and more importantly ability, in using the Hokkien Chinese dialect is necessary in order to recite magical prayers and communicate with Chinese deities. In 2008 a group of young *huatkua*s was established mainly by the students of Phuket Wittayalai School. The active members of the group are Noppol, Yai, Dang, and one student from a vocational school, Eak. Noppol, the oldest in the group, was born in Phuket in 1990 and was raised by parents who are familiar with the Chinese shamanic culture and have close ties with *mah-songs* of various shrines. This led to Noppol's interest in being a *huatkua*, a person who is esteemed as a knowledgeable person in shrine society. Noppol went to Phuket Wittayalai School in 2007 in order to study the Chinese language, and in 2010 he continued his higher education at a university in Chiang Rai, the northernmost province of Thailand. Despite the remarkable distance between Phuket and Chiang Rai, Noppol was able to continue with the activities of the Young Huatkua Club via social media.

Dang and Eak, both born in 1995, became members of Bangniew Shrine because they reside within its vicinity. They have attended the Vegetarian Festival and practice the knowledge of *huatkua*, which they learned from the elderly *huatkua* of Bangniew Shrine. While they usually support the activities of the shrine, they also regularly attend as *huatkua*s for the Young Huatkua Club every time a private ceremony for members is held.

Yai, the youngest member, was born in 1997 and became a student of Kathu Shrine's *huatkua*, Laozi-Larn, because his parents believed in the Chinese deities. Several years later, Laozi-Larn passed away before Yai was able to sufficiently gain the knowledge required to be an official *huatkua*. Despite this, Yai continually read up on Chinese shamanic culture from books brought from Taiwan and Penang. Since he was not under the protection of any elderly *huatkua*, this led to a conflict between Yai and members of Kathu Shrine. Thus, he preferred to teach himself and then later claimed himself as a *huatkua* when he was 13 years old. It was much later, at the age of 17, that Yai met other young *huatkua*s in Phuket Wittayalai School and they established their group.

Members of the Young Huatkua Club are excluded from the dominant shrines since they do not believe in the master narrative and the practices of the dominant shrines. Because they can read the Chinese language, they find that the practices and beliefs of Phuket's dominant shrines do not conform with those of Taiwan, where Hokkien Chinese people also migrated and imparted their traditions of shamanic practices. Yai explained the purpose of establishing the Young Huatkua Club as follows:

Our members are from various shrines, but no one is from Kathu [Shrine]. We have a common agreement to worship the Chinese deities, but not in the way of Phuket shrines because Phuket traditions have been mingled with different beliefs. We first studied the traditions of Taiwan, since the Taiwanese have a strong faith in their deities and seem to openly share their knowledge. We do not even study the practices of Penang, because their traditions are not pure either. Many of our practices are opposed to those of Phuketians; for example, I normally wear black attire⁸⁾ during the *song-keng* [prayer recitation]. (Interview with Yai, September 21, 2015)

The network of the Young Huatkua Club's members has expanded through the use of social media. The relationships among members was the starting point for creating online communities where their personal interests, abilities, and roles in conducting Chinese rituals could be revealed. Such abilities became the symbolic capital for members of the Young Huatkua Club in starting relationships with *mah-songs* or devotees who wanted to conduct Chinese rituals, as disclosed by Noppol in the following statement:

When I created the Facebook page, many people I never knew started to follow me. For example, Eak and Dang [two important members of the Young Huatkua Club] were members of Te-Kong-Tong at Bangniew, but they came to help me conduct ceremonies since we knew each other via Facebook. They finally became official members of Huat-Sue-Tong [the alias for Noppol's house, which he wants to convert into his private shrine] when our relationship strengthened. We always exchange voluntary labor between my group and their group, Te-Kong-Tong. However, the creation of a relationship between groups like these may cause conflict if the original group is afraid of losing its members. When I went to attend ceremonies in other places, some people may have worried that I would copy their knowledge and their way of conducting ceremonies. (Interview with Noppol, February 23, 2016)

The use of social media has created an interconnection between online and offline settings. Members of the Young Huatkua Club usually support *mah-songs* who want to worship their deities on an important day by conducting Taoist annual celebrations of Chinese deities called Sae-Yid (生日)⁹⁾ in the home altar (see Fig. 4). In order to manage the complicated activities during ceremonies, members of the Young Huatkua Club are assigned into three groups: *huatkuas*, musicians, and general members who take care of voluntary jobs such as folding golden papers, decorating spaces and altars, preparing food

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- 8) The practices of the Vegetarian Festival have been imposed by Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanism. In these religious practices people usually wear white due to its association with merit, cleanliness, purity, and divine power. Black in these religions represents sin, negative karma, hell, bad luck. However, in Taoism black is believed to represent the power of the universe, which can be used to influence human destiny in a positive way. Thus, young *huatkuas* prefer to follow Taoist traditions, which is not acceptable to Buddhist devotees.
- 9) Actually, Sae-Yid is not the appropriate term for the day of the celebration of Chinese deities; rather, the term should be used to refer to the time to congratulate a person who reaches the age of 60. Nevertheless, Phuketians commonly use this term to refer to the day on which deityhood was achieved and the birthday of Chinese deities.



Fig. 4 Noppol (Center, in the White Shirt with Writing on the Back) and Yai (in the Striped Blue Shirt) Recite Prayers at the Home Altar of Ketsinee, whose Mother is the *Mah-song* of Pun Tao Ma (September 28, 2015).

offerings, and so on. Through social media members of the Young Huatkua Club are able to reveal their roles in conducting ceremonies as well as their identities. One such instance was the annual ceremony of the deities Pun Tao Kong (土地公) and Pun Tao Ma (土地婆) in which Noppol was invited by female *mah-songs* of Pun Tao Ma, members of Tarue Shrine who were friends of Noppol's parents, to conduct a three-day ceremony in a private home. Noppol set the main altar at the house entrance, where the images of the six highest deities—symbolizing the six directions of the universe according to Taoist beliefs—were located; these deities are not usually worshipped by Phuket shrine members. In the living room the altar of Pun Tao Gong, Pun Tao Ma, and other deities was prepared as the focal point of the ceremony (see Fig. 4). The house was decorated with vividly colored bouquets, poems written on paper lotuses hanging from the ceiling, and Chinese wooden lanterns. The active members of the Young Huatkua Club—Noppol, Yai, Eak, and Dang—played crucial roles in conducting the ceremonies following the Taoist ritual structure, which included a welcome ceremony, a chanting ceremony, a bridge-walking ceremony (see Fig. 5), and a sending-off ceremony (Participant observation, September 28, 2015).

Most *huatkuas* of the three main shrines consider it unacceptable to conduct these ceremonies in a private home since they believe a small home cannot contain the power of high-ranking deities. However, members of the Young Huatkua Club argue that those



Fig. 5 Bridge-Crossing Ceremony Conducted by Members of the Young Huatkua Club at the Home Altar of Ketsinee. Dang (Left, Wearing a Watch) Waits for the Ceremony to Begin (September 28, 2015).

high-ranking deities can be invited if *huatkuas* have sufficient knowledge and do not show disrespect to the deities.

Noppol does not follow the traditional Phuketian way of conducting ceremonies. He deliberately adds more artistically decorated altars, a food offering, and a highly complicated liturgy. After the ceremonies, many photos are usually disseminated on social media. Pictures of this three-day ceremony were later posted on the page of the Young Huatkua Club, which spread widely among various shrine members and made Noppol famous in the online world.

The connection between the online world and the ceremony conducted in the home altar is a crucial factor in supporting the exchange of necessary resources, namely, knowledge, voluntary labor, and financial support. Through the circulation of pictures of the ceremony on social media, Noppol gained the opportunity to expand his network among shrine members based on his abilities, which are necessary for conducting ceremonies. It is customary for Facebook followers to observe movements in the online world of the administrator of a page they are following, and usually add them as Facebook friends as well. Consequently, based on these social media users' distinct practices and interests, a network that can extend beyond the online world is built among them. In the case of the Young Huatkua Club, since Noppol handled his activities both offline and online, his and his friends' names have become well known among members of small shrines.

Despite his difficulty in being accepted by the three main shrines, Noppol was able to continue his practices in a private setting.

The online and offline activities of the Young Huatkua Club have had the following sequential effects on the Phuket shrine community: (1) the Young Huatkua Club's members provide crucial arguments and practices that question the authenticity of Phuket's traditions; (2) through the use of social media, they open up areas for discussion among members of the shrine community; the counter-narratives become discourses that resist traditional practices supported by members of the three main shrines—Kathu, Juithui, and Bangniew; (3) the private spheres of home altars are turned into discursive spheres wherein counter-narratives are circulated. Such discursive spheres become interconnected when their members communicate with one another through online channels, visit the home altar of friends, and construct new relationships offline.

However, the activities of the Young Huatkua Club alone are not able to influence the entire process of the festival's revitalization, which results particularly from the interaction between the private and public spheres. The roles of young *huatkuas* in the public sphere of the Vegetarian Festival are limited. Thus, the process of change in the festival should be mutually driven by actors who can oscillate between the private and public spheres. In the next sub-section, a group of *mah-songs* who utilize the counter-narratives in such fashion will be analyzed.

Information about Taoist ceremonies influences the practices of Phuket *mah-songs*. The counter-narratives, especially biographies of neglected deities, also assert the authenticity of *mah-songs* who are possessed by deities not accepted by the dominant shrines. These *mah-songs* then reproduce the counter-narratives through their social media in order to demonstrate the existence of their deities. Since most *mah-songs* are not proficient in reading Chinese characters, the counter-narratives translated by the young *huatkuas* are important sources of basic information.

Jiachai (食菜) Facebook Group: The Social Media of Female Mah-songs

The case in this sub-section is a group of female *mah-songs* who reproduced the counter-narratives and started constructing their community in their home altars. They used social media to strengthen their ties, expand their network, and earn a reputation both offline and online, which eventually increased their chances of meeting new devotees who could support them in the Vegetarian Festival street procession.

Young Huatkua Club members constantly provide information on the date of the Sae-Yid ceremony and biographies of minor deities such as Kiu-Tian-Hian-Liu (九天玄女) (Interview with Yai, March 13, 2014), Kim Hua Niew Niew (金花娘娘) (Interview with Noppol, May 23, 2016), and Tai Seng Pud Jor (大聖佛祖) (Interview with Noppol,

June 9, 2017). Because of this, they are able to develop an online as well as offline relationship with *mah-songs* who are possessed by such deities. This research aims to understand the network of the three main actors—*huatkua*s, *mah-songs*, and devotees—unified by their use of social media. This researcher had the opportunity to interview a group of *mah-songs*, Jiachai, whose leader had a relationship with Yai, a core member of the Young Huatkua Club.

The leader of this group is Fon, a 36-year-old housewife with two children. Born in Pangnga, the province next to Phuket where the Vegetarian Festival culture is also practiced, she moved to Phuket in order to enroll in a tourism program at a vocational school and began working in the tourism industry after graduating in 1998. While in vocational school, she was asked by a lecturer to volunteer in Juitui Shrine, working in the kitchen and preparing the ingredients for vegetarian foods.

Since 2010 Fon has been a *mah-song* of Kiu-Tian-Hian-Liu (九天玄女), the female Taoist deity believed to have created mankind at the very beginning of history. However, it was observed that there were three spirits that were able to come and possess her body: (1) the elderly Kiu-Tian, who is modest and humble and has the highest rank among these spirits; (2) the young Kiu-Tian, who has a bold and strong character; and (3) the spirit of a monkey, without a specific name and the lowest ranked among the three, which often came to Fon's body during the ceremony and played freely with devotees and their companions.

Notably, many members of the three main shrines have argued that it is impossible for *mah-songs* to be possessed by Kiu-Tian-Hian-Liu, whose divine power is too high to be contained by a human body. For this reason, Fon has been excluded from the dominant shrines. She has opted to communicate with some female *mah-songs* who believe in her practices and is careful not to start a relationship with people who seem to condemn her shamanic activities.

Fon uses Facebook as the main forum for expressing her feelings and sharing her day-to-day activities. She frequently posts selfies as well as images of her children and friends, and occasionally she posts photos of her home altar and herself as a *mah-song*. Fon always tags her location as "Mother's house," which implies the altar of Kiu-Tian (九天). Photos tagged with that location are automatically sorted by Facebook as public photos, which can be accessed by anyone. In this way, Fon has effectively changed her private home into an online public sphere. Fon also created a Facebook group named "Eating Vegetarian Foods, Phuket" or "Jiachai, Phuket" in 2012, with the initial intention of communicating with her friends in Bangkok and Phuket, and her sister in Norway. However, the group became popular—it recently had 4,511 members—which gave Fon the opportunity to circulate texts and photos to a vast audience.

Normally, dominant shrine members believe that conducting shamanic ceremonies in a private home is harmful to the homeowner if *huatkuas* or *mah-songs* do not know the right way to control supernatural powers by using Hokkien Chinese mantras. A sin of a devotee or a divine power may be left in the home's vicinity. Fon, who does not have such knowledge, personally believes that her deity is benevolent and has only a positive influence; thus, she has decided that conducting ceremonies in her private home during special occasions, such as paying homage to her deity, is acceptable.

Every year Fon hosts friends who come to participate in the Vegetarian Festival, and so she has become the leader of her group—composed of four female *mah-songs*, one male *mah-song*, and one companion. They use social media to maintain their relationship, although they meet face to face every year. Mali, Fon's older sister who is a *mah-song* of Kuan Yin and lives in Norway, comes to Phuket every year for this special occasion. During her time in Norway Mali constantly posts images of deities—especially Kuan Yin, who is her master—and the history of the Vegetarian Festival on the Jiachai Facebook group. Karn and Amonrat, who are *mah-songs* of Lo Chia and Yok Lue Niang Niang respectively, frequently post photos of their practice as *mah-songs* on Facebook despite the distance between Phuket and their residence in Bangkok (see Fig. 6). Totsawat, a male *mah-song* of Ang Hai Yee (红孩儿), and Pang, a friend of Fon who was the only companion supporting everyone during the street procession, have lived in Phuket. They



Fig. 6 Karn Used This Photo of Himself (Right) and Amonrat (Left) when in a Trance as His Facebook Cover Photo (Facebook, October 7, 2016).

constantly use social media to communicate with members of the group. Fon often comments on photos posted by members. Facebook Messenger or Line is used to exchange detailed information when agreements or opinions are needed.

One week before the festival, Jiachai members gather at Fon's house in order to prepare their paraphernalia, magical prints, and attire, which are used mainly during the street procession. In September 2015, in order to facilitate day-to-day communication during the festival, a Line group was created and shared among members. Worshippers who were not permanent members and only came to worship the deities of this group were also added. Since everyone had their personal activities during the day, members had to read Line-disseminated information to know the meeting place in the vicinity of the shrine. After the ceremonies each day, members shared photos via Line. The *mah-songs*—Fon, Mali, Karn, and Amonrat—were able to select suitable photos and post them on their Facebook group and personal walls. In this way, their social identities as spiritual mediums were publicly revealed and opened to comments.

The social identity of *mah-songs* is based on the characteristics of their deities. Although there are very few *mah-songs* of Kiu-Tian-Hian-Liu (九天玄女), the high-ranking goddess who possesses Fon, the deity is well known among devotees because of her distinctive characteristics. The *mah-songs* are usually dressed in yellow, which is the color of the Chinese emperor. Kiu-Tian is believed to be the female warrior deity who taught military strategy to the Yellow Emperor named Huang Di (黃帝), who is regarded as the founder of Chinese civilization. *Mah-songs* of Kiu-Tian may hold a sacred sword and stab themselves with needles during the street procession (see Fig. 7). The *mah-songs*, in a trance, torture themselves by slashing their backs or cutting their tongues with a sword. This practice is unique to *mah-songs* of Kiu-Tian and is not performed by female *mah-songs* who are possessed by other female deities. Fon posted a photo showing her in a trance, with needles penetrating her cheek while she was holding a magical sword. She captioned the photo as follows: “*Mah-songs*, in trance, torture themselves as a way of salvation. The *mah-songs* have to sacrifice their body. It is not easy to be *mah-songs*. Their life is always at risk.”

Other social media users who understood the biography of Kiu-Tian wrote comments such as the following:

“This is a real miracle.”

“May I share this photo.”

“I have faith in this deity.”

(Facebook, Kiu-Tian-Hian-Lue, July 2, 2017)

Fon also disseminated videos and photos of the Vegetarian Festival when she was not in



Fig. 7 Fon Posted This Photo of Herself in a Trance on Her Facebook Wall (Facebook, January 23, 2018).

a trance. In an interview with Fon and Totsawat, Fon described the feedback she received from Facebook users:

Fon: “If I use Facebook Live or post videos, Taiwanese worshippers will come to see my video. For example, my recent video [video of the ceremony that was conducted just one hour earlier] was shared 14 times. Taiwanese and Malaysian people love to see our ceremonies. It is a way to disseminate our culture as well.”

Researcher: “Do you have friends whom you met in your Facebook group?”

Fon: “Most of my friends in the shrine are from my group. Sometimes I cannot remember them, but they introduce themselves. Then we become friends. Those members often add the administrator of a Facebook group as a Facebook friend when they join the group.”

(Interview with Fon and Totsawat, September 26, 2016)

From this conversation, it is clear that Fon’s and her friends’ posting of pictures on their Facebook pages became their way of creating an identity in shrine society and their means of gaining popularity or earning a reputation (see Fig. 8). Fon is a *mah-song* of a female warrior deity, while Totsawat is a *mah-song* of Ang-Hai-Yee, the young deity who is widely known through the Ming novels¹⁰ named *Journey to the West*. Devotees who are

10) Most of the Taoist deities worshipped in Phuket are from three novels written during the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368–1644): *Feng Shen Yan Yi* (封神演義) (Canonization of the gods), *Xi You Ji* (西遊記) (Journey to the West), and *San Guo Yan Yi* (三國演義) (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).



Fig. 8 Fon (Left), Totsawat (Middle), and Amonrat Share Photos of Themselves when in a Trance in Order to Celebrate the Approach of the Vegetarian Festival (Facebook, October 13, 2016).

familiar with the biographies of deities from novels and movies can recognize the identity of *mah-songs* and may choose to be their companions.

Information in social media is further channeled across the countries from Thailand to Taiwan, and a relationship is created between Fon and worshippers from various places. For example, one worshipper from Singapore, Lim Thiamsoon, asked Fon whether he could accompany her in the 2017 Vegetarian Festival (Facebook wall of Fon, October 13, 2017). Moreover, friends whom Fon met via social media have become members of the group. In 2016, Fon said:

This year we have Srida as a new member. I met her on Facebook, and she talked with me through Facebook Messenger saying that she had *ong* [Thai: a concealed spirit of a deity] but was not a *mah-song*. She wants to join the street procession and follow us in the parade. I don't know if she can walk along with us because of her age. (Interview with Fon, September 26, 2016)

Srida, a 45-year-old female shopkeeper who was born in Pangha and moved to Phuket around 10 years ago, described her experience with Fon:

I have followed Fon's group for a long time and saw her photos of her possession, which got me interested. Later, I found that Fon was born in Pangha as well. I then made a decision to communicate with her through Facebook Messenger. At that time Fon had already started to run her shop at Walking Street, so I went to see her there and we became acquainted. (Interview with Srida, October 3, 2016)



Fig. 9 Fon Posted Photos of Herself Participating in the Street Procession. The Last Picture (Lower Right) Shows Srida as a Companion (Facebook, October 13, 2016).

Srida also explained why she was interested in Fon's deity:

I have an altar in my house, and the images of Kiu-Tian, Pud Jor, and others whose names I don't know. My mother brought them from China, five images in total. I shared the pictures on the Jiachai group [Facebook group established by Fon]. You can see them. So I had faith in Kiu-Tian already, before I met Fon on Facebook. (Interview with Srida, October 7, 2016)

On October 7, 2016 Srida participated in the street procession as one of Fon's companions. While Fon was in a trance, Srida had to remain nearby and follow Fon for more than four hours during a round trip from the shrine to Sapan Hin. Hence, Srida was able to communicate with other friends who came to support Fon in the ceremony, which effectively included Srida in the public sphere of the shrine community (see Fig. 9).

Fon created another Facebook account, which essentially became an avenue for discourse when arguments were exchanged regarding the origin and beliefs of the Vegetarian Festival. Since 2014 she has operated a Facebook account named องค์บารมี กิ้วเพียนเหียนลือ (九天玄女) [Kiu-Tian-Hian-Lue], which has 1,839 friends and 345 followers. This account is used mainly to display photos, videos, and text related to her practice as a *mah-song*. The banner of this account is a picture of Fon in a trance, wearing yellow attire, holding a long metal sword, and standing in front of four devotees kneeling with their palms together as if in prayer to pay respects to the deity. The picture depicts the

power of a female deity over humans. Fon uses this Facebook account to start relationships among female *mah-songs* who have a common identity based on their beliefs and practices.

It is possible for one deity to possess more than one *mah-song* simultaneously. On May 9, 2017 two *mah-songs* who were both possessed by Kiu-Tian-Hian-Lue took notice of Fon's page, since it carried the name of their deity, and started a conversation on Fon's Facebook wall. They exchanged their personal contact details with each other and were able to communicate with Fon via Facebook Messenger. They also exchanged information about their practices, such as the period of abstention from meat products, the color of their attire, and the posture of their deity. *Mah-songs* have a deity playing the role of an intermediary among them, and hence the relationship can be built upon their interactions.

Mah-songs influence the process of revitalization by entering the public sphere of the Vegetarian Festival. They can choose to either register in particular shrines or discreetly enter the area of the ceremony without permission. Fon and her friends have been able to participate in the street procession every year since 2010. She believes that her deities have the obligation to bless devotees in order to increase their charisma in return. Thus, she needs to support her deities despite her position in the shrine being lower than those of the male deities and the high cost of the necessary paraphernalia.

The street procession has become a main ritual event of the festival in which symbolic capital is exchanged and cultural practices are transformed. The process is as follows. First, the shrine needs to increase the number of devotees who commit to a donation. The street procession can build faith among devotees if the *mah-songs* exhibit spiritual charisma (meeting of Juitui *mah-songs*, September 29, 2016). Second, *mah-songs* become significant intermediaries between shrines and devotees due to the above reason. Phuket shrines always request *mah-songs* to participate in the street procession even though many of them constantly violate the shrines' regulations. The shrines then strictly control the practices of the *mah-songs* and prevent some of them from engaging in the rituals. Third, through the support of a devotee, *mah-songs* have the opportunity to introduce various cultural customs: Taoist deities, paraphernalia, and practices that have never before appeared in the festival. Since *mah-songs* do not need the support of a shrine committee, they choose instead to communicate with their friends via social media. A set of symbols—names of deities, photos of paraphernalia and attire, magical prints, a list of Chinese mantras—is used in the process of communication. In the street procession, the identity of subgroups is therefore exhibited rather than a collective identity of the Phuket shrine.

From this case, it is clear that social media plays a vital role in sustaining relation-

ships among members of the Jiachai Facebook group. *Mah-songs* actually need financial support from devotees and companions in order to prepare the paraphernalia and attire to be used in the street procession of the Vegetarian Festival. Compared to male *mah-songs*, female *mah-songs* are relatively unknown as important members in the ceremonies since they are prohibited from accessing the main areas where Vegetarian Festival ceremonies are conducted. In addition, they are not allowed to stand beside the palanquin or vehicle of the Nine Emperor Gods while this is brought out in the street procession by male shrine members along with male *mah-songs*. Thus, female *mah-songs* choose to use social media to emphasize and showcase their roles by sharing their photos during trance and by disseminating the biography of their deities to devotees.

Worshipping a particular deity becomes part of the identity of devotees due to their belief that “their” deity has more divine power than the others. In the case of Srida, she follows her mother in worshipping Kiu-Tian and feels that this deity has helped her family overcome many difficulties from the time she was young. Among *mah-songs* possessed by Kiu-Tian, the use of social media gave Fon the chance to meet Srida, who later became her supporter. There is a process of interaction in the private and public spheres by members of the group. Female *mah-songs* have been showcasing their activities in the private sphere of their home altars via social media for over a year, thus expanding their network, and they perform in the public sphere of the Vegetarian Festival, where they receive support from the companions whom they have met while expanding their network.

Conclusion

In the case of counterpublics, subordinates excluded from the dominant shrines are able to strengthen their ties, maintain their activities, increase their status and prestige, and secure support and resources through the use of social media. However, what is the influential role of social media in the revitalization of tradition? In order to answer this question, the revitalization of the Phuket Vegetarian Festival has been examined.

The belief in shamanic practices flourished from the 1990s, when the tourism industry was introduced in Phuket. The Vegetarian Festival has been changed by the advent of the modern economy, which has reduced the role of religious institutions. However, religious beliefs combined with economic activities have become a form of popular religion, widely practiced as a way of receiving prosperity (Pattana 2012, 31).

The emergence of a capitalist monetary system transformed the process of exchange between devotees and Phuket shrines. The TAT’s promotion of the Vegetarian Festival

raised the profile of particular shrines in the public sphere, which led to donations from devotees that were used to maintain the shrines' religious activities and renovate their buildings. The number of shrines in Phuket increased from 13 in the 1990s to 49 in 2017. Of these, 21 opted to participate in the tourist-industry-led Vegetarian Festival and consequently necessitated a greater number of *mah-songs* since *mah-songs* are intermediaries between the Chinese deities and devotees. Devotees normally make a donation to a shrine if they have the opportunity to communicate with the deities they believe in. Thus, the growth of the Vegetarian Festival as a tourist event and the increasing numbers of shrines and *mah-songs* reinforce each other as social trends.

The Vegetarian Festival is practiced nationwide because it is believed to be a way to make Buddhist merit (*bun*). In other words, Theravada Buddhism is important in supporting the festival as a part of popular religion. Thai people who practice the national religion, or Theravada Buddhism, tend to participate in the festival. Moreover, as long as the shrines accept the religious system of Buddhist merit making, the dominant shrines in Phuket gain the privilege of being central to the festival. This has created a dispute between dominant shrine members and subordinates who prefer pure Taoism.

Social media plays the important role of circulating the practices of subordinate voices. The practices of *huatkuas* and *mah-songs* have gradually changed since 2005, when the website phuketvegetarianfestival.com was established. Initially the Internet and subsequently social media became avenues for people to exchange their knowledge about shamanic cults. Forty-year-old Wichai, who established thevegetarianfestival.com, found that it became a place for exchanging counter-narratives and closed the Web board 10 years after it was set up (Interview with Wichai, August 25, 2015). After that, people started using social media apps such as Facebook, Line, and Instagram instead.

Through the use of social media, new meanings and understandings of the Vegetarian Festival were created. First, the younger generations strived to separate pure Taoism from Buddhism by promoting Taoist doctrine via social media, showing that the practices of pure Taoism disregarded the *bun* system of Theravada Buddhism. Second, through the dissemination of discourses about pure Taoism, the practice of the Vegetarian Festival was perceived as a way to bestow prosperity, luck, and longevity in line with Taoism rather than to accumulate merit (*bun*) in accordance with the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism. Lastly, the established religious practices performed during the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket were increasingly perceived by a growing minority of Thais as unorthodox.

The use of social media changed the festival, with drastic changes occurring in both the public and private spheres. In the private sphere, young *huatkuas* disseminate pure Taoism to other *huatkuas* and *mah-songs* through social media. Their practices at the

home altar are consequently disengaged from Theravada Buddhism. Worshipping Taoist deities rather than making merit (*bun*) has become the core activity. The practices of subordinates in the private sphere have become diverse since there are various Taoist deities with their particular efficacies—such as healing ailments, bestowing luck, or protecting family members. At the same time, in the public sphere *mah-songs* introduce the symbols of such Taoist deities in ritual events, especially the street procession. This has transformed the cultural forms of the festival because *mah-songs* wear Taoist attire, use Taoist paraphernalia, and exhibit the behavior of their Taoist deities. Typically, *mah-songs* are compelled to follow the regulations of dominant shrines in order to preserve the traditional cultural forms of the festival. However, these *mah-songs* can mobilize along the network of subordinates because of their devotees' support and the use of social media. They have the opportunity to participate not only in the festival but also in various other interconnected venues, such as home altars and minor shrines. Through the cohesiveness of their communities in the private sphere, they have increased power to negotiate with the dominant shrines.

As a result, social media has become not only an online venue where subordinates gather in groups but also a place where necessary resources such as financial support, voluntary labor, and knowledge can be exchanged. It has become the main mechanism for the revitalization process by empowering subordinates with the opportunity to maintain their practices without support from the dominant shrines. Through online communication, relationships among subordinates are greatly strengthened both in social media and in home altars, where participants usually gather and practice shamanic rituals. As a result, for a growing number of Thais in Phuket the duration of the Vegetarian Festival has increased from nine days to a whole year, the tradition of the festival has been transformed into pure Taoism highlighting the role of the *mah-song*, and the ceremony is now recognized as a way to receive Taoist prosperity rather than making Buddhist merit.

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Dead in the Water: Global Lessons from the World Bank's Model Hydropower Project in Laos

BRUCE SHOEMAKER and WILLIAM ROBICHAUD, eds.

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.

Tens of millions of dollars have been spent on environmental and social mitigation programs for the Nam Theun 2 (NT2) hydropower project in Laos, extending over the full footprint of the project zone from the Vietnam border down to the confluence of the two impacted rivers with the Mekong. What are scholars, development practitioners, and concerned citizens to make of this high-profile infrastructure project? Costing about US\$1.45 billion in the end, it made such a significant investment in addressing its socio-environmental externalities, but as the authors of *Dead in the Water* argue, has still come up short.

A first interpretation is that NT2 was, and remains, an exception. It is rare to encounter such a nationally transformative resource project, backed with loan guarantees by global institutions at the peak of their influence, in what was (as Laos in the late 1990s to early 2000s) a prototypical weak developing state. If NT2 represents a kind of high-water line for Washington Consensus institutions in Southeast Asia, this book also demarcates the limits of that power. Moreover, as is now clear, NT2 did not fulfill its promise of raising the sustainability bar for other hydro-developers in Laos. Indeed, some within the Government of Laos (GoL) seem to have drawn the opposite conclusion—that Western institutional support for infrastructure comes with too many conditions, and too many studies—and in the end, the critics are not appeased anyway (Singh, Ch. 10, p. 224). NT2 thus helped form the institutional and regulatory scaffolding for foreign investment into the Lao electricity generation sector, while also producing an unintended policy shift toward regional and state-linked investors from China, Vietnam, and Thailand, holding lower commitments for impact assessment.

A second and divergent interpretation is that, due to its shortcomings, NT2 represents a case of high ambition combined with “failing forward.” Fleur Johns (2015) has argued that NT2 “failed forward” not just in the realm of development programming and impact mitigation, but also in terms of how the project reflected the complex intersection of neoliberal policy reform within a single-

party authoritarian regime: “Neoliberal experiments ‘fail forward’ when their transformative promise goes unrealized, without this dampening the ardor of that promise’s further pursuit” (Johns 2015, 348). In Laos, this ardor has led to the initiation of the Xayaburi, Don Sahong, and Pak Beng mainstream Mekong hydropower projects, despite widespread environmental concerns.

A third possibility, which has been pursued by scholars such as Jerome Whittington (2019), is to broadly set aside disputed and possibly irresolvable claims about failure, success, and local impact, toward examining how the social production of new ecological knowledge of rivers creates new subject-positions, claims to expertise, new logics of environmental risk management, and re-spatializations of state sovereignty and authority.

Dead in the Water does not specifically set out to theorize a new framework for understanding the NT2 project or the implications of hydropower development in Laos. Its aims are more applied and grounded, and constitute a basic warning that “supporting high-risk projects—those with the potential for severe social and environmental impacts—in countries with significant governance issues is fundamentally inappropriate and likely to cause more harm than good” (p. 298). The approach is set by some well-crafted chapters by the lead editors: independent researcher/consultant Bruce Shoemaker, and conservation biologist William Robichaud, both whom have long-term experience in the country. While none of the other chapter contributors are Lao nationals, which is a shame but understandable, given the constraints with freedom of speech in the country; almost all of the other writers have spent decades working and researching about Lao resource management issues.

The individual chapters are very readable, written with an assured touch, and here I will highlight a few of them. In Chapter 1, “Stepping into the Current,” lead editors Shoemaker and Robichaud introduce NT2 as more than just a commercial infrastructure project—it was also one of the largest rural development and conservation initiatives in Laos, that aspired to mitigate social impacts of project resettlement and the downstream inter-basin water diversion, and to secure critical biodiversity protection outcomes through the creation and funding of the Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area. There are solid and informative chapters on the famous octogenarian “Panel of Environmental and Social Experts” (Hubbel and Shoemaker, Ch. 2) and on *NGO Consultation and Engagement*, which, importantly, records the 1997 disbanding of the independent “NGO Forum on Laos” on orders from the Lao Government (Ch. 3, p. 73). Shoemaker and Hubbel launch a key critique, that the decision by some international NGOs to engage with NT2 ended up being manipulated by the World Bank, in a strategy to circumvent requirements for public participation in project hearings (p. 80). Meanwhile, domestic political realities within authoritarian Laos meant that there were “no mechanisms in place for decision makers to respond to input from local communities affected by the project” (p. 81).

Part 2 of the book tackles the contested social and environmental outcomes of the project. Applied anthropologist James R. Chamberlain offers an important ethnological review of the Nakai-

Nam Theun watershed area. Chamberlain decries the lost opportunity of continuing the research initiated in 1997, that was focused on how the indigenous/minority Austroasiatic ethnic groups residing in the project area were adapting to project-induced livelihood and socio-cultural changes. The author does not directly reflect upon his own early involvement in project-sponsored research, and whether this may have lent certain legitimacies to the overall project. Every engaged researcher must make their choices—as Shoemaker himself recognizes (p. 67). Nevertheless, the reader detects Chamberlain's deep disappointment in what became of the NT2 ethnic-minority safeguard mandates: "In the end," he writes, "alleged national sovereignty and expediency took precedence" (p. 101).

The absurdity of some of these safeguard mandates is highlighted by Glenn Hunt and co-authors in Chapter 5. Despite all the studies, when it came time to actually fill the NT2 reservoir, the project developers and local authorities were at a loss for how to actually manage the villagers' livestock. The results were shambolic. Villagers were told to sell their animals, which crashed the market price, ensuring they received a minimal value for their primary assets. Hundreds of other animals starved in the new resettlement sites, which did not have sufficient grazeland capacities. Some remaining buffalo became trapped by the inundated water on the far side of the reservoir, within the new Nakai National Protected Area. In this spot, the herds thrived, but proceeded to cause considerable ecological damage to the new watershed protection forests. "Things fall apart" as they say—and with NT2, it appears, with a high degree of consistency.

The entire question of the conservation offset and the protected area is subjected to scrutiny by Robichaud in Chapter 7. In 2001, the GoL established the Nakai-Nam Theun Watershed Management and Protected Authority (WMPA), supported with a guaranteed funding block of US\$1 million per year for 25 years—money drawn from NT2 revenues. Despite this significant financing, the results have still been disappointing. Robichaud's blunt conclusion is that progress with conservation outcomes depends more upon institutional culture and commitment by key agencies: "It is principally for lack of interest in its conservation mission that the WMPA has not succeeded" (p. 166).

Downstream impacts are a critical issue in the Nam Theun 2 theater. In Chapter 8, Ian G. Baird and colleagues make the point that little if any direct compensation was provided to the 150,000 people in the downstream recipient Xe Bang Fai river. The terms of the NT2 Concession Agreement meant that these very significant impacts could be externalized from project accounting, and offloaded onto local communities. Ryder and Witoon emphasize this point in Chapter 12 (p. 265), and Shoemaker and Robichaud reiterate this in the Conclusion, writing: "The institutionalised separation of revenues from a dam's true costs and liabilities in a country where public opposition to these projects is not tolerated has created an attractive environment for private hydropower financiers and developers" (p. 294).

Part 3 examines the "Wider Legacy" of NT2. Sarinda Singh insightfully argues that the pub-

lic consultations for NT2 coincided with, rather than contributed to, a minor political opening for public debate around resource led development in Laos, circa 2005–12. This brief thaw has since closed. Substantive scrutiny and public debate of the hydropower sector by Lao citizens is now almost entirely off-limits, and viewed by the government as very close to criticizing the *party-state* itself.

A useful chapter by Carl Middleton, focusing on the discourse of “sustainable hydropower,” rounds up the third section. Middleton challenges the branding of NT2 by the World Bank and the wider hydropower industry, “as a model to legitimize their claim that sustainable hydropower is possible” (p. 271). The second identified narrative is that of the poverty reduction and development connection. The chapter effectively traces how these models and narratives have been circulated by industry, construction companies, dam operators, and financiers. The irony, of course, is that NT2 is now viewed as something of an anachronism, and newer dam developers active in the Mekong region typically have weaker standards, and less transparency and accountability (p. 287).

If NT2 ultimately failed in establishing something that could be called “sustainable hydropower”—and this book makes a convincing case for this interpretation—what hope is there other major dam project in the Mekong basin? The International Finance Corporation is still carrying the flag in countries like Myanmar. However, the collapse of the Xepian Xe Namnoy saddle dam in Sanamxai district of southern Laos in July 2018—surely due to a catastrophic engineering and regulatory failure—and the apparent lack of progress in improving governance standards or transparency in the Lao hydropower sector more broadly, indicate that the Mekong hydropower sector is in many ways failing backwards, not failing forwards. In the end, as Hubbel and Shoemaker summarize: “The Bank’s money and the advice of independent panels are no substitute for an engaged local citizenry and a government accountable to its own people” (p. 59).

The close empirical approach to analyzing this transformative dam megaproject is not a point of weakness of this book, but rather, its core value-added. It does much to clear the mystifying narratives which have built up around NT2, particularly as forwarded by the World Bank, the Nam Theun Power Corporation (NTPC), and indeed from the GoL agencies. Although I have followed the academic and gray literature on this project quite closely for the past decade, there were still many new things I learned, particularly about the early project debates. Overall, this is an essential sourcebook for anyone interested in Lao PDR, hydropower in the Mekong basin, or indeed broader questions of the political ecology of conservation and development. The volume is also relevant for those interested in the social and environmental implications of large infrastructure projects underway in the region under the umbrella of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. A close reading of *Dead in the Water* is highly recommended.

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Slow Anthropology: Negotiating Difference with the Iu Mien

HJORLEIFUR JONSSON

Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2014.

Slow Anthropology presents chapters with ethnographic and historic data about the Iu Mien, originally from the uplands of Laos, who after being caught up in the disruptions of the American–Vietnam war, now live in three different countries (Laos, Northern Thailand, and California). The author argues for an approach to understanding the upland-dwelling communities of Southeast Asia, such as the Iu Mien, from a perspective that focuses on their myriad relationships with other peoples, or what the author calls “intersections” and negotiations of identities. Jonsson wants to call attention to how peoples situate themselves through contracts with others, and reconstruct culture along various social and cognitive causal chains. For him, culture is what happens among people across difference and not what distinguishes one group from another. This approach allows for a representation of upland peoples as politically active and historically situated agents negotiating their own identities and futures.

The thrust of the argument and ethnographic presentation is based on an opening critique of James C. Scott’s book, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. There, Scott argued that the upland peoples of the Southeast Asian Mainland Massif, or Zomia (a name he takes from Schendal), lived in societies and reproduced cultures that developed through state evasion. As the modern nation-state has absorbed territories that were once the homes of state-evading, upland-dwelling peoples, these strategies of evasion have come to an end, heralding the demise of the societies and cultures of the peoples who practiced them.

Jonsson’s critique points out that Scott’s approach lumps the social and cultural diversity of the Mainland Massif together under the name Zomia to enable him to develop an ideological argument that is built on the notion that states are by their very nature oppressive institutions, and sedentism entails subjugation and control. For Scott, human freedom is dependent on mobility and strategies of evasion. But according to Jonsson, Scott’s model takes away the peoples’ ability to engage the state through negotiation. He further stresses that the examples Scott gives of upland people evading the state are atypical and are of situations when political relations had bro-

ken down. This approach denies the diverse upland peoples a history and unintentionally treats them as relics from a long period of state history when they could do only one political maneuver—flee from the predatory presence of the state. In this approach as he stresses, negotiation, mutual alliance, and benefit (the very procedures that make moments of history) never emerge as options. And according to Jonsson, denying history to a people is to engage them through an act of symbolic violence.

The author stresses the contractual nature of relationships, which were negotiated within different political and religious contexts. He notes that among the upland peoples there has always been a mirroring match between contracts made with spirits and the contracts made with the government. It is through such contracts that agreements benefitting both sides were and are negotiated.

Jonsson suggests that arguments resting on the notion that “the state is the enemy of the people” attracts readers who share in this particular anti-state approach. It resonates with their negative expectations of state–periphery relations. As he says, it is indicative of the spirit of our times in which the state is the negative other and the upland peoples’ stand as an intersubjective third between the Western academic self and the otherness of the state. As such, this and similar types of arguments say more about Western scholarship in the process of epistemological collapse than about Asian historical and ethnographic realities. He asserts disparagingly “the whole Zomia thing was just a fuss” which reflected a very educated White Bourgeois U.S. theory regarding what happens across difference. But, he goes further than this to assert that this American academic approach to the upland peoples is a refraction of the White American’s bourgeoisie admiration with Native American Indians, which has appropriated their images for the enhancement of their own prestigious identity. This interest rests on an unequal relationship which denies a fellow humanity to them. Jonsson maintains that the “shadow of the Indian” has now cropped up in comparable fascination with some of the upland peoples of Southeast Asia who served as allies to the American military during the U.S.–Vietnam war, and treats Southeast Asian upland peoples as “scientific pin-ups” for fantasies of Western (American) political virtue. Jonsson might be right with these assertions, but the slide from Scott’s Zomia to U.S. scholarship is uneasy as he does not provide enough critical evidence for these comments.

Chapter Two presents data about Iu Mien during the war in Laos. Here Jonsson discusses the ethical difficulties of writing about violence without sensationalizing representations. The chapter presents descriptions of Iu Mien experiences of the war from first-hand interviews. Chapter Three focuses on the Iu Mien refugee camp in Thailand. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the highlanders were seen as a threat to the Thai nation. But toward the end of the millennium, Iu Mien began to participate in sport competitions and national festivals typically found in Thai villages. The author sees their participation in these events as forms of negotiating with the Thai state and its national culture. These sport events have developed forms of expressing national

loyalty as well as ethnic pride in a presentation of sameness and difference. He sees their participation in these village events as echoing an occasion during the late nineteenth century when a hundred people from the uplands dressed up in traditional costumes and brought gifts to the lowland lords in China. In Thailand, these ceremonial events connect the community to the Thai state and allow them to negotiate a space within it as well as to pass for Thai (Thai-accepted Mien). Jonsson argues that the view that minorities are threatened by national integration, modernity, and capitalism needs to be revised.

From Mien in Thailand, the ethnography moves on to discuss the Mien in California. Here Mien have undergone different forms of identity negotiations. Jonsson discusses some of the difficulties in their adapting to the host American society and their ways of overcoming those difficulties. Conversion to Christianity was seen by many as a means of becoming American, and the community also came to reorganize themselves into civic self-help groups. Children have developed American needs, one being that they needed to be told by their parents "I love you."

One intriguing incident that occurred among the Iu Mien in the three different countries around the same time was the reception of dreams which told people they had to build a temple to an ancestral spirit otherwise their culture and identity would fall apart. A temple was built in Oakland and a spirit medium in California chanted for the Thai Mien community who did not have the appropriate ritual specialist. The chant was transmitted live by cell phone to Thailand and amplified by loudspeakers. The dream message increased contacts between the different Iu Mien, providing them with a more global sense of identity. Jonsson's point is to show that rather than assume the Iu Mien is a monolithic ethnic group who will disappear with modernity, their identities should be understood as historically situated and constantly transforming in relation to their relations with others. Unfortunately, the author does not say more about this event and does not go into real depth about the Mien diaspora and the differences in Mien ethnic identities in different countries.

Jonsson's model for understanding the Iu Mien is an ethnic model. However, he does not really tell readers what he means by his usage of terms such as "ethnic" and "ethnicity." Neither does he provide the meanings of other terms such as "society," "negotiation," and even "contract." The problem of interpretation and representations of upland peoples might have to do more with uncritical, indiscriminate, and confused usages of such terms. Jonsson's own "ethnic model" approach to the Iu Mien also seems to hide a sense of primordiality.

Although there is much merit in understanding upland peoples by focusing on their negotiations with lowlanders, care must also be taken not to provide an insultingly shallow image of a people that reduces their complexity of semiotic webs of meaning to nothing more than market-style negotiated relationships with others. Further, we must also be careful not to dismiss fleeing and retreat from any definition of negotiation. Upland people's ability to negotiate with others was always conditioned by their ability to retreat, flee, and/or find another local lord. The threat of

retreat gave people in the highlands (an elsewhere) a certain leverage for negotiations. In the context of the modern nation-state, upland peoples have lost this leverage. But, as Jonsson suggests, there are different symbolic possibilities available, such as being a national citizen of the state and sharing in some common values and goods that can be used in negotiations. In this respect, I think the author's approach only complements Scott's model.

Slow Anthropology is a thought-provoking and critically insightful book and would be of interest to students of the upland peoples of the Asian Mainland Massif (Zomia), indigenous peoples studies, comparative Southeast Asian studies, ethnic studies, war and violence, and diaspora studies. It also provides an exemplary critique of Scott's recent Zomia model.

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Brunei—History, Islam, Society and Contemporary Issues

Ooi Keat Gin, ed.

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At the mention of Southeast Asia, big countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines often come to mind. The Sultanate of Brunei is certainly a recognized name on the world stage; however, its status as a "small country" compels us to find out more about this unique nation located at the heart of Southeast Asia. Other small states, such as Qatar in the Middle East or Slovenia in Europe, provide interesting perspectives on their place and role in this day and age of globalization. Brunei, too, represents a vital perspective as it navigates its position regionally and globally.

Brunei—History, Islam, Society and Contemporary Issues tackles various and crucial aspects of Brunei, ranging from history, politics, society, and Islam, to identity. As the book is about a small country, it is important to further our understanding of this subject in an increasingly changing world. How do Brunei and other "small" nations define their role and determine their policies with bigger countries on the regional and global stage? This volume highlights rather succinctly the pragmatic role of Brunei born out of its long-held experience of polity and commerce that is uniquely Southeast Asian. Nine authors contributed in writing the eight chapters of the book, while the Editor wrote the Introduction. The chapter's authors are members of the Academy of Brunei Studies at the University Brunei Darussalam, or are faculty of the same university. Though there was potential for more scope on important topics on Brunei, this book has taken a multidisciplinary approach spanning social science and infrastructure.

The volume comprises four main parts. The first, "Genesis, Historical Ties and Cotemporary

Relations,” illustrates the “birth” of Brunei, specifically from the tenth century to the mid-fourteenth century, in addition to its historical relations with neighboring polities, kingdoms such as Aceh and also examines China and Brunei’s international relations in the contemporary era. The second part of the book deals with crucial subject of identity, especially on being “Malay” in modern-day Brunei. This section provides an in-depth description of the social aspect of Brunei society, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century. It discusses in detail the meaning and essence of what it meant to “live on water,” and examines many facets of daily life on Kampong Ayer—considered the heart and soul of Brunei society with its unique sense of tradition and identity. The third part—containing only one chapter and written by a female scholar from Brunei—focuses on Islam, and explores the rights of women in Brunei according to the Islamic Family Law. This chapter is not only a scholarly work, but also a “voice” that offers an intimate insight into women’s circumstances and challenges in society. The fourth and last section of the book deals with an economic aspect of Brunei and the challenges that come with modernizing the local economy, mainly through oil and gas, and the subsequent dependency on foreign labor and imports. Without a doubt, this section could have easily been expanded to include discourse on other issues relevant to the cotemporary economic reality of Brunei.

Tracing the roots of the history of Brunei, Chapter One attempts to understand the “early polities” that existed and developed in the north-west coast of Borneo Island between the tenth and mid-fourteenth centuries. The methodology of study here is derived mainly from archaeological and linguistic data, written sources by indigenous people, oral tradition, and Chinese records. The author claims that the collected evidence shows a number of coastal and semi-coastal complex societies existed around the beginning of the twelfth century. Names such as Libang, Santubong, and Gedong areas of Sarawak were the most known social entities of the time. The location was considered vital to the international trading network, which helped the development of the several coast polities. The author argues that the case of Brunei was founded and developed since the tenth century by indigenous Borneo Malay speakers, at the heart of international trading network.

Chapter Two moves on to describe the relationship between the fledgling polity of Brunei in particular, and other polities within the neighboring vicinity and beyond. The author and historian of this study investigates the most well-known historical document on the history of Brunei, *Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei (Genealogical History of the Sultans of Brunei)*. There are three manuscripts of the *Silsilah*: two in London located in the School of Oriental Studies (SOAS) and the Royal Asiatic Society of London Library, and a third at Brunei Historical Museum. This historical document is highly significant in its popularity and value to the development of literature and culture of Brunei, and its relevance to other literature and historiography of the Malayan World. Contrary to the Malay histography literature of placing past figures, like kings, in a mythical way, the *Silsilah* begins with the first Sultan of Brunei, Awang Alak Betatar. Quoting from the actual passage on the first king of Brunei, the document says, “the first to become the king in the state of Brunei is

Awang Khalak Betarar, carrying the title of Sultan Muhammad, who first brought Islam in accordance with the Shari'at of our prophet Muhammad." The *Silsilah* was written by Datuk Imam Yakub in the year 1735 CE. After the conversion of the Awan Khalak Betarar to Islam, he forged strong relations with Aceh. It was here that scholars and clerics from Aceh introduced literature and religious books influencing the Sultan and the culture of Brunei. The *Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei* documented the lineage of the kings of Brunei as well as royal customs and relations in the region. In other words, this historical document explains several crucial historical landmarks, including war, Islamization of marriage, diplomacy, and trade, which made the kingdom of Brunei a powerful state and contributed to usher in what is understood as the golden age of Brunei.

Brunei's foreign relations in the contemporary era are discussed in Chapter Three. The theoretical discussion on small states, or micro-states, is an interesting sub-theme of the book. Chapter Three define Brunei as being classified into "micro-states"—"sovereign states with a very small population of a small land area, which largely means a population of less than one million or 10,000 kilometer square of land area" (p. 63). The author of Chapter Three argues that small states pursue closer ties with great power in the region for the purpose of external balancing with neighbors in the region. In this case, Brunei has fostered and maintained good and dynamic relationships with Japan, China, and the United States. Additionally, one interesting aspect of Brunei foreign relations is "Islamic Diplomacy." For example, the Organizations of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) offers a global platform for Brunei to play a multilateral role in coordination with other members of OIC. It works to promote the promotion of Islamic interests and values and thus for the benefit of Islamic Umma, as Brunei policy indicates. Brunei is considered an active contributor to OIC's Islamic Solidarity Fund, in addition to funds directed at Afghanistan, Somalia, and some countries in Sub-Sahara and West Africa. ASEAN is a vital international organization to Brunei since the country obtained independence in 1984. Brunei's outlook towards ASEAN is indicative of how small states maneuver available resources, in terms of diplomacy, economy, politics to prove its position and importance as regional member by undertaking the role of peacemaker, among others. We can see other highly relevant international examples, such as how Qatar and Slovenia seek active diplomacy to secure their regional place and position.

Chapters Four and Five examine the Malay identity in Brunei and existing ethnicities. Chapter Four argues that the term "Malay" is culture-based. However, being Malay as an identity is going to be met with challenges in modern times. The Sultanate of Brunei as a nation evokes homogeneity yet society reflects diverse ethnic heritage that goes well back in history.

In Chapter Five, "To Live on Water," readers are given a detailed background of the Malay identity in Brunei. This study offers a day-to-day description of life in Kampong Ayer, the traditional village constructed on water in Brunei during the British Residency in the first half of twentieth century. For example, community education appeared to have flourished within Kampong Ayer. Scholars offered their homes as places of learning and studying the religious texts. To meet the

demand of the increasing number of students, *balai* education was introduced, where a structure would be built on water in order to conduct lessons for and host *ulamaa*, scholars, and students. The *balai*, as a religious educational institution, is said to have been the driving force behind the “greatness of Islam in Brunei.” Here it is illustrative and at the same time significant to compare the *balai* with *pesantren* in Java and *pondok* in Malaya. Indeed, these “civil society” institutions carry vital social underpinning of Islamic civilization in terms of independent social entities, belonging to society and not the state. Historically speaking, till the formation of modern nation-state, Islamic society was largely independent of political authority. Governance was known and characterized as horizontal in nature. Education institutions, professional and trade guilds, *ulamaa*, scholars, and charity-based social services were all funded and sustained independently from the state through Islamic funding of *waqf*, endowment, *zakat*, almsgiving, and charity. Thus, it would be of an added value to explain how the *balai* maintained and sustained its function in Brunei society. To highlight this enduring aspect of Islamic civilization in relation to the Brunei case would be very meaningful. In all, this chapter is an informative and enjoyable read.

Chapter Six examines women’s rights in Brunei under Islamic Family Law. It argues that the legislation of “Emergency Order (Islamic Family Law) 1999” aims at empowering women with protection and justice, particularly during marriage and after divorce. The chapter is the only one in Part Three of the book. The other sections each consist of two or three chapters. As Brunei is a Muslim country, the discussion would have been enriched if this section was supplemented with other topics relating to Islam and Brunei. Nevertheless, highlighting the challenges and issues facing women in contemporary Brunei society is highly important and should be encouraged, in order to empower the rights of every woman and include women fully into the development and progress of Brunei.

On the issue of foreign labor in Brunei, the discussion in Chapter Six goes back to the colonial era. Colonialism brought about transformation to Brunei’s local economy, transforming it from a subsistence to capitalist economy. In the twentieth century, Brunei became highly dependent on foreign labor, which brought a number of economic, social, cultural, and political issues to the forefront. Presently, Brunei needs foreign labor to maintain its modern economy and the strategy of economic diversification to decrease dependence on oil and gas. The final chapter is about fishing, a traditional, centuries-old economic activity of Brunei. However, the country has become overly dependent on importing fish for local consumption.

In all, this book takes a multidisciplinary approach—comprising the humanities, social sciences, and infrastructure—in its discussion of Burma. Such an approach is to be encouraged in research and inquiry of social and development aspects of any given society. Certainly, there are additional vital topics that still can be researched and discussed on Brunei. But on the whole, this volume offers valuable information and timely additional knowledge on a country that is poised to expand its role diplomatically and economically within the region as well as on the world stage.

Iyas Salim

*Organization for Advanced Research and Education, Doshisha University****The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66***

GEOFFREY B. ROBINSON

Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder

JESS MELVIN

Rethinking Southeast Asia. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Much like most controversial events in Indonesian history involving the military and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI hereafter), the question regarding the extent of the Indonesian military's involvement in the systematic detention and massacre of alleged PKI leaders, members, and sympathizers during the aftermath of the September 30, 1965 coup is an issue that has left the public and scholars cold for many years. Evidence of this confusion is manifest, for example, in the enduring narrative (even among scholars and pundits) that the killings in 1965–66 were a result of spontaneous civilian violence aimed at communists, who were portrayed as the atheist and godless (*tidak beragama, tidak bertuhan*) “puppet masters” (*dalang*) of the abortive coup. Even the most critical of scholars (see, for example, Anderson and Mcvey 1971; Crouch 1978; Cribb 1990; Sundhausen 1982) have shown an uncharacteristic reluctance to describe the killings as a result of a nationally coordinated military campaign. The elusiveness of any semblance of resolution to the issue has resulted to the continued impunity enjoyed by the main architects and perpetrators of the genocide.

While a host of scholars have tackled the history of Indonesian genocide from various disciplines and methodological approaches (see, for example, Kurniawan *et al.* 2015; Kolimon *et al.* 2015; Sukanta 2014), with some even making transparent their sympathies for the victims and antipathy toward the perpetrators (see, for example, Mortimer 1969), none have really given conclusive answers in relation to the killings. Relatedly, there is an influx of autobiographical accounts from *ekstapols* (ex-political prisoners), with the rise of a youth generation curious about their nation's troubled history (*sejarah kelam*) and the emergence of “indie” presses in Bandung (Ultimus), Jakarta (Komunitas Bambu), and Yogyakarta (Antariksa, Insist, Kendi, Merakesumba). Hersri Setiawan's (former PKI member and chairman of LEKRA, or Institute of People's Culture, in Central Java) *Memoar Pulau Buru* (2004), Djoko Sri Moeljono's *Pembuangan Pulau Buru* (2017), and Martin Aleida's *Tanah Air Yang Hilang* (2017) come to mind when discussing works that have tangentially tackled the issue of mass detentions and killings during the aftermath of the 1965 coup.

While past and recent scholarship tried to examine the socio-cultural, religious, and area-specific aspects of the killings, autobiographies of former political detainees, and collected accounts of *ekstapols* and survivors focus more on the legacies of impunity and injustice left by the 1965–66 genocide.

In *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder*, Jess Melvin sheds light on the actual participation of the Indonesian military in the 1965–66 killings, pogroms, and civilian government purges inflicted against alleged members of the PKI and its affiliate mass organizations. Focusing on the province of Aceh as one of the primary and earliest evidence of killings having a “centralised and coordinated nature” (Melvin, p. 293), the book presents compelling evidence—through official military documents, telegram communications from various embassies, and personal accounts from perpetrators, survivors, and eyewitnesses—of the involvement of the Indonesian military in all the phases of the PKI annihilation campaign: the portrayal of the September 30 coup as a PKI plot; the encouragement of civilian participation in the physical annihilation of the PKI and its affiliate organizations; the consolidation and streamlining of the “official version of events”; and the subsequent rise of Suharto to power and the militarization of Indonesian bureaucracy. Moreover, by using genocide as the primary lens to understand the events in 1965–66, Melvin does not only attempt to vanquish the ghost that has for many years haunted contemporary Indonesian politics and history, but also contributed to the expanding field of genocide studies in Southeast Asia (see, for example, McGregor *et al.* 2018). On the other hand, as if a match made in heaven, Geoffrey Robinson’s *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66* (2018) pulls out all the stops by offering readers a comprehensive history of the 1965–66 genocide in Indonesia. Eschewing the exclusively area- and gender-specific, socio-cultural, psychological, and religious focus of past scholarship, Robinson favors a comparative approach which does not only account for the aforementioned, but also heavily considers the national and international factors that have influenced the course of events before, during, and after the 1965–66 massacres. Through his skillful and desultory reading of colonial and early postcolonial Indonesian military history, Soekarno’s deteriorating diplomatic relationship with the U.S. and other Western bloc states, and Indonesia and PKI’s pivot to China during the height of the Cold War, Robinson provides a multi-faceted narrative that veers away from pinning the blame to a single faction or party. In the same way, as a contribution to the field of genocide studies, Robinson’s approach also accounts for the variations and particularities of the Indonesian case (especially when considering the dates, methods, and parties involved in the killings) in contrast to other cases of mass detentions and killings.

Melvin’s book consists of eight chapters, with Chapters 2–7 providing a detailed chronology of the military response, civilian reaction, and killings in the various cities and sub-districts of Aceh during the aftermath of the September 30, 1965 coup. Robinson’s, on the other hand, consists of 11 chapters, with the first 4 dealing with the various preconditions and pretexts in modern Indo-

nesian history that “appear to have been especially important in facilitating violence against the Left” (Melvin, p. 28). In Melvin’s opening chapter, meanwhile, she presents a comprehensive discussion on genocide as an emerging framework in understanding the 1965–66 killings in Indonesia. Through a review of the term’s usage and a quick overview of how genocide scholars have applied the term to understand various cases of genocide, the chapter raises convincing arguments which “confirms the early assumption that the 1965–66 killings can be understood as a case of genocide according to its sociological (non-legal) and legal definitions” (Melvin, p. 31). Similar to Robinson’s current work, Melvin pushes for the use of the term “genocide” in describing the military, paramilitary, and civilian involvement in the mass detentions and killings in Aceh. Further, in the succeeding chapters, Melvin argues that the bureaucratic, ideological, and structural legacies of previous military campaigns during Soekarno’s Guided Democracy, most notably during the “Crush Malaysia” (Ganyang Malaysia) campaign, gave the Indonesian military an opportunity to consolidate their own ranks, granted them unprecedented access to various state organs, blessed them with unbridled authority to “train” civilian defense forces that could be mobilized in the event of a national emergency, and allowed them to control the narrative about the event.

In Chapter 2, Melvin provides a brief history of Indonesia’s national military command structure from the colonial period up until Soekarno’s conception of the Dwikora (People’s Double Command) in 1964; Aceh’s colonial and post-independence history, including its history of resistance against the Dutch and postcolonial separatist rebellions; PKI strength and presence in Indonesia and its surprising spread in Aceh; and the complicated relationship of the traditional and modern Acehnese elite (the *uleebalang* and *ulama*) with the Indonesian army’s top brass. By doing so, Melvin is able to provide context as to why Suharto and the Indonesian military were able to mobilize camps, such as the decommissioned rebel group Darul Islam, that were previously antagonistic toward them. Relatedly, the rise of the modern Acehnese elite and party politics in the province afforded the military, in hindsight, timely allies in their impending collision against the PKI during their 1965–66 campaigns. In addition, Melvin was able to debunk the enduring argument that decades-old conflict between the PKI and Islamic political factions was the main reason why the killings escalated into genocidal levels.

Chapter 3, on the other hand, gives readers a chronology of events both in Aceh and Jakarta from October 1–6, 1965. This brief period offered high-ranking military officials the opportunity to plan coordination tours across the regions, meet with local government leaders, and arrange mass meetings with various political parties (including representatives of the PKI to the Front Nasional) in order to explain “what really happened” on September 30, 1965. As shown in the military documents analyzed in the chapter, Melvin was able to prove the existence of a sophisticated and high level of coordination between the military command in Jakarta (led by Suharto), inter-regional and provincial commands in Sumatra (led by General Ishak Djuarsa), and other political allies, which include Islamic political parties and civilian militia groups. The chapter also

gives readers a glimpse into the campaign which spelled the complete destruction of the PKI in Aceh: *Operasi Berdikari* (Operation Berdikari). Chapter 4 presents a chronology of events from October 11, 1965. The said dates constituted Djuarsa's massive coordination campaign in various cities and regencies of the province. Through this coordination campaign, Djuarsa was able to relay specific instructions regarding *Operasi Berdikari* to various city military commands, local government units, and other key allies in the province. This, and the succeeding coordination and provincial campaigns described in the following chapters, account for the speed and sweep through which the violence in Aceh (and in other regions of Indonesia) spread, leaving a lasting legacy of militarism and intolerance which continues to suppress any semblance of dissent or critical thought in Indonesia.

Robinson's second, third, and fourth chapters read like a perfect complement to Melvin's first four chapters. In the second chapter, for instance, Robinson provides an analysis of the following: the (1) Indonesian colonial and revolutionary experience which inspired acute ideological cracks between the Muslims, PKI, and the Indonesian military; (2) the complexities of Indonesia's post-colonial state formation; (3) the Indonesian military's history of brutal repression of internal enemies; (4) and the highly volatile, polarized, combative, and militant nature Indonesia's post-independence politics, akin to a timebomb waiting to explode. Chapter 3, however, provides an in-depth analysis of the competing versions of the September 30, 1965 coup, while also underscoring specific inconsistencies and improbabilities of the New-Order-sponsored official narrative. Rounding out his foundational chapters, Robinson discusses in Chapter 4 Indonesia's political climate during the height of the Cold War in Southeast Asia in the early 1960s.

Chapter 5 of Melvin's work gives readers a glimpse of the first outbreak of public violence and first wave of mass detentions in Aceh from October 7–13, 1965. Through the military documents and personal accounts of perpetrators who were either ex-members of youth organizations and paramilitary groups, such as Pemuda Ansor (Ansor Youth), Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth), Hansip (Civilian Defense), and Hanra (People's Defense), we see how the Indonesian military skillfully "encouraged" civilian population in the annihilation of the PKI and its sympathizers. In Chapter 6, Melvin, through an in-depth analysis of national, regional, and provincial military documents, shows how the Indonesian military escalated the "war" against PKI through its own direct involvement in the arrests and killings of prisoners, recruitment, and mobilization of additional paramilitary units, and through the national indoctrination campaign launched by its allied anti-communist political parties. The chapter also features more personal testimonies from survivors, perpetrators, and eyewitness from various cities and sub-districts of Aceh. Chapter 7, on the other hand, focuses on the anti-Chinese violence and civilian government purges that occurred in Aceh, just months after the violence reached its peak in the province. Similar to the previous three chapters, readers will see how the military orchestrated the violence against specific segments of civilian populations, in this case the Chinese members of Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan

Indonesia (Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship) or Baperki and the rest of the Chinese *pribumi* population in the province.

Chapters 5, 6, and 8 of Robinson's work provides a polyvalent account of the killings, underscoring its various aspects. Chapter 6 examines the violence in Java, Sumatra, and Bali based on accounts of perpetrators, survivors, and reports from national and international media; Chapter 6 zeroes in on the Indonesian army's specific role in the arrests and killings; while Chapter 8 argues that the relationship between the varying patterns of killing and detention is one of the anti-PKI campaign's most neglected aspects, and that both

[m]ass incarceration[s] and mass killing[s] were integrally related in two ways: first, in the sense that most of those eventually killed were first detained, and second, that rates of long-term imprisonment were lower where traces of killing were highest. (Robinson, p. 209)

Again, the aforementioned chapters read like a perfect counterbalance to Melvin's Aceh-specific narrative, especially in Chapter 8 where Robinson puts forward the same argument concerning the detailed and planned nature of the campaign at all levels (national, regional, provincial). Chapter 7, meanwhile, provides an interesting account of international involvement and response before, during, and after the anti-communist campaign in Indonesia. Through a deft look at the "assurances," "encouragements," and "silences" of the U.S., British, and Australian governments before, during, and after the pogroms and mass incarcerations, Robinson is able to draw a clear map of competing international interests in relation to the ongoing anti-communist campaigns in Southeast Asia and the world. Chapter 9 deals with the mass incarceration program employed by the New Order regime as part of its nationwide state propaganda and political censorship. Robinson's final chapters deal with several issues related to 1965–66: (1) actual attempts of various groups and organizations to establish a truthful and accurate account of the events in 1965–66; (2) resistance from the Indonesian government and military to mete out judicial punishment to perpetrators; and (3) various programs, and reconciliation and reparation for victims and survivors.

Readers, especially those who have little to no knowledge of the 1965–66 anti-communist purges in Indonesia, may find discomfort in some of the information disclosed in both books. More than the accounts of actual violence featured in both works, the calculated and callous nature of the killings still stands as the campaign's most harrowing aspect. Nevertheless, this discomfort might be assuaged by the fact that these books were written to settle age-old questions regarding the events that transpired during that "year that never ended" (*tahun yang tak pernah berakhir*). Specialists, on the other hand, will find in Melvin's work answers to questions that have eluded scholars who have previously tackled the 1965 coup and its attendant legacies. Scholars interested in international relations, especially in the anti-communist incursions of Western states in Southeast Asia during the Cold War, will find Robinson's work insightful and rich in historical data.

Through her interweaving of military documents, interviews, and personal accounts, Melvin

has probed into the complexities, contradictions, and lasting legacies of impunity of the anti-communist campaign in Aceh (and in Indonesia as well). In contrast to Robinson's macro approach, Melvin was able to see the traces of the national (even international) involvement through the examination of the provincial and local aspects of the genocide in Aceh. Emphasizing the centrality of military involvement throughout the anti-communist purges and in the consolidation of the nascent New Order regime's power, the book separates itself from past and existing scholarship on the 1965–66 genocide, which, due to the fugitive nature of primary sources (and the Indonesian military's paranoia), failed to explain the deliberate and organized nature of the killings, notwithstanding the existence of variations in methods and auxiliary groups involved. On the other hand, Robinson's comparative approach affords readers an opportunity to see the various internal and external interests in play before, during, after the 1965–66 genocide. More than just a straightforward narrative of the killings, Robinson is also interested in the continuing quest of justice for survivors and their families, and in the legacy of violence and silence the killings (and the regimes that sponsored it) have left on its wake. Finally, by stressing the centrality of "historically specific acts and omissions made by people in positions of political power" (Robinson, p. 296), Robinson convincingly argues that mass killings and incarcerations are not acts of a people who have run "amok" (as popular accounts are wont to claim), but of various forces and institutions that have decided to settle political conflict through violence.

Though Melvin and Robinson, like Oppenheimer with his films, might be accused of opening up old wounds, what these brave and groundbreaking books really open up is a way of breaking the specter of silence that has haunted Indonesian society for decades. Rich in historical data and written in impeccable scholarly prose, these two tomes are must-reads for Indonesians ready to confront the troubled history of their nation.

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