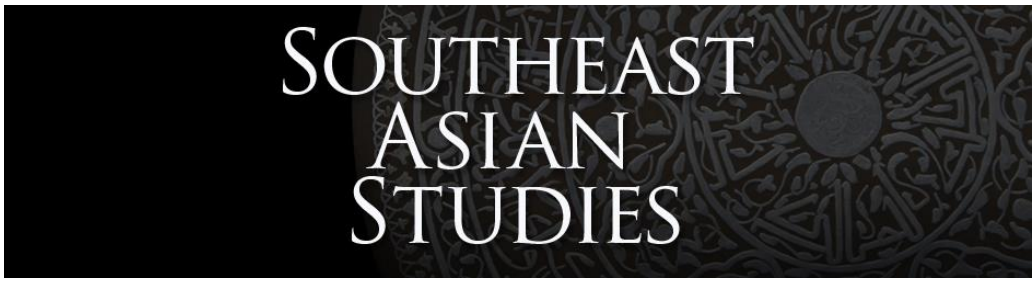

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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CONTENTS

Personal Narratives and Labor Migration: A Retired *Guojia Ganbu* in Southeastern Guizhou

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The mass domestic migration of laborers from rural to urban areas is one of the most visible and significant aspects of "the rise of China." Examining personal experiences can help us to describe and understand this phenomenon. As Arthur Kleinman (2006) has observed, life histories and personal voices demonstrate how people live a moral life amidst uncertainty and danger, and how they interpret what really matters to them. While recounting retired *guojia ganbu* Deik Bok's life history and narratives, I discuss and elaborate on one individual's experience of uncertainty and morality through China's vicissitudes from the 1950s through the 2010s. I argue that this person's experiences tell an important story about minorities in China through the socialist and reform periods, and specifically about the shifts in economic decisions and subjectivities that accompanied the rise of labor mobility. This ethnography builds on my friendship with Deik Bok that began in 1997 and was maintained through the many years I conducted ethnographic studies in Hmub villages in the highlands of southeastern Guizhou. Deik Bok represents a lively and vivid social actor of a particular time and place participating in China's labor migration and social transformation since the 1950s, and his story provides a nuanced view of the transformation of China's minority areas.

Keywords: narratives, labor migration, ethnic minority, Hmub, Guizhou, Southwest China

Introduction

This paper focuses primarily on Deik Bok,[1)] a retired elder *guojia ganbu* (ethnic minority

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1) *Deik*, a Hmub kinship term, means "brother." Bok is a Hmub given name.

cadre)[2] of Hmub ethnicity from southeastern Guizhou,[3] mainland China, and his lifelong experiences of rural-urban labor migration. Following the vicissitudes of his life allows for a microscopic exploration of the ways that individuals experienced mobility from the 1950s to the 2010s. Inspired by reflective scholarship on trans-local mobility combined with life history narratives, the paper draws on two decades of participant observation in Taijiang County Seat, in particular describing the linguistic performances and experiences of a cadre trying to make his living through changing economic times and the role of kinship networks in both his successes and his failures. On the one hand, personal narratives provide ethnographic data to be collected, described and analyzed; on the other hand, they also constitute an analytical approach to integrating an individual's subjectivity and linguistic performances (Hoskins 1998). Drawing on verbatim transcriptions of personal narratives, the paper explores the implications of trans-local mobility and elaborates on an individual's experience of uncertainty and morality in China since the 1950s. I argue that this person's experiences tell an important story about minorities through China's socialist and reform periods, and specifically about how the rise of labor mobility led to shifts in economic decisions and subjectivities.[4]

Literature Review

Amidst China's rise, one of the most important features of modern Chinese society is the large numbers of rural migrants living their lives straddled between rural homes and urban workplaces. There has been significant scholarly interest in issues related to this massive domestic migration. Some scholars have asked how such labor migration affects relationships of migrants with other individuals, and with their families and relatives (Wu 2005; Ohashi 2011; Fang 2016; 2018; 2019; Horie 2018). Others have examined how this

2) Briefly, there are two types of cadres in China: national cadres (*guojia ganbu*) who work for the central government and local cadres (*difang ganbu*) who work for local governments. The rank of national cadres is used exclusively for members of China's ethnic minority populations.

3) Guizhou is located in the eastern part of the Yun-Gui Plateau. Based on a 1990s survey, there were roughly nine million Miao (Hmub/Hmong) spread across a large part of the massif that covers the Yun-Gui Plateau in Southwest China and surrounding uplands in both Southwest China and northern parts of Southeast Asia (in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand) (Chien 2009). The Miao within China are usually divided into five groups based on their language and geographical distribution.

4) The transition to a socialist market economy began in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping introduced his program of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Initial reforms in decollectivizing agriculture and opening the economy to foreign investment in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to large-scale reforms, including corporatization of the state sector and partial privatization of some enterprises, in the late 1990s (Vogel 2011).

mobility reshapes and reconstructs the boundaries between villages, and between villages and county seats (Liu and Gu 1999; Yang 2003; Li 2007; Wang 2007). Studies have also explored the challenges that rural migrants face in navigating the drastic changes entailed in moving to work in a city, particularly the struggles of adapting to the rules, lifestyles, and cultural habitus of urban life (Fei 2001 [1939]; Shao 2002; Li 2007; Fang 2016; 2018; 2019).

Literature on China's migrant laborers has also highlighted considerable variation between the experiences of men and women, both in their reasons for leaving home to seek work in cities, and in the nature of labor migration (Schein 2006; Qui and Xu 2009; Shen 2010; Ohashi 2011; Horie 2018). For example, research has shown that women migrating between places are more likely to find themselves in a doubly marginalized situation (Qui and Xu 2009; Shen 2010; Ohashi 2011; Horie 2018). Put forward in the 2006 book *Translocal China* (Oakes and Schein 2006), the concept of "translocality" is used to discuss the different ways in which people from rural areas develop new connections, identities, and imaginations of space in response to their trans-local movements. In her essay in this volume, L. Schein (2006, 213–237) uses the concept of translocality to explore the life histories of several Miao (Hmub) women from Guizhou, with a focus on their experiences as migrant laborers.[5] Schein describes how women from the Hmub village of Xijiang, located in southeastern Guizhou, moved to urban centers through marriage or various other channels such as work, cultural performance, or the production of ethnic handicrafts and clothing. During the transition from the countryside to the city, these Hmub women experienced dislocation, emplacement, and replacement—reflected in their bodily experiences, dietary habits, appearances, clothing, identities, and worldviews. The transitional experiences of these Hmub women also serve as a vantage point for our understanding of the trans-local experiences of Deik Bok explored in this study.

Exploring the fundamental aspects of this contemporary phenomenon of translocality requires a nuanced theoretical perspective, particularly if we want to explore the interactions between rural migrants and their places of origin, or the similarities and differences between urban and rural life in their lived experiences. In exploring the subjectivities demonstrated in the experiences of Hmub migrant laborers from southeastern Guizhou, it is important to take into account such issues as bodily experiences, emotions, as well as the framing of self and identity (Kleinman 2006; Schein 2006; Fang 2016; 2018; 2019). Under this conceptual framework, I carried out an ethnographic research project among the Hmub in Taijiang County aimed at describing and interpreting the unique microhistories of individuals, families, villages, and counties in the context

5) The Miao women studied by Schein (2006) belong to the Hmub subgroup that I describe in this article.

of migratory flows, as well as the regional history of Guizhou, especially from the 1920s to 2010s. During this period, the people in southeastern Guizhou experienced a prewar phase from the 1920s to the 1940s, a socialist phase from the 1950s to the 1970s, the era of China's economic reform and development from the 1980s to 2000, and China's economic rise to prominence from 2000 to 2010. This paper especially explores how China's transformation relates to generational characteristics of Hmub people born in the 1950s in southeastern Guizhou and their mobility as reflected in their experiences of labor migration.

As J. Hoskins (1998) argues in her book *Biographical Objects*, studying a life history does not mean dealing with a pre-existing and fixed text. Narratives cannot simply be "discovered." When a person talks about their own life, they are not just providing information about themselves but also telling the outside world about who they are through the act of storytelling. For example, Hoskins describes how the Kodi people of eastern Indonesia talk about important moments and events in their lived experiences by telling stories about their cherished personal belongings. In this way, the Kodi people express selfhood through stories and objects (Hoskins 1998).

Being a "Taijianger"

Taijiang County is located in southeastern Guizhou (Qiandongnan). The field site for this study, Taijiang County Seat and the villages on adjacent mountains, is mostly populated by the Hmub people (an endonym).[6] Taijiang County Seat, with its population of around forty thousand, is located in the north of Taijiang County. The elders and friends I met in Taijiang County Seat were from the first or second generation that moved from villages to urban areas. Born between the 1920s and the 1970s, they recounted various experiences—from their migration during the Cultural Revolution to their various reasons for going to work in a city during the Reform Era. These Hmub migrants typically faced language barriers and had to adjust to new lifestyles when moving to a new place to work. Their personal migratory experiences highlight that often working in the city was not a matter of personal choice. Their experiences also reflect the rapid transformations of Chinese society more generally; the unique historical, social, and cultural context of Guizhou; as well as the differences associated with ethnicity, gender, and generational factors.

6) Hmub society is cognate with Hmong; both refer to patrilineal descent groups that practice cross-cousin marriage and duolocal postmarital residence. Hmub and Hmong have been called Miao in Chinese since the Qing Dynasty (Chien 2017, 215).

Locally, the term "Taijiangers" (*Feb Niat bel Naik*) refers to people who live in Taijiang County Seat. Some are retired literati or officials whose hometowns are in Huangping County or Shibing County, on the north bank of the Qingshui River.[7] These two counties were once governed by *tusi*, the local chiefdom system, as far back as the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and also came under the governance of the Qing Empire earlier than did Taijiang County.

Part of being a Taijianger is participation in shared memories based on lived experiences. All Taijiangers have their own stories about life in different villages or on either side of the Qingshui River. Based on this understanding, I revisited Taijiang County Seat in 2011 and 2014 to observe the experiences of Hmub people moving between their rural homes and their workplaces in urban areas, as well as their activities within and outside their own households. These observations were combined with in-depth life history interviews of Hmub people in Taijiang County Seat set against the backdrop of ongoing economic, social, and cultural changes at the national and regional levels.

As mentioned earlier, this paper focuses primarily on an individual named Deik Bok ("Brother Bok"), a retired elder *guojia ganbu* of Hmub ethnicity, and his lifelong experiences of rural-urban labor migration. His life gives an idea of the ways in which individuals in Taijiang experienced labor mobility between the 1950s and 2014. Finally, there is a discussion of how Deik Bok's narratives tell an important story about the experiences of minorities during China's transformation through the socialist and reform periods, and specifically how the rise of labor mobility impacts economic decisions, bodily experiences, emotions, and the framing of subjectivity.

Deik Bok's Life History and Migratory Experiences

Deik Bok is a good friend of mine, and recounting his life history in an academic article makes me somewhat uneasy. When we first met during the late summer of 1997, I was a graduate student of anthropology who had come to southeastern Guizhou to learn about Hmub culture. Since then, Deik Bok has accompanied and guided me for two decades in my research among the Hmub people. By the time I saw him in Taijiang County Seat in 2014, he had retired from his post as an ethnic minority cadre and I was a university professor with more than ten years of teaching experience.

Over the years, Deik Bok had become like an elder brother to me. In the late sum-

7) The Qingshuijiang is the longest river in Guizhou Province. It cuts across the whole of Taijiang County from west to east and then runs through the northeast corner. This river is also the border between Taijiang and Huangping and Shibing Counties.

mer of 1997, Teacher Yang of Guizhou University accompanied me to Taijiang to help me find a suitable field site for my doctoral research a year later. Deik Bok, then working in the Taijiang County Publicity Department and a member of the Federation of Literary and Art Circles of Taijiang County (*Taijiang diqu wenxue yu yishujei lianhe hui*), was my main host in Taijiang. At the time, I was deciding between two Hmub villages in the hills, Fangf Bil and Eb Diuf Nel, to be the field site for my doctoral research.[8] It was more convenient to travel to the village of Fangf Bil, so a group of us went there to conduct preliminary fieldwork. Teacher Yang became unwell and left early with a young colleague from the Southeastern Guizhou Federation of Literary and Art Circles; they returned to Kaili and Guiyang, respectively.

Therefore, Deik Bok was the only person who accompanied me to the village of Eb Diuf Nel. This village was very meaningful to my research, because it was where Professor Wu Ze-Lin (1898–1990), a well-known Chinese ethnologist, and his research team had conducted and documented fieldwork and interviews during the 1950s (Wu 1987 [1956]). The only way to reach the village from the main road was on foot. During the almost two-hour walk, Deik Bok and I discussed many aspects of Hmub village culture in the Taijiang area, and we became close friends after that field trip. At the end of 1998, I returned to the village of Fangf Bil and stayed there for a year and a half to carry out fieldwork for my doctoral research. Later, whenever I came to Taijiang for my ethnographic research, I asked Deik Bok for help.

Through him I came to know his wife and her sister, Xu Xiaohong, with whom I also became good friends. During my research, I also lived with Xiaohong's family for a short period. I still remember one night in the winter of 1998 when Xiaohong gave me two blankets to keep warm, a warmth that stays with me to this day. Later, Xiaohong left to run a shop in Kaili, the largest city in the region. Deik Bok introduced me to his relatives, and I stayed with them whenever I left Fangf Bil village and came to Taijiang County Seat for a while. I frequently stayed with Uncle Zhang Mingda, an elderly county magistrate then, and Aunt Zhou Yunrong, a respected retired teacher. Uncle Zhang and Aunt Zhou

8) Fangf Bil and Eb Diuf Nel are both Hmub villages perched high on a hillside in the upper reaches of the Qingshui River. They form part of the northern subgroup of the central Miao (Yang 1998, 99), and administratively they are part of Fanzao Township, Taijiang County, in Southeastern Guizhou Autonomous District in Guizhou Province. Local people speak an eastern Miao dialect of the Miao-Yao subfamily of the Sino-Tibetan language group. The people of Fangf Bil and Eb Diuf Nel call themselves Hmub. Both villages were composed of about three hundred households, with a population of almost 1,500 (1998–2000) (Chien 2012). They are divided into several hamlets (*vangf*) whose names refer to various nearby geographical features. The residents of any single hamlet are generally the agnatic descendants of a lineage subsegment and share a common Han Chinese surname. The naming system is patronymic (Chien 2012, 97).

treated me like their daughter. Living with them was an unforgettable experience.

Since 1997, my friendship with Deik Bok has given me a window to view his life history and experiences of migration between villages and cities from various angles. For this study, Deik Bok's life history narratives not only provide ethnographic data to be collected, described, and analyzed but also constitute material for an analytical approach to integrating an individual's subjectivity and linguistic performances.

Early Childhood Education and Migratory Experience (1959–73)

Deik Bok was born in 1959 in Datang Hmub Village, Geyi Township, Taijiang County. In 1965, at the age of six, he began to study in elementary school, just before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). In fact, Deik Bok almost missed the chance to go to junior high school after elementary school because his uncle had once written slogans against the revolutionaries. As Deik Bok recalled, fortunately, the accountant of the local production brigade helped him fill in his application form so he was able to register for school. Deik Bok thus entered Shidong Junior High School in 1970 and graduated two years later, in 1972.

Deik Bok's retelling of his early years highlights several key points. One is that his experiences were very much entwined with the Cultural Revolution:

> My maternal grandmother was labelled a landlord and my paternal uncle an anti-revolutionary. When I was a kid, I went to study at Datang Elementary School. Back then, I was not bad at studies. I was just a bit mischievous, not serious enough. During the Cultural Revolution, I wouldn't have been able to attend junior high school if it hadn't been for the recommendation from the brigade accountant.

For Deik Bok, the Cultural Revolution was a dreadful time because of his experiences at elementary school during those years: "There were always fears lingering in my heart. Once, I wrote something on the blackboard that I was later criticized for by the school. Even now, I can't remember what I wrote."

In his early life, Deik Bok had to work constantly to earn his meal tickets to survive:

> It was very hard to study at that time. I had a big family, and my relatives had difficult lives. All of us earned money by cutting firewood—one piece was worth five cents, the equivalent of ten or twenty yuan today.

When Deik Bok was in junior high school, Shidong Township was in the early stages of development. Under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, farming activities in the township were filled with the friendliness of rural social networks: "[Back then] it was not as lively as it is today; it was just a small township with a small main street. The

whole school often went out to support the farmers. We helped the farmers every week."

Deik Bok noted that Shidong also underwent an administrative change at that time: "Shidong Town was originally a district that governed ten small townships." Deik Bok's memories of his early years were filled with the desire to further his education, even if it meant a long journey: "The way to school was long, but I felt happy." The emergence of this yearning also intersected with his image of his father:

> At that time, my father worked for the Shidong Administration for Industry and Commerce (Shidong Gongshang Ju). Sometimes, when I went home with my father, on the way the two of us would go and chop pine trees for their oil. My father climbed the tall pine trees and cut down their branches. I would also help to carry them home; we had to walk about twenty miles.

The above narratives recalling Deik Bok's childhood and his years of early education touched me. Despite the hardships caused by the Cultural Revolution, Deik Bok's unique bodily experiences, personal feelings, emotions, and frame of self and identity were deeply present in his narratives. The image of a loving father and son taking a long walk home carrying firewood was vivid and a significant way to weave the profile of the young Deik Bok and his dream of his future and happiness.

Migratory Experiences from Adolescence to Adulthood (1973–94)

Another crucial point in Deik Bok's life history relates to his first migratory experience: the basic training he received before he assumed the position of *guojia ganbu*. Deik Bok's early childhood education paved the way for him to go on and attain the level of education necessary to become an ethnic minority cadre serving in rural areas. In 1972 Deik Bok graduated from Shidong Junior High School, and the following year he began teaching in a village elementary school. By then, he had already begun to get involved in local affairs. As well as being a teacher, Deik Bok was a *jifen yuan* (points keeper) for the *shengchandui* (local production team). In 1976, during the seven years that he worked at the village elementary school, he also took the National Higher Education Entrance Examination but failed. It was not until 1980 that he passed the exam and became a *difang ganbu* (rural cadre). This course of events was significant in Deik Bok's life history. First and foremost, as Deik Bok was officially admitted into the Party school, he later had the opportunity to be promoted to *guojia ganbu*. Second, Deik Bok's two years at the Party school, located on the site of the old Lotus Academy (*Lianhua shuyuan*) in Taijiang, took him to Taijiang County Seat for the first time and gave him his first experience of modern city life. As Deik Bok recalled, "I really yearned to go to Taijiang County Seat because then I could go to school and work."

At the Party school, Deik Bok was trained in agricultural technology and botany.

After his training ended in March 1982, he went to Wujiazhuang and Zhenyuan, both in Guizhou Province, to receive military training. In 1983 he was sent to the Pingzhao People's Commune and took charge of a group of civilians who were trained to undertake various tasks despite not having officially joined the army. In 1984 Deik Bok was transferred to work at the Shidong People's Commune from April to May. That year, he also took the entrance examination for the college for adult learning and got married. In August he joined the Guizhou Radio and Television University in Majiang County to major in Party and governmental affairs. After two years at the Party school, Deik Bok moved to Taijiang County Seat. In 1986 he started working in the Taijiang County Party Committee Office (*Taijiang xianwei bangongshi*) and his eldest son was born. Since he was fond of writing, in 1987 he got involved with publishing the journal *Taijiang Literature and Arts* (*Taijiang wenyi*), which he continued until his retirement. In 1991 Deik Bok transferred to the Publicity Department (*xuanchuanbu*) of the Taijiang County Party Committee Office.

Description of a Changing Town

In narrating his life story, Deik Bok also described how the town had changed over the years. In 1989 Taijiang's first karaoke parlor and ballroom opened. In 1992 Shidong Township became Shidong Town. Recalling his life in Taijiang County Seat since 1986, Deik Bok described the living conditions back then and the leisure activities people engaged in:

> DB: The house I lived in at that time was a wooden house passed down from a previous county Party committee member. It was located on the new street, on the mid-slope of the hill fortress. Life was more difficult back then.
> ML:[9] Yes, *deik*, I can imagine and fully understand. By the way, do you still remember what you did in your leisure time in those days?
> DB: Fishing . . . no, no, it's bow fishing. Going uphill to find bee pupae, then frying them to eat. . . . There was only one karaoke parlor and ballroom at the time. We went dancing instead. There were not so many [karaoke parlors and ballrooms] then.

By 2011, the year this interview took place, the first karaoke parlor and ballroom had already been demolished. During the interview, Deik Bok offered his own thoughts and feelings on the differences between life in Taijiang County Seat and in the village in the 1990s:

> When you live in a village, you need very little to support a basic life. There is no way to buy expensive clothes, or especially to buy a house. This kind of problem is very troublesome. In 1992

9) ML is the author, Mei-Ling.

Figs. 1–4 Daily Life in Taijiang County Seat, Southeastern Guizhou
Sources: Photos by author (2011; 2014)

and 1993, the policy of housing reform was implemented. I bought a house from my wife's eldest brother. The house was more than 80 square feet and cost 4,000 yuan. At that time, I didn't have enough money. I couldn't manage it. I tried to borrow money from different people but failed. Later I took a loan from an affinal relative (*khait*).

In interviews and conversations that I had with Deik Bok in Taijiang in 2011, his personal experiences reflected the changes that had occurred in the county seat from the 1980s to the 2010s in terms of space and lifestyle (Figs. 1–4). Deik Bok's personal account of Taijiang in the 1980s shows how his relationship with space and the state had changed, and how his life had progressed in terms of finances, scientific knowledge, and military training: "At the time, this whole place was farmland, like that old street where the Education Bureau now stands. There are houses built in these places now."

He also recounted that since the 1980s, members of the public had been able to take out bank loans. Deik Bok's different experiences of life in the city and life in the village in the 1990s were profoundly shaped by the blend of socialism and capitalism, market reforms, and the state's urban housing policy. Eager to make use of the new opportunities, Deik Bok, who as a forty-something ethnic minority cadre had already secured a stable job as a county-level government official, moved to the city to seek a new job because he needed to pay off the loan on his house in Taijiang County Seat.

The *Dagong* Migration

Deik Bok referred to working in the city as *dagong* (wage earning on a temporary basis). It was an important experience in his life. In 1994 he left Guizhou Province for the first time, to work in Shenzhen.[10] He had been pressured by his relatives to seek work in Shenzhen. In contrast to Deik Bok's rural home village and Taijiang County Seat from the 1990s to the 2000s—which were smaller yet densely populated ethnic minority areas where the native tongue of the Hmub dialect was widely spoken—Shenzhen was one of the fastest-growing urban centers in the world. While Deik Bok worked in Shenzhen for only a short period of two months, working in the city gave him very different experiences from his life in Guizhou. Because of his interest and ability in writing, he first went to the *Shenzhen Daily* (*Shenzhen ribao*) to apply for an editor position, but he was not hired. Deik Bok expressed regret about this during our conversation:

> DB: It was too late for me to try that. If I had gone there ten years earlier, I could definitely have got a job as an editor or journalist in Shenzhen.
> ML: Such a pity, *deik*. The world is changing so fast.

After this, he stayed on in Shenzhen and worked on a construction site. He recalled that his fellow workers were from Hubei, Beijing, and Sichuan. However, his experience as a construction worker in Shenzhen was not very comfortable, due to a sense of estrangement at work and a sense of bodily restraint in the city:

> ML: How did you feel when you were working there, *deik*?
> DB: When I was working there, I was constantly being supervised and given orders. There was great pressure in my heart. The atmosphere in the city was very depressed. It was also very hot.
> ML: You love writing, *deik*. I still remember that you sent me your work, a manuscript of a short novel, *The Old Hong Kong*, before I left Taijiang in 1997. You wrote a story of a Hmub elder who was longing for Hong Kong. . . . I am wondering if this story is related to your experience in Shenzhen?
> DB: I didn't write at the time. It was too hot at night. I had to get up a few times to cool down before I could sleep. There were an unusually excessive number of mosquitoes. It's so scary to get up in the morning and see all the mosquitoes around you.

Return to Taijiang (1994–2013)

After his brief stint in Shenzhen from March to April 1994, Deik Bok returned to Taijiang in May. There he worked in the Publicity Department until 1996, mostly handling paperwork. Sometimes, because of his idealist attitude, he had friction with his superiors. Although his stay in Shenzhen was quite short, the experience seemed to frustrate Deik

10) Shenzhen is a major sub-provincial city on the east bank of the Pearl River estuary, on the central coast of southern Guangdong Province.

Bok deeply. Before taking up his position in the Federation of Literary and Art Circles of Taijiang County (where he worked from 1996 to 2012), he did not seek work outside Taijiang again. For him, working in the county seat was more comfortable. "I feel happier in a small city," he said.

As mentioned earlier, I first met Deik Bok late in the summer of 1997, when I came to Taijiang to find a field site for my doctoral research. Deik Bok recalled that this was the time he and his wife had begun to invest in restaurants (1997–98), giving them names that reflected his education and love of literature.[11)]

As a *guojia ganbu*, Deik Bok closely followed the news of economic reforms and housing policies promoted by the state. In 2004 a new county government policy began encouraging rural villagers to move to the city:

> The county government promoted a policy back then. In order to increase the urban population, the county government encouraged people to spend money buying a house in the county seat. They would give you a new house of 80 square feet. After I worked in the county government, I was retired from the production team and had also sold all the farmland in my hometown. I could only work in the local government while doing a bit of restaurant business.

From the ethnography and narratives recounted, we can see how this ethnic minority cadre in Guizhou skillfully adapted to state policies and profited through careful calculations based on economic rationality. For example, Deik Bok was able to launch successful restaurant ventures by securing financing through various channels:

> When you have no money, that's the only way. I returned to my village and asked all my relatives [*ghat ghat khait khait*, consanguine and affine] to lend me a few thousand yuan. Then we could borrow money from the bank. So I took a loan of 70,000 yuan. . . . When business was good, we could earn 10,000 to 20,000 yuan a month. . . . In 2004 I secretly took a loan with my house as collateral. I paid more than 600 yuan a month from my salary. It was a 15-year loan. Now there is 30,000 yuan left of the loan.

Apart from the restaurant business, Deik Bok also took over a quarry and a sheep farm, but these two ventures did not last long. When I heard that he had tried again and again to invest in various kinds of businesses for survival, I started to appreciate new sides of my old friend. As I had known him over the years, he was a romantic, intellectual person

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11) The names of his restaurants included North Sea People's Restaurant (*Beihai renmin canguan* 北海人民餐館), Forestry Restaurant (*Linye canting* 林業餐廳), and King Xiang Yu Restaurant (*Xiangdawang canguan* 項大王餐館). Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 BC) is a well-known historical tragic hero from the late Qin period of Chinese history. He led an uprising and built the regime of Western Chu. He died by suicide when he was defeated by Liu Bang (256–195 BC), the founder of the Han Dynasty.

(this was the impression I had since I first met him in 1997). During our early encounters we bonded over classical Chinese literature and poetry; we shared our experience of writing essays, short novels, and free verse in Chinese. When I began interviewing Deik Bok for this project, I discovered an entirely new side of him I had never imagined before.

In the above narratives, the profile of Deik Bok from adulthood to middle age highlights the importance of conventional kinship relations and kin-based networks even as capitalism and socialism became entangled in the new age of the twenty-first century (the influence of kinship relations on a Hmub individual's adaptation to the changing world will be explored in the later Discussion section).

Retirement (2014–)

I met Deik Bok again during a field trip to Taijiang in the summer of 2014. By this time, he had already retired from his post as a *guojia ganbu*. We had a conversation over a cup of tea. He had aged considerably from the time we had met last, in the summer of 2011, yet the atmosphere of our conversation was the same as it had always been over the years: such a long and warm friendship always made me feel at home when I visited Taijiang. Still, this time I was concerned about how Deik Bok was doing after retirement. "Why did you retire now, *deik*?" I asked. "Was it because you reached retirement age?"

He smiled bitterly and replied, "I retired for the sake of a camera."

> ML: No kidding, *deik*. I cannot believe it.
> DB: I now regret it. Originally, I could have bought the camera with my retirement money. But I was not able to buy it. The money was soon divided among family members, and I had nothing left. Recently the government has raised the wage for a *guojia ganbu* from 500 to 2,000 yuan.

In my field notes I wrote down the Chinese phrase "再見" (*zaijian*), which carried two layers of meaning. The first meaning was "See you again." From 1997, when I started my doctoral research, through to my later career as a professor, my continued research on Hmub culture had brought me back to Taijiang every two or three years. Each time I went to Taijiang, I would be sure to visit Deik Bok. The second meaning was "Goodbye." When I returned to Taijiang in 2014, Taijiang County Seat and its relationship with the villages on the surrounding hills had undergone drastic changes. The various developments and changes experienced by the county seat and villages had become ever more apparent. Furthermore, my old friend Deik Bok had retired from being a *guojia ganbu*. For me, these changes signaled a temporary ending of my anthropological journey in Taijiang. It was the end of one chapter but also the arrival of a new generation and a new era. I said "Goodbye" and "See you again" to the Taijiang County Seat of old, and to my old friend Deik Bok.

Discussion

Deik Bok's narrations of his migratory experiences tell an important story about minorities through China's socialist and reform periods. First, some narratives engage specific bodily experiences, emotions, and the framing of self and identity. It is notable that Deik Bok's memories and narratives of his educational experiences were always marked by positive feelings about progress and mobility. For example, the narratives of his time studying at Shidong Junior High School were highly charged with feelings of optimism and progress: "The way to school was long, but I felt happy," "I had a sense of happiness," and the vivid recollections about his journey home with his father ("Sometimes, when I went home with my father, on the way the two of us would go and chop pine trees for their oil. My father climbed the tall pine trees and cut down their branches. I would also help to carry them home"). These feelings of optimism and progress were still present when Deik Bok entered the Party school to train to become a rural official. As he recalled, "I longed to go to Taijiang County Seat, because I could study there."

In recalling his experiences from adolescence to early adulthood, Deik Bok consistently expressed feelings of happiness about his educational progress at the college for adult learning and the Party school despite suffering setbacks during the Cultural Revolution due to his family background. However, these positive feelings did not extend to his experiences at work. In the late 1990s, as Deik Bok reached middle age, he went to Shenzhen, an urban center outside of Guizhou, to seek work. Describing his position as a temporary worker and the working conditions he experienced in Shenzhen, he expressed a sense of exhaustion toward work: "The atmosphere in the city was very depressed. It was also very hot. . . . When I was working there, I was constantly being supervised and given orders. There was great pressure in my heart." This kind of job burnout continued to affect Deik Bok's employment choices later in life, and he felt he was more accustomed to life in smaller cities.

Bodily experiences provide a unique lens to understand the meanings of labor mobility between different places, such as the recollection about the humid, hot weather and the mosquitoes when Deik Bok lived in Shenzhen as a temporary migrant worker:

> It was too hot at night. I had to get up a few times to cool down before I could sleep. There were an unusually excessive number of mosquitoes. It's so scary to get up in the morning and see all the mosquitoes around you.

This narrative goes against the common assumption that moving away from the remote countryside means moving away from bugs, and it offers a fine-grained corporeal account of what it actually feels like to move between places. Looking back, it was a unique

personal experience for Deik Bok to travel to Shenzhen and work there in 1994. To him, Shenzhen was not just an urban center.

Dagong *vs.* Gongzuo

Deik Bok's experiences and narratives of work are another point for discussion. The distinction between *dagong* (打工), or wage earning on a temporary basis, and *gongzuo* (工作), or wage earning on a permanent basis, was of primary importance to him. His understanding of the differences between *dagong* and *gongzuo* also reflect the ways in which social and economic capital are intertwined with each other:

> *Dagong* is all about labor or skill and pays very little. A stable job is a real job. It's like, if I had got the job of an editor at *Shenzhen Daily*, my household registration could have been transferred from my village to the city. If you have a *gongzuo*, it is stable; and if you are just hired on a temporary basis, it is *dagong*.

The different conceptualizations of *dagong* and *gongzuo* motivated Deik Bok to find a "proper job." For him, a stable position in a private company was not *gongzuo* but *dagong*, whereas work that granted a work permit was considered *gongzuo*: a real job. Deik Bok applied the same views with respect to his offspring. He considered his second son, who ran a real estate business in Shenzhen, as not having a real job but only doing *dagong*. In contrast, he considered his eldest son, a police officer in Taijiang, as having a real job. Deik Bok's conceptualizations of *dagong* and *gongzuo* point to the influence of state policy on the views of ethnic minority cadres. His experiences of work embody how local social networks intersect with modern ways of life. In other words, the transformation that Deik Bok encountered is embedded in the intersection of the state and local society.

Many Sides of Deik Bok

Over time, I came to see many different sides to Deik Bok. Initially, he was primarily a friend, a guide, and a consultant in my research on Hmub culture in Taijiang—someone who also loved writing and publishing literary journals. He was also a newspaper columnist as well as an ethnic minority cadre who occasionally had friction with his managers. As I discovered, Deik Bok was also a businessman adept at making money. However, despite our enduring friendship and my many field trips to Taijiang over the years, somehow I had remained totally unaware of this side of Deik Bok. In our past exchanges, our conversations typically centered around Hmub village culture. My main impression of him was as a member of the local educated elite, someone who worked in Taijiang and was passionate about literature. It was not until I interviewed him in 2011 and 2014 and listened to his life history that I realized I was just "an innocent anthropologist" and had

entirely missed another side of his life.

From Deik Bok's life history narratives, we can see how this *guojia ganbu* gradually adapted to the developing market economy after the launch of China's reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*). Familiarizing oneself with the survival skills to cope with modern life has a great bearing on one's experiences of transformation. During my stay in Taijiang in the late summer of 2014, I finally wrote down a tentative topic in my field notes: "Being a *guojia ganbu* after China's economic reforms." To me, Deik Bok's life history and narratives are very fitting material for this topic. In the eyes of this Chinese *guojia ganbu*, *gongzuo* given by the state offered a relatively stable job with a work permit, granting retirement and a pension. At the same time, other *guojia ganbu*s among Deik Bok's contemporaries actively adopted different approaches to adapt to the market economy, namely, by engaging in economic activities and making money. This is supported by the fact that Deik Bok, then a *guojia ganbu*, also invested in business ventures such as a sheep farm and various restaurants, demonstrating how ethnic minority cadres such as he carefully calculated gains and losses based on economic rationality. Viewed in this way, we can understand why Deik Bok said he regretted his decision to retire early "for the sake of a camera" (even if this explanation was just a joke with an old friend) and understand the importance of economic rationality in his values and decision making. However, looking back we can see that he experienced a complicated lifetime of dramatic social change from a socialist society to a socialist market economy; the camera is also an indexical metaphor for me to illustrate Deik Bok's lifelong idealist personality and romantic attitude.

Importance of Social Networks

For Deik Bok, gaining the economic capital to run a business in Taijiang required not only familiarity with the rules of the market reforms, but also his pre-existing social network ("I returned to my village and asked all my relatives [*ghat ghat khait khait*] to lend me a few thousand yuan. Then we could borrow money from the bank"). This network was particularly evident in his ability to secure financing. Deik Bok acquired his initial capital to do business by selling farmland and borrowing money from consanguine (*ghat*) and affine (*khait*) relatives in his rural hometown.

Thus, in the story of Deik Bok's integration with the market reforms in southeastern Guizhou, we see that Hmub kinship networks played an important role in shaping the labor migratory experiences of this Hmub individual and, in the process, his encounters with China's transformations over the socialist and reform periods. Before we move to the last point of our discussion, I would like to provide some details about how the Hmub is a kin-based society, and how *ghat* (kin, or consanguine) and *khait* (affine) are

the most important pairs of kinship. Following is an illustration of the relationship between *ghat* and *khait* through gift exchange in ritual settings among the uphill Hmub villages.

From late 1998 to early 2000, when I was conducting fieldwork in Village Fangf Bil, *khait* were usually the main gift-givers on various occasions, such as weddings, funerals, building a new house, and so on. The *ghat* usually came to these occasions with a bowl of rice wine, some meat, or a small number of fish caught in a paddy field. Hmub people consider "entertaining guests" (*nil khait*) to be the main responsibility of *ghat*, not to "present gifts" (*ghet ghongf ghit*). There are two sentences in Hmub language that express this contrast most clearly:

"*Khait ghot gongf ghit dak*." (The *khait* carry the gifts and come.)
"*Ghat xud jet denk nil khait*." (The *ghat* take the wine and go drink with the guests.)

The verbs in these sentences cannot be confused: the *khait* "carry gifts and come," and the *ghat* "take wine and go drink with the guests." The quantity of a gift may be regarded as a criterion of distinction between the *khait* and the *ghat*, but an even better criterion is that *ghat* who go to drink with the guests do not bring rice gifts with them. Both the *khait* and the *ghat* can bring meat and wine as gifts, so rice is what distinguishes the two groups in the eyes of the host family. It is noteworthy that the *ghat* and the *khait* share and eat the cooked glutinous rice brought by the *khait*, as well as the white rice, vegetables, pork porridge, and glutinous rice cooked by the host family for the ceremony (Chien 2005, 50–51).

What is special about the experiences of a minority cadre in southeastern Guizhou? How unique or common are Deik Bok's narrations and experiences? Based on my long-term fieldwork among Hmub societies in southeastern Guizhou, my ethnography and interpretation tell me that the world of kin-based relations is an important legacy not just for Deik Bok but for all other Taijiangers. It is through the web of these relations that the ethnic minority cadre represented himself and shaped his local and social identity.

Conclusion

Mass labor migration from rural to urban areas is one of the most visible and significant aspects of "the rise of China." Examining personal experiences can help us to describe and understand such macro phenomena. For example, from eight persons' life histories and personal voices, Kleinman (2006), a Harvard anthropologist and psychiatrist, has described how people live a moral life amidst uncertainty and danger, and interpreted

what really matters in their personal lives. While recounting Deik Bok's life history and oral narratives, I have discussed one individual's experience of uncertainty and morality through China's socialist and reform periods. Specifically, I listened closely to how the rise of labor mobility led to a shift in his economic decisions and subjectivity. This ethnography builds on the long-term friendship between us and on the ethnographic studies I have conducted in Hmub villages in the highlands of southeastern Guizhou since 1997. Particularly relevant data was gathered during two field trips in 2011 and 2014. Life history narratives not only help us to reconstruct and interpret the lives of real people through empirical methodology but also relate to concepts of performance, existence, and linguistic practice. Deik Bok represents a lively and vivid social actor of a particular time and place participating in China's labor migration and social transformation. As such, his story provides a nuanced understanding of China's transformation from the perspective of a person in a minority area.

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Diverse Experiences of Agrarian Change in Ethnic Minority Communities of Vietnam's Northeast Uplands

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Despite a growing literature, market-oriented agrarian change in Southeast Asia continues to beg questions on the diversity of local experiences and trajectories of development. In this article, we examine the challenges faced by ethnic minorities in Vietnam's northeast uplands during the process of agricultural transformation since the 1986 economic reforms. Drawing upon field research on a Tay commune in Lang Son Province and a Dao commune in Quang Ninh Province in 2016 and 2018, the article investigates their specific experiences with agrarian transformation. We suggest that local people have adapted their production systems according to the demands of the market but have not been able to compete successfully as market actors. Their main constraints are limited access to natural resources, lack of control over the market, and the ineffectiveness of state agricultural extension projects. Based on the analysis, the article provides suggestions for supporting upland farmers in overcoming their challenges.

Keywords: agrarian change, agricultural transformation, ethnic minorities, uplands, Vietnam

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, agriculture in Southeast Asia has been undergoing significant changes. The expansion of a capitalist economy caused by the Green Revolution and new socioeconomic policies implemented by governments since the 1960s have stimulated market-oriented agriculture in the region (Li 1999; De Koninck *et al.* 2011; Chai 2017). This has presented new opportunities for rural households to participate in production for markets. The main aspects of the transition include shifts in the mode of production and farming methods, the emergence of agribusiness and large-scale com-

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mercial farming, and changes in land-use and landholding practices (Grandstaff *et al.* 2008; Chai 2017; Rambo 2017). Major changes to lives and living conditions have ensued, including rising incomes for many rural dwellers, more diverse livelihoods, greater connectivity, higher mobility, increased off-farm employment, and the growth of a rural middle class (Rigg and Vandergeest 2012; Walker 2012; Keyes 2014).

Rural Vietnam has been undergoing similar transformations since the 1980s and 1990s, when the state issued a series of agrarian reforms in response to socioeconomic crises under the planned and collectivist economy (Fforde 1993, 303; Kerkvliet 1993, 20). With Resolution 10, titled "Renovation in Agricultural Management"—issued by the politburo in 1988—land, draft animals, and other means of production were redistributed to farming households (Kerkvliet 1993, 20–21). A further step in agricultural decollectivization was taken in 1993 when the new Land Law allowed households and individuals to secure land-use rights for over twenty years. Along with local initiatives taken by rural people themselves, these new policies led to more productive land use, private investment in agriculture, and an agricultural shift from self-sufficiency to commodity production (Luong Hy Van 2003; Taylor 2007).

However, agrarian transformation in the uplands has not proceeded at the same pace and in the same direction as in lowland areas. As in other upland regions of Southeast Asia with predominantly ethnic minority populations, poverty, illiteracy, poor nutrition, and poor access to health and other services persist, due to inadequate access to electricity, clean water, roads, schools, health infrastructure, and marketing opportunities (McCaskill and Kampe 1997). Growing commoditization and integration into regional and global markets have led to increased dispossession and marginalization of smaller landowners and agricultural workers (Li 1999; 2002; Baulch *et al.* 2002; Taylor 2008; Sikor *et al.* 2011; Dang Hai-Anh 2012). Marketization has also had negative impacts on upland environment and society, leading to environmental degradation, social dislocation, cultural disequilibrium, and social conflicts (Jamieson *et al.* 1998; Friederichsen and Neef 2010). Not all upland experiences are the same, however, as upland localities and groups record strikingly different development outcomes and problems (World Bank 2019).

This article demonstrates the variation and complexity of agrarian change in Southeast Asia by showing the varying ways in which local people in our study sites have transformed their agricultural practices to engage with post-reform marketization in Vietnam. It reflects on the limitations of market-led development by examining the positive and negative outcomes of agrarian transformation in the two localities. Using a comparative framework, the research seeks to portray similarities and differences between the Tay and Dao ethnic groups' experiences, which we track down to local historical, geographical, and social differences.

The article proceeds as follows. After a brief discussion of the history of upland transformations in Vietnam, we review the literature on agrarian differentiation and upland poverty. We then turn to our case studies of how local people have transformed their agricultural production and the outcomes they have achieved. The article concludes with a discussion of how the commonalities and differences between the two localities contribute to our understanding of agrarian change and the impact of place-sensitive policies on agricultural extension for upland farmers in Vietnam.

Background and History of Upland Transformations

Prior to the collectivization period (1960s–80s), ethnic minorities in Vietnam such as the Tay, Tai, and Muong resided along valleys where they cultivated wet rice, kept forest gardens and small areas of swidden (sometimes called "slash and burn") cultivation, and planted cassava and maize to feed livestock. Social differentiation was then based on landownership. Families that had settled in the region early owned the largest and most fertile fields. Meanwhile, people living in the high mountains, such as the Dao, Hmong, and Ha Nhi, practiced swidden cultivation and consumed forest produce for their daily food. Upland rice, maize, and cassava were their main crops. The fallow periods for swidden fields in the earlier days were extended because the population was scattered. The land belonged to the communities, and all people could access it (Castella and Dang Dinh Quang 2002). These traditional production systems were seriously impacted by the agricultural policies of the state after Vietnam ended its nine-year war of resistance against the French in 1954, which introduced land reforms, then collectivization.

In 1960 the first agricultural cooperatives were established in the valley areas occupied by Tay, Tai, Nung, and Muong groups. In 1961 a national program named *định canh định cư* (sedentarization) moved the people living in the mountains down to the valleys to participate in cooperatives. The Green Revolution introduced some advantages—such as rice intensification, new seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation systems—into the cooperatives. However, the irrational management mechanisms of the centrally planned, government-subsidized economy led to a decrease in wet rice productivity. Meanwhile, the government issued a law concerning forestland in the 1970s, which banned upland people from clearing the forests for cultivation; this led to a food crisis in the Vietnam uplands (Castella and Dang Dinh Quang 2002, 55).

Case studies on land-use changes in the northern uplands indicate that decollectivization led to an initial boom in agricultural production in the early 1990s, when local farmers expanded their cultivated land in the hills and increased the agricultural land area

(Sikor and Đào Minh Trường 2001, 46). Besides two wet rice crops, farmers were encouraged to grow potatoes, cabbage, and corn as winter crops, alongside fruit trees (Castella and Dang Dinh Quang 2002, 86). The economic reforms also abolished the ban on trade among localities. Thus, lowland traders came to the mountainous areas to sell consumer goods and buy agricultural products. Through this market formation, upland farmers purchased increasing amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides for expanding their crops. People gained access to new seeds of rice and corn—mostly Chinese hybrid varieties that demanded large amounts of purchased inputs (Sikor and Đào Minh Trường 2001, 40; Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005, 413).

After the market reforms there was a common tendency toward agricultural production shifts in the upland and ethnic minority areas of Vietnam. This involved switching from cultivating paddy and upland rice to a diversified agricultural system that combined various crops and livestock (Castella and Dang Dinh Quang 2002, 75). Upland people engaged in a mixed economy of subsistence and cash crop production. The commodity market had become a key source of income (Henin 2002; Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005, 413; Phuc To *et al.* 2016). As a result, household income increased and the poverty rate among ethnic minorities of Vietnam declined from 69 percent before 1998 to 35.5 percent in 2020 (Lâm Nguyên 2020). Meanwhile, various rural development programs were introduced to increase connectivity, improve irrigation, and bring new techniques, skills, and occupations to farmers in the uplands. Ethnic people became more involved in the web of national and transnational markets (Turner 2013).

Explanations for Agrarian Differentiation

Despite the improvement and greater opportunities, agrarian transformation in the uplands has not been without problems. Although the overall poverty rate in Vietnam is low and continues to decline, poverty remains concentrated in minority-dominated and upland regions. The percentage of poor households among ethnic minorities is three times higher than the national poverty rate of 10.2 percent (Lâm Nguyên 2020). The 53 ethnic minorities account for 14.6 percent of the country's population, and yet the poor among them account for more than 52 percent of the total number of poor households (Lê Phương 2019). A common view holds that as the cash income of ethnic people has increased, these people have gained access to better services such as education and health care. In fact, the socioeconomic rifts have increased between the minorities and majority, and among minorities themselves (UNDP *et al.* 2018, 47). Since the reforms, upland areas have been home to growing internal inequalities based on differences in

access to production factors such as land, remittances, power, social capital, and information (Henin 2002; Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005).

Researchers have attributed the poor developmental outcome of Vietnam's upland regions to ecological obstacles such as poor soil conditions, water shortages, and difficult terrain combined with severe weather conditions that cause floods and landslides (Pham Thi Thanh Nga *et al.* 2020). These in turn have compounded the problems of introducing critical development infrastructure such as all-weather roads, school buildings, electricity, water, and sanitation systems. Cultural, customary, social, and environmental considerations influence people's capacity and willingness to accept and adapt to the priorities, lifestyles, methods, and techniques associated with market-based livelihoods (World Bank 2019). Also, state socioeconomic development policies for the upland region sometimes have been inappropriately or ineffectively applied (Lê Phương 2019).

A key issue related to uplands development is the environmental cost associated with marketization. The policies of promoting agricultural expansion, resettling lowland farming communities into upland regions, and intensifying agricultural practices have led to serious environmental problems such as soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, laterization in mountainous areas, and chemical pollution of soils and streams (Henin 2002). While traditional swidden cultivation by upland people used to be friendly to the environment, under population pressure and market demands, many ethnic groups now have no choice but to continue practicing extensive pioneer swiddening methods of farming that cause far more damage to forests (DiGregorio *et al.* 2003, 193; Rambo and Jamieson 2003, 166). In this article, we will pay special attention to the environmental impacts of market-driven uplands development when examining the outcomes of agrarian transformation in the two study sites.

According to existing literature on agrarian change in Vietnam,[1] the distinct geographical, social, and cultural characteristics of upland localities shape the process of agrarian transformation. Thomas Sikor's (2001) case study of three Black Tai villages in Chieng Dong commune of northwestern Vietnam reveals that the trajectory of agrarian change in this community was characterized by a shift from water buffalo to cattle in response to market demands, which allowed local people to save and accumulate surplus in the form of livestock. Jennifer Sowerwine (2004) found that although the Dao people in Ba Vi National Park (Hanoi) responded proactively to spatial constraints and new market demands by cultivating medicinal plants to sell to urban centers, the Dao people in Ban Khoang (Lao Cai Province) expanded lucrative cardamom agroforestry systems beneath the canopy of old forests, which lie within the boundaries but beyond the regula-

1) There are some studies comparing land-use changes in upland Vietnam, such as Meyfroidt *et al.* (2013) and Castella and Dang Dinh Quang (2002).

tory gaze of the state. S. Turner (2010; 2012b) describes how Hmong people in Lao Cai applied their traditions of mobility, kin-based social structure, and economic adaptability to grow cardamom for sale while also becoming transnational textile and buffalo traders. Turner emphasizes that the livelihood strategies of Hmong in response to the market are within the context of their distinctive historical traditions. Yet, it is important to note that not every Hmong community is like the one in Sa Pa, which lies along the Vietnam–China border. In an interior upland area like Bac Kan Province, Hmong people are mostly involved in farming combined with wage work rather than participating in market trade (Lý Hành Sơn 2018, 87). Although Hmong and Dao people in the Vietnam–China borderland area actively grow bananas and pineapples to export to China (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2013), some ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands participated in the cassava boom when Vietnam recently became the second-largest cassava exporter in the world (Phuc To *et al.* 2016).

These works illustrate how upland communities in Vietnam are undergoing idiosyncratic agrarian transformations in response to official market-led development policies. The literature suggests that agricultural intensification, market integration, and population dynamics are the main shaping factors of agrarian change in the region. However, given the diversity of local experiences and unexpected trajectories of development, much remains to be learned about the specific experiences of the people coping with such momentous change. In this article we compare the experiences of two ethnic minority communities in Vietnam's northeast uplands who have been engaged in processes of marketization in order to highlight such local variation.

Case Studies: Agrarian Transformation in Two Upland Communes

For comparison purposes, we chose two communes in two northeast upland provinces of Vietnam to conduct field research—Quang Lang commune, Chi Lang District, Lang Son Province; and Tan Dan commune, Hoanh Bo District, Quang Ninh Province. We visited Quang Lang commune from April to September 2016 and Tan Dan commune from May to June 2018. In each commune we focused on the experiences of the numerically dominant ethnic group, who have recently been engaged in marketization. In Quang Lang commune we focused on the Tay, who live in valley areas and mainly cultivate paddy fields; and in Tan Dan commune we focused on the Dao, who reside in the uplands and whose livelihoods rely on forestland.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. For the quantitative component, among the 205 households in the two villages we studied in

Quang Lang commune, 140 Tay households were randomly invited to participate in the survey to ensure that two-thirds of the households in the village were represented in the sample. The survey questions were intended to determine the socioeconomic changes in the community after the 1986 reforms. In this paper, the survey results on land use, livelihood transformation, income, and living standards of households are presented in order to understand the agricultural transformation in this community. In Tan Dan commune, we used the survey results on related spheres of agricultural change of our colleagues at the Institute of Anthropology in 1993 and 2006 (Viện Dân tộc học 1993; Tran Van Ha and Le Minh Anh 2008) and recent statistics from the local government to examine the agricultural transformation. For the qualitative component, sixty semi-structured interviews were conducted in Quang Lang and 33 in Tan Dan commune. The interviews included open-ended questions on informants' personal information and their families' socioeconomic situation. Villagers were free to share their ideas and opinions on their livelihood, agricultural transformation, and the challenges they faced during the transformation.

Quang Lang Commune

Locale and People

Quang Lang is one of the 19 communes in Chi Lang District that surround the administrative center of Dong Mo town, in Lang Son Province.[2] The commune is 130 km from Hanoi and 40 km from the Vietnam–China border. Although Dong Mo town is small and developing slowly, the strengthening of market exchanges has led to the expansion of the trade and service industries in the town, creating more jobs for suburban residents. The owners and employees of small businesses in Dong Mo are looking to buy peri-urban land in communes such as Quang Lang to reside on. The construction of National Road No. 1A in 2000 had a major impact on the socioeconomic life of the people here. According to locals, the national highway's opening has led to the strengthening of socio-economic and external cultural exchanges, and in turn the agricultural transformation process has become far more pronounced.

In 2016 Quang Lang commune had 1,741 households and over 7,000 inhabitants. The majority of people belong to the Kinh and Nung ethnic groups, with Tay people comprising approximately 31 percent of the commune's population. Of the 13 villages

2) On November 21, 2019, Quang Lang commune was merged with Dong Mo town, Chi Lang District, Lang Son Province, according to Decision No. 818/NQUBTVQH14 of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly.

in the commune, Lang Trung, Khun Phang, and Lang Dang are the three Tay villages. Approximately 90 percent of households in these three villages comprise Tay people, while the other villages are more diverse. The Tay have resided close to one another in villages in the valley for a long time. Our 2016 research field sites were Khun Phang and Lang Dang villages. The total number of households in the two villages was 205.

Changes in Land Use and Natural Resources

Prior to taking part in the cooperative movement of the 1960s, almost all of the Tay families in Quang Lang had wet rice land for cultivation; each household had an average of two *mẫu*[3] of paddy land. The better-off households often owned up to ten *mẫu*. During collectivization, most of the natural capital—including forest and agricultural land—of the Tay people was under the management of the cooperative. After Doi Moi, the natural capital was allocated to back individual Tay households. This decollectivization, along with policies such as Land Contract No. 10 in 1988 and the exemption of agricultural and irrigation fees in 1995, made people feel happy, secure, and self-reliant. They felt that production on their own paddy land was more successful than collectivized production, where "everybody's business is nobody's business."

Although the management of natural capital improved after Doi Moi, the cultivated land area of the people in Quang Lang was reduced. This was due to population growth and urbanization. In the 1960s Lang Dang village had only 39 households, but it now has over 120. When National Road No. 1 was extended through Quang Lang commune in 2000, Khun Phang and Lang Dang villages lost 6 ha of cultivated land, belonging to about thirty households. In the coming years, the construction of the Hanoi–Lang Son highway will take away at least six more hectares of residential and agricultural lands from the two villages. At the time of our study, about 20 percent of the interviewed households in Quang Lang had no paddy land for cultivation, while the remainder had on average 1,032 m^2 (Khun Phang village) and 1,305 m^2 (Lang Dang village) per household. Additionally, a considerable amount of cultivated land had been lost or reduced by natural erosion, sale of land, and house construction. By 2016, there were about ten households in Lang Dang village that had lost a portion or all of their paddy fields due to erosion from the Thuong River. Therefore, some local Tay people lack natural capital for use in their livelihood transformation and development.

The 65 ha of the villages' forestland was better managed under the forestland allocation and reforestation programs of the Viet–Germany project in 1997 and 1999. At that time, the households that already had forestland continued to manage their land and

3) One *mẫu* equals 3,600 square meters.

received contracts for reforestation from the project. Other households were also encouraged to receive reforestation contracts. The main goal of the program was to attach the responsibility and interests of each household to their allocated land to protect and cultivate it. Owing to this, many forested areas that were previously clear-cut (to grow food crops in response to serious food shortages) are now covered by forests. The practice of clear-cutting has been abolished, and trees are harvested only when they are mature enough for wood or intercropped with fruit trees such as banana, litchi, and longan. At the time of contracting care of forestland, 80 percent of the households had forestland; but due to population growth, only 40 percent of the interviewed households now had this type of land. Moreover, the types of trees that were provided by the project are still immature and do not yet provide a steady income.

In addition to cropland and forestland, the Tay people in Khun Phang and Lang Dang also have some small areas of swidden land, totaling about 9 ha. By 2016, only 46 percent of households owned this type of land. Local land for gardening purposes is also limited; these plots are usually less than 360 m^2, and fewer than half of the households in the community have gardens.

Natural resources such as fish and shrimp, birds and herbs, which once played a very important role in the life of the community, are now becoming exhausted. Most people no longer rely on natural food sources as their main means of sustenance and instead buy food at local markets. Many local people say that resources from the forest are no longer reliable for the life of the whole community.

Agricultural Intensification

Interview results revealed that in the early years of Doi Moi, the Tay in Quang Lang focused on investing in fertilizer and new hybrid varieties of rice, maize, and potato to increase food yield in response to food shortages. Throughout the 1990s, the local populace grew these new hybrids and other ground crops to meet household needs and to sell at the local market. As a result, by the end of the 1990s the Tay people had eliminated the food shortages that had previously been endured for seven months of the year.

Besides rice and cash crops, 46 percent of households in Khun Phang and Lang Dang also plant fruit trees such as litchi, longan, and custard apple on their 9 ha swidden land; these were harvested and sold for an average annual income of VND20 million (about USD1,000) in 2016. Households grow vegetables in their gardens mostly for sustenance, but some also sell them in the local market, providing a daily income of approximately VND200,000 (about USD10).

In traditional agriculture, besides crop cultivation the Tay in Quang Lang also devel-

oped animal husbandry, raising a range of domestic animals (e.g., buffaloes, cows, goats, pigs, chickens, and ducks) and also aquatic species in lakes and ponds. However, after Doi Moi there have been changes in the method and purpose of husbandry among local Tay households. Raising buffaloes and cows (especially buffaloes) formerly played an important role in the economic life of the Tay people. Households that had limited capital and lacked labor for tending fields would instead raise several animals to provide power (mainly for ploughing). Some better-off households could raise several head of livestock in case they were needed for a big event such as building a new house, holding a wedding, or conducting a funeral.

With the promulgation of the policy of land and forest allocation to individual households in 1995, the area for raising livestock has been reduced. Moreover, the use of machines in agricultural production has made animal power nearly obsolete. Currently, there are only ten households in Khun Phang and Lang Dang who together raise about 110 buffaloes and 40 goats, mainly for sale and for ploughing small plots of paddy field that are unsuitable for machines. Pig rearing has become more difficult in recent years due to disease, but approximately 80 percent of households continue to raise pigs, totaling around 230 head. Almost all of the households keep around twenty chickens and ducks, which are used or sold when needed. Since the 2000s, animal husbandry has brought some additional income to local households, but it has not developed into industrial production because of the limited range area, lack of financial capital, inadequate techniques, and concern over diseases.

Like many other ethnic minorities in Vietnam, the Tay in Quang Lang started to diversify their household livelihoods with Doi Moi, with small trading, services, or hired labor. Khun Phang and Lang Dang villages' proximity to Dong Mo train station led to some villagers traveling by train to the Sino–Vietnamese border in the 1990s to transport illegal goods or to work as or manage porters and brokers. Each village had several households buying agricultural products within the village to sell at the big markets in the district. Some worked as hired laborers in Lang Son or neighboring provinces.

Market Integration

After 2000, as the national road was built, the Tay in Quang Lang learned how to grow cash crops for sale, but this did not come without struggle. Over the past decade or more, many Quang Lang people have tried to convert from growing rice as a subsistence crop to growing ground crops such as melons and potatoes to sell in the market. They grew large amounts of watermelon without researching the capacity of the regional market to consume this product and did not secure buyers for the product before planting. As a result, much of their produce ended up unsold and wasted.

Potatoes have also been unsuccessful as a cash crop. Although the Tay signed purchasing contracts with several companies for potatoes, they did not pay close attention to the terms and were unable to grasp the technical standards and specifications of potato planting. The potato crops did not meet the contract standards, and companies did not buy the potatoes. The people were forced to sell the potatoes at a price "as cheap as giving away" or use it for animal feed.

Tay people in Quang Lang, like many upland dwellers in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, actively participate in the market and are influenced by market factors (Li 1999; Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005). Before Doi Moi, people mainly used human capital to interact directly with natural capital such as forests, rivers, and paddy fields to generate products for everyday life. In the early stages of Doi Moi, people grew and harvested food for their own use, rarely trading at the market due to a shortage of financial capital. Today, they often sell their crop and husbandry products in the market and work as hired laborers.

Currently, about 60 percent of local households grow cash crops, predominantly chilies. With the average yield of 170 kg of rice and 300 kg of chilies combined per *sào*[4] of a paddy field, a household would earn 340 kg of paddy and VND5 million to 10 million (approximately USD250–500) annually from selling chilies per *sào*. This provides income for needs such as health care, educational expenses, everyday goods, and social interactions. Most households purchase food, necessary personal and household items, and production inputs such as seed varieties, fertilizers, and pesticides at local markets and from shops in the village and the local town. Those who no longer engage in agriculture must buy rice and vegetables from the market.

Increasing interaction with markets helps people improve their living standards but also subjects them to market forces. When the Tay in Quang Lang began producing commodities, they grew accustomed to and accepted the reality of price fluctuations. Lower prices for successful crops forced them to shift from potato to watermelon, then to green pumpkin and chili. Even chili, which is grown to sell to private traders for export to China, is priced differently year after year. At the start of the season the crop price is VND50,000 per kilogram, but it decreases to only VND10,000 per kilogram by the end of the season.

Meanwhile, due to market influence, the cost of productive inputs is also increasing. According to local people, the cost of paddy field cultivation, which includes ploughing, land processing, fertilizer, pesticide, crop varieties, and labor, has become almost equivalent to the price of the rice they produce. When growing cash crops, the cost of each

4) One *sào* equals 360 square meters.

crop variety is one of the most important considerations in selecting crops. For example, the cost of 1 kg of potato seedlings is VND9,000, while the price of the resulting produce is VND4,000 per kilogram (normally 12 kg of produce is grown from 1 kg of seedlings). The shift between crops among the Tay in Quang Lang is usually a rapid response to the market rather than a strategic response. When the price of a crop drops too low or when a crop becomes more susceptible to disease, the villagers shift to a new crop. Local agricultural promotion programs encourage people to produce crops, but they do not provide market information to help people effectively choose crops; so local people have to manage by themselves to the best of their ability.

Population Dynamics and Social Differentiation

Since 2000, with the construction of National Road No. 1, the number of people in Quang Lang who work in non-agricultural jobs has increased. According to our survey in 2016, the proportion of people who worked purely as farmers was only 60 percent, with 34 percent working in non-agricultural sectors such as trading, services, hired labor, and government.

Road construction not only helps local people access more locations to find jobs, it also enables economic activities in towns and communities nearby. After completion of the road, the Dong Banh industrial zone was built. Enterprises there, such as brick and construction material factories, provide jobs for laborers. Construction projects often have a high demand for building-related workers, so porters, mansion coolies, construction laborers, and plumbers are common professions for the Tay people in Quang Lang. Up to 40 percent of local households have someone who works as a laborer year-round. Both men and women work as laborers; however, the number of male laborers is much higher. Among those, approximately 22 percent are young people (18–30 years old) who work in factories (e.g., Samsung Corporation) in their local area and surrounding provinces such as Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Lang Son, and Hanoi. Middle-aged people, especially men, tend to work for enterprises and projects within the district. Farmers in the village sometimes take up short-term, seasonal jobs within the local region, such as mansion coolies and hired laborers in processing shops or agriculture. Our survey results reveal the diversity of income sources in local households (Table 1).

Before Doi Moi, natural capital (land) and human capital were two of the most important factors that determined success and income levels of household economies in the uplands of Vietnam (Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005, 408). Today, for the Tay people in Quang Lang, knowledge of techniques, market information, and social relations have become vital to economic success. In the production of cash crops, local people must learn about new high-value crops and how to care for them, search for crop varieties, and

Table 1 Income Sources of the Tay Households in Quang Lang in 2015 (%)

Income Sources	Percentage
Cultivation	37
Livestock	22
Trade, crafts, services	8
Work for hire	18
Salary	14
Others	1

Source: Household survey questionnaire result in 2016.

undertake the marketing of outputs. However, very few local farmers can meet this demand.

The Internet has become an important tool for engaging in trades and providing services. Knowing how to use the Internet for research allows people to assess which available local goods are in high demand in a wider market. Social relationships can be helpful for those applying for jobs or networking. Today social capital (and information obtained via social capital) as well as financial capital are decisive factors in differentiating groups within a community.

Almost thirty years after Doi Moi, the social capital and human capital of the local people have changed. We see more villagers investing in education and expanding their social relationships to help them achieve success in the changing economy. Survey results indicate that 19 percent of household members are students, 31 percent have completed secondary school, 30 percent have finished high school, and 12 percent have graduated from college and university. Education is necessary for young people to improve their knowledge, skills, and suitability for jobs, but social relations play a more important role in accumulating social capital in Vietnam today (Luong Hy Van 2003). So far, only a small number of Tay people in Quang Lang have utilized social relationships to build their businesses, while others who have not built or expanded their social ties are missing opportunities.

Our survey of the Tay villages in Quang Lang revealed that only 31 percent of households had savings in 2015. Among them, the saved amounts varied widely. Only 2 percent of the total households saved more than VND70 million (over USD3,000) per year, 27 percent saved between VND40 million (USD1,755) and 60 million (USD2,600) per year, and 2 percent saved about VND20 million (about USD1,000) per year. Survey results on savings are considered estimates because respondents might hesitate to reveal their real income. Statistics provided by local authorities in 2015 show that in the two villages the rate of rich households was 5 percent, better-off 12 percent, average 69

percent, and poor 14 percent. The households with greater incomes could be those that were able to rapidly adapt to the changing economic climate.

Tan Dan Commune

Locale and People

Located in southern Quang Ninh Province, 45 km from Ha Long city, Tan Dan commune is one among five upland communes in Hoanh Bo District. Tan Dan is a highland commune in Quang Ninh Province—the most socioeconomically dynamic province in the north of Vietnam. A transportation system connecting the commune with the rest of the province was established long ago. Changes in agricultural practices, cultural and social life, and urbanization have been apparent in this community since the economic reforms of the 1990s.

Tan Dan commune is the home of the Dao people. Hills and rocky mountains account for 93.75 percent of the natural area, while just over 6 percent of the commune is agricultural and flat land. Of the natural area, 90.56 percent is protected and production forest, while the rest is arid gravel and bare rock slopes that cannot be planted for cultivation. Therefore, the main agricultural production here is forestry based, combined with a small amount of wet rice area. In 2018 the commune had 588 households with 2,478 inhabitants, of whom 92 percent were Dao people and the remainder Tay, Nung, and Kinh. There are eight villages in Tan Dan commune: Dat Do, Khe Dong, Khe Cat, Khe Muc, Hang Tran, Tan Lap, Dong Mung, and Bang An.

Changes in Land Use and Natural Resources

Traditionally, the Dao lived high in the mountains. They relied on shifting cultivation and forest resources. In 1968, under the government sedentarization program, Dao people in Tan Dan were moved from the mountains to settle in the valleys, where they still reside today. Initially, households were brought into cooperatives and the reclaimed land along streams was used to cultivate rice fields. After a few years, seven villages of the commune on additional land area along the stream were converted for paddy cultivation. However, due to the lack of adequate investment in breeds, techniques, and fertilizers and the inefficient and low-yield collective economy, people still faced difficulties in all aspects of production (Trần Văn Hà 1996).

The economy of Tan Dan changed after the implementation of Doi Moi in 1986. In 1990 the practice of contracting fields began, and 95 ha of paddy fields (of which half were one crop and half were double crop) and 125 ha of upland rice fields were allocated to

households in the community. Today about 80 percent of households have water fields, with an area of 1,000 m^2 to 2,000 m^2 per household. What was once upland swidden land was cleared to create fields for crops or allowed to regenerate into forestland. This land was then allocated into areas of 1,000–1,500 m^2 per household.

In the 1990s, 6,430 ha (90.56 percent) of the total forestland area of the commune was protected and production forests allocated to households. By the time of our study in May 2018, only 18 percent of all forestland was allocated to households, and the remaining area was managed by the Provincial Forest Protection Department of Quang Ninh.

Before 1992, drought had rendered the 50 ha of land that was allocated for crops unsuitable for growing. Thus, families relied on the harvest of forest products to ensure their livelihood. In 1992 Program 327 was funded by the government to provide investment capital for sedentary ethnic minorities to develop infrastructure and production. The local government allocated 738 ha of land to 245 households (0.7–3 ha per household). A total of 245 households comprised 80 percent of the total households in the commune in 1992. During this time, people did not realize the benefits of forest contracting and were concerned that if they did not plant the forest, they would have their lands confiscated. Therefore, only 80 percent of the households contracted the forestland, while the remaining 20 percent did not dare to receive the contracted forestland. In 2007, as the Dao population was increasing and there was a shortage of productive land, Quang Ninh Province allowed Tan Dan commune to recover more than 360 ha of protected forest to use for production. In 2012 local authorities again allowed the forest in the Yen Lap reservoir area to be reassigned as productive land.

Now, each Dao household in Tan Dan has an average of 2.2 ha of productive forestland. However, some of the forestland is fragmented and too far from residential areas. Many households have had to sell their allocated forestland, so in fact landownership in Tan Dan is uneven. Forestland ownership has differentiated households into three groups: those in group one own 8–9 ha, those in group two own 3–4 ha, and those in group three own less than 1 ha. For successful forest production, each person requires 2 ha and each household needs about 10 ha of forestland. However, in the context of increasing population, the land resource requirements are narrowed and only households in group three (<1 ha) are considered to lack enough productive land. As of May 2018, according to the statistics of the People's Committee of Tan Dan Commune, there were 82 households lacking productive land (14 percent). This is a common problem in areas with ethnic minorities in Vietnam, where an estimated one in five ethnic minority households have no residential land and too little or no productive land (Nguyễn Cao Thịnh 2015).

Agricultural Intensification and Market Integration

Wet rice fields in Tan Dan were reallocated for long-term use in 1990, and households have since introduced new rice varieties such as purebred CR293, agriculture 8 (NN8), and Ta Linh red (China). New intensive measures of cultivation, fertilizer enhancement, and pesticide have helped to increase rice productivity from 1.7 tonnes/ha in 1993 to 4.2 tonnes/ha in 2018. Our interview results revealed that 80 percent of Dao households in the commune had enough food for their families with the current area of wet rice cultivation.

On dry and flat land, people grow crops such as corn, potatoes, peanuts, beans, vegetables, and fruit to serve the needs of their families and to sell in the market. The area of each crop varies each year, depending on market demand. In recent years people have planted more purple sweet potatoes, purple sugarcane, and guava than before.

On the forestland, which was the main source of livelihood for the Dao people, there have been experiments leading to the constant changing of crops. In 1993 the state allocated eucalyptus trees to the people, in addition to forestland. After the eucalyptus was harvested, the people purchased more eucalyptus seeds from the state. Due to the unsuitability of the land, the trees did not develop well and the income from the harvest was very low. Therefore, people stopped planting eucalyptus trees. From 1995 to 1998, local authorities also experimented with planting other crops such as cinnamon and bamboo, which also failed. From 2000 to 2006, local authorities mobilized people to plant Aquilaria (trees grown for eight to ten years that produce resin used to make incense) on production forestland. After five years, the Aquilaria plants had not grown much because the proper fertilization technique was not used.

In 2013–14, Tan Dan commune implemented a pilot project to grow four hectares of purple morinda plants. The project allocated seedlings to farmers who were paid for planting each tree. After five years, they could start harvesting tubers. Purple morinda must be planted in clean soil, which requires careful care and thorough weeding for the new plants to grow well. It requires a lot of regular care. Many households did not have the patience, and they quit planting morinda. In 2016 the commune authorities put yellow flower tea plants into trial cultivation but again were unsuccessful.

Acacia is the most popular and successful crop in Tan Dan. In 2002 some households experimented with acacia and discovered that it grew and sold well, so now acacia covers 85 percent of the commune's forestland. Acacia trees are referred to as poverty reduction trees by village leaders because acacia plantations have created many jobs and provided income for households. The cost of seeds for each hectare is about VND6 million (USD300). Plants are typically harvested after five to ten years, but poor households harvest young trees after three or four years. After five years of growth, each hectare

of acacia produces about 50 tonnes of wood, which has a current market price of VND30 million (USD1,500). From planting to harvesting, each hectare of acacia requires around a hundred days of work. Although acacia tree production does not provide a high income, locals have found it to be a suitable crop to grow in their soil and it has been easy to sell because traders are always willing to buy for export to China. With this land, the Dao people have few other options. There is a struggle to find new commodity trees that can replace acacia trees and keep the soil from degradation. The Dao community in Tan Dan also has very little agricultural land, which presents further challenges.

In addition to farming, the Dao in Tan Dan have relied on animal husbandry to provide extra income. Traditionally, upland farmers raised chickens and pigs to serve the needs of rituals and Tet holidays for the family. From 1994 to 2004, a number of loan projects for livestock development from local authorities and international organizations like the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization gave the Dao people assistance in raising buffaloes to provide power for agriculture and timber harvesting. As of 2018, the commune had two hundred buffaloes. Most households also raised one or two pigs and up to ten chickens to serve the family's needs. There were three households that had their own pig and chicken farms with large numbers of livestock. Large farms are not common because the Dao still rear animals according to traditional methods that are not very profitable, and there is always a risk of disease. Over the years, a number of other projects raised livestock such as porcupines, pheasants, and wild pigs, but all were unsuccessful due to low market prices.

Before the agrarian transformation, in addition to shifting cultivation the Dao often harvested products from the forest to serve their needs for food and daily life. Since the exchange of goods between Tan Dan and other places has expanded, the use of traditional Dao products has changed. From 1991 to 1993, almost all Dao households in Tan Dan had members participating in the logging of local forests for sale to the market. At that time, Tan Dan annually lost two hectares of primary forest, exclusive of plantation forest, to illegal exploitation. In addition, people collected orchids, snakes, and incense to sell to traders from cities like Hai Phong and Ho Chi Minh City to export to China.

Before the economic reforms, there were 16 households in Tan Dan picking medicinal plants for curing rheumatism, hepatitis, milk loss in lactating mothers, etc. By 1993 more than fifty households were collecting medicinal plants for sale in Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, and Hanoi. There are still more than ten households practicing this profession today. Since the 1990s, the Dao people have engaged with the mechanism of the market economy by linking traditional economic activities with market activities within and outside the local region. Career structures in the community have begun to shift, and social differentiation has become more exaggerated.

Population Dynamics and Social Differentiation

In 1993 Tan Dan's income structure was as follows: agriculture accounted for 47.5 percent, wood and forest products 46.23 percent, and other industries 6.27 percent (Viện Dân tộc học 1993). By 2006 income from agriculture and forestry had decreased to 70 percent, and industries and services made up the remaining 30 percent. In 2017, although the economic structure of Tan Dan was still predominantly agriculture and forestry at 57.9 percent (cultivation 18.6 percent, forestry 21.1 percent, animal husbandry 18.2 percent), there had been a steady increase in services and trade (42.1 percent). There were 145 households and 185 laborers who had stable incomes from service activities, trade, and non-agricultural occupations such as state officials, teachers, and soldiers. In the whole commune, there were thirty households with food, grocery, electronic entertainment, and service shops and eight households with trucks used for transport, material supply services, and agricultural production.

The survey results in the three periods revealed that in 1993, 30 percent of households were classified as poor (with an income of 5–15 kg of rice per month) (Trần Văn Hà 1996, 61), but by 2017 the average annual income in the commune had increased to VND22.5 million (about USD1,000) and 17.5 percent were classified as poor. The poverty threshold in 2015 was 3.9 percent. By 2017, the number of poor households in the commune had reached 7.8 percent; in addition, there were 56 households (9.7 percent) belonging to the near-poor group.[5] Obviously the average income trap in Tan Dan always created some instability among groups escaping poverty due to the impact of market prices of agricultural and forestry products and labor wage (Table 2).

Table 2 Dao Households in Tan Dan Commune, Categorized by Living Standard in Three Research Years (%)

Living Standards	1993	2006	2017
Rich/well-off	4.81	10.20	32.5
Average income	37.54	67	50
Poor, near poor, and in hunger	30.61	22.8	17.5

Sources: Survey result of Viện Dân tộc học (1993), Tran Van Ha and Le Minh Anh (2008), and statistics of People's Committee of Tan Dan Commune in 2017.

5) The criteria for determining poor households in 1993 were different from the criteria in 2017. Poor households in 1993 were evaluated based on the criterion that the household lacked food for three to six months per year. The poor household category in 2017 was a multidimensional measure with an average monthly income of VND700,000 (USD30). In addition to income estimated through the characteristics of household assets, it also takes into account access to basic social services such as health, education, housing, domestic water and sanitation, information, and physical products (Decision No. 59/2015/QD-TTg dated November 19, 2015 on the poverty standard of a multidimensional approach for the period 2016–20).

In 2018 the main commercial service activities were offered by Kinh people[6] living along Highway 279, which runs through Tan Dan commune. For the Dao people, the main sources of income were agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, labor in coal mines in Bang Anh village (managed by Vietnam Coal and Mineral Corporation), and other hired labor. The commune had two hundred young workers (18 to 30 years old), many of whom worked in Ha Long city, Hanoi, and Hai Phong and a few in China as laborers or traders. These young workers returned to the commune only on holidays. Middle-aged workers (30 years and up), often engaged in seasonal agricultural work (such as cutting grass and peeling acacia bark) and masonry and carpentry in workshops in neighboring communes, in addition to their regular agricultural and forestry production. This work provided a daily income of VND100,000–200,000 (USD5–10).

The better-off Dao households made their income from businesses and services and/or productive land that they inherited or accumulated from trading. The availability of capital and land allowed these households to invest in many valuable crops and animals such as ironwood, Aquilaria, and large-scale livestock (pigs and buffaloes) and engage in diversified economic activities. Average-income households in Tan Dan struggled to combine agricultural production on 3–4 ha of forestland with job-seeking and service development opportunities. Many poor and middle-income households depended on working as hired laborers and collecting additional forest products such as bamboo, herbal medicine, and honey to sell. Our 2018 interviews revealed that some households were poor due to circumstances of social isolation or illness, but many were young new households that lacked productive land and had no capital to invest in production and business. Therefore, their only source of income was pay from working for hire. Lack of land and inequality in forestland-use rights were among the main causes of poverty for the Dao people in Tan Dan commune.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our case studies of the Tay in Quang Lang and Dao in Tan Dan confirm that marketization has advanced well in Vietnam's uplands. Since 1986, local people have shifted from a semi-subsistence to a market-oriented agricultural economy, combined with small trade and hired services. There are similarities and differences in the process of agricultural transformation between the two communities, as evidenced by local people's varying experiences and challenges. When market production commenced, the biggest constraint

6) Kinh or Viet people form the majority in Vietnam.

was limited natural resources. For the Tay, natural conditions of the valley did not allow for expansion of paddy fields, and as the population increased the land tenure of households became more constricted. The Dao, meanwhile, could use only 18 percent of the forestland instead of freely practicing shifting cultivation as they had done before 1968 given the state's forest protection and management policies. As a result, more than thirty years after the reforms, the economic structure of the majority of Tay and Dao households in our two study sites still consisted of small-scale agricultural and forestry production, combined with animal husbandry, petty trading, and hired services. In Quang Lang commune, each household had on average only 1,100 m^2 of farmland and 2.03 ha of forestland for production. The output was also low, averaging 1,000 kg of rice, 600 kg of chilies, and several hundred kilograms of fruit per household per year. In Tan Dan, on average each household had 1,615 m^2 of farmland, 2,100 m^2 of cropland, and 2.2 ha of forestland. Each year income from agriculture, augmented by income from forestry, was just enough to meet the food needs of the family. In these communities, we see the limits on marketization imposed by the landscape and other natural capital factors.

To meet the demands of the market, uplanders in both communes have had to invest in new production systems and improve their production processes. Many of these new production projects have been unsuccessful due to a lack of knowledge and skills and the fact that the products do not sell well in the market. In Quang Lang, since 2000 local farmers have tried many crops, ranging from watermelons to potatoes and chilies. In Tan Dan, since 1993 people have been continuously searching for new suitable industrial crops and converting their land for such crops, including eucalyptus, Aquilaria, cinnamon, bamboo, and purple morinda. However, none of these crops have been successful.

Field surveys in the two communes show that when local people start producing agricultural products for sale in the market, many do not possess the required skills and knowledge (on inputs such as source materials, plants, and seedlings as well as product outputs). Many also lack the land required to turn around production and diversify crops, ensuring that there is always a source of income for the family and preventing the risk of crop failure and price depreciation. Most of the farmers' social networks are in the villages. The farmers thus have few opportunities for expanding their relationships with outsiders to gain new production knowledge or information about storing, transporting, and trading agricultural products.

Meanwhile, the local government program for technical assistance and agricultural knowledge is known to be inadequate and ineffective (Henin 2002, 18). According to local people, government officers do not communicate technical knowledge well, while seedlings are not planted in a systematic way as part of a long-term strategy. There is also a gap caused by the loss of government advice and support in extension services

such as fertilizer and pesticide use (Lee *et al.* 2010; Phuc To *et al.* 2016, 178). While the local government's extension projects in the two communes introduce new crops, they do not provide support in product marketing; thus, no cooperatives or agricultural entrepreneurs are ready to enter into contracts with farmers. Meanwhile, credit programs sponsored by the government are unfocused and unevenly implemented; they do not reach households that are most in need of loans (Hoàng Thị Bích Loan and Đinh Phương Hoa 2016). As a result, people stop producing the crop or livestock variety promoted by the program as soon as the program ends. Upland farmers feel they have been on their own during the transformation to a market economy and have had to take risks without any support.

In both communes, in the current farming system local people are forced to use seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides purchased at very high prices in order to increase crop productivity and protect crops from pests. Quang Lang residents spoke about the high price of potato seeds and the amount of pesticides they had to use when growing chilies. Similarly, Tan Dan residents had to invest in inputs for growing acacia, even though this plant is harmful to the soil. The consequences of this intensification process are high production costs, environmental pollution, and overexploited land. This makes some local farmers think about returning to the crops they used to plant or finding crops that do not require additional funds to purchase inputs, similar to what Turner (2012a, 548) found among Hmong people in Lao Cai Province.

In the narratives of the local people, we often heard comments such as "earning enough to eat now is simple, but getting rich is difficult." Decollectivization and marketization have intensified production, diversified economic activities, and improved the incomes of both the Tay and Dao communities. However, there is a difference between the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of that transformation. Income from agriculture and the number of rich households in the communities have increased. However, the environment in both localities has become more polluted, and natural resources have been exhausted. The income gap between households in the two communes and between rural and urban areas is increasing.

While the agricultural transformation experiences and outcomes of the Tay and Dao in the two upland communities have much in common, there are a few differences between them due to local divergences in historical, geographical, and social factors. As the Tay people in Quang Lang reside in the valley and close to National Road No. 1, locals have long been integrating into the national political and socioeconomic programs. Moreover, the recent urbanization in nearby Dong Mo town has also impacted Quang Lang commune, and the transformation experienced by Tay people in this locality has been more comprehensive compared to that experienced by the Dao in Tan Dan. The close

proximity to the district town as well as to Hanoi and other big industrial parks in the region has also resulted in more diverse jobs and income opportunities for the Tay. More people in Quang Lang own both paddy fields and forestland, allowing them to grow more diverse crops and trees than the Dao in Tan Dan. As a result, the social gap is narrower in Quang Lang than in Tan Dan. Yet, Quang Lang faces more serious problems with environmental pollution than does Tan Dan. While the Dao people raise concerns about the effects of acacia mono-cultivation, the Tay people already suffer serious problems with water and land pollution and riverbank erosion.

Overall, the Dao in Tan Dan are facing greater challenges than the Tay in Quang Lang. As traditional forestry-based uplanders who were moved down to the valley in the sedentarization program of the 1960s and then impacted by forest management policies since the 1970s, the Dao in Tan Dan have had no choice but to rely on state ethnic minority development programs for their livelihoods. Although the Dao in Tan Dan actively participate in marketization, like ethnic people elsewhere (Sowerwine 2004; Turner 2010), they have reached a standstill owing to their limited access to natural resources, market constraints, and the ineffectiveness of ethnic minority development projects (Lê Phương 2019). To date, people in the commune have not been able to find any viable crops other than acacia. In the future, they will face difficulties if overproduction causes prices to decline or the soil to become exhausted. Potential solutions are intercropping other crops with acacia, reverting in part to some traditional practices of forest exploitation, or exploring the development of off-farm services that make use of Dao people's stock of traditional knowledge.

The key lesson of this paper is that the process of agrarian transformation in Vietnam's uplands has been complex and multilinear. It is at once shaped by the restructuring induced by marketization of the uplands and specificities in local histories and natural conditions. With varying levels of market and infrastructural access, upland farmers have found themselves in a position of having to compete as market actors without sufficient institutional support for crop identification, product development, branding, and marketing. Without a viable support structure, they lack access to market information, technologies, and a network of agricultural enterprises to potentially export their products. As such, the causes and consequences of economic and environmental impasse in these two upland localities are both locally specific and traceable to upland farmers' broader institutional and political economic disadvantages as ethnic minorities operating from the margins of the national economy and society.

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Filipina Migrants and the Embodiment of Successful Aging in Japan: Individual Quests for Wealth, Health, and Meaningful Interdependence

Michelle G. Ong* and Mario Ivan López**

In recent years, Japan's long-term foreign residents have continued to increase; and among the communities that have settled, Filipinos constitute one of several aging groups of migrants. This paper focuses on how aging Filipina migrants reflect upon and negotiate their observations on how they age in Japan. It argues that their perceptions of aging arise from expectations of self-reliance and independence linked to a discourse of successful aging popular in current discussions on aging globally. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper shows how informants articulate their expectations through the management of finances, personal health, and the practice of transnational retirement. It ultimately shows that within a shifting neoliberal discourse that pressures citizens to age proactively, alleviating the burden on the Japanese state, Filipinas express counter-narratives through their personal worries, desires, and practices. These have implications for the discussion on aging migrants in Japan.

Keywords: Japan, Philippines, migrant, active aging, successful aging, care work, aging

Introduction

Southeast Asia is characterized by dramatic socioeconomic, political, and demographic differences and change (Peng 2017). It includes countries that are among the wealthiest in Asia, as well as some of the poorest. Over the last twenty years, the speed at which aging has taken place around the globe is without precedent. Like other regions, Southeast Asia is entering into a period of shifting demographics. Various nations are aging at different rates, facing differing population growth rates, unemployment rates, and welfare

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needs of newly aging populations. Additionally, some countries have developed and promoted themselves as desirable retirement destinations for aging migrants from wealthier countries within Southeast Asia and East Asia (Toyota and Xiang 2012) while they grapple with how to provide care for their own populace. In the last decade, more and more efforts have been made by the Japanese state and international agencies to view aging from a regional standpoint and foster dialogue and cooperation among economically, culturally, demographically diverse Southeast Asian countries and Japan, South Korea, and China.[1)] Increasingly, the needs of migrant-receiving and migrant-sending countries have come to inform policies, programs, and pathways that redefine the care that migrant laborers provide and the conditions they eventually come to experience themselves (Chung 2010; Peng 2018). In this paper we bring attention to aging as a globally growing area of concern that has an impact on migration within, from, and into Southeast Asia as a migrant-sending and migrant-receiving region.

Migration and aging are both phenomena that are understood in the wider migration literature as being shaped by three factors. The first is a global shift toward a neoliberal ethics—the idea that human well-being is best served by allowing individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an environment characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2005). The second factor is sexism against women, in which women's bodies are seen as objects of male desire (Bartky 1990) and most suited for less valuable reproductive work (Parreñas 2008). The third factor shaping migration and aging is ageism: discrimination against old people based on negative stereotypes (Butler 1969). These evolving sociopolitical forces produce material and discursive conditions that can disadvantage migrants, women, and older people. This paper focuses on the experiences of long-term Filipina migrants who have settled in Japan, to illustrate how these forces have shaped individual realities and subjectivities: the migrants' desires, options, and decisions around aging. Although Japan is often regarded as a "recent" country of immigration in the wider literature and one typically held up as a model of exclusionary policies (Chung 2010; Liu-Farrer 2020), this paper provides important insights into migrants' experiences of aging in a hyper-aging population where migrant labor is increasingly seen as crucial to the economy and the provisioning

1) For instance, see the annual ASEAN-Japan Active Aging Conference, the third and last of which was held in Manila in 2017, and the annual ASEAN and Japan High Level Officials Meeting on Caring Societies, organized by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, which had "Active Aging" and "Resilient Communities for Active Aging" as themes for their 2012 and 2013 conference, respectively. These meetings include representatives from ASEAN member countries and observers from South Korea and China and are supported by international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization (Japan, International Affairs Division, MHLW 2013; 2014; Asian Development Bank 2017).

of care-related services.

Over the last twenty years, Japan's burgeoning aging population, shrinking labor force, increasing cost of welfare, and need for care workers have led to a push to increase immigration to the country (Milly 2020). The last two decades have witnessed various attempts at recruiting migrant labor through trainee visas, skilled migrant visas, a points system for highly skilled professionals, Nikkeijin work schemes, and a care work visa system (Ohno 2012). Most recently, the Japanese Diet partially amended the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICA) to accept two new types of resident status to include semi-skilled workers across 14 sectors.[2] The expectation is that young migrants will boost the economy through their labor, investments, and consumption. Japan has projected a fairly homogenous image of an ethno-nationalist country exceedingly cautious about the benefits of migration (Douglass 2000; Douglass and Roberts 2000; Liu-Farrer 2020). Yet now there is also growing acknowledgement in academic, political, and public discourse of the promises and potentials of migration and the actual contributions of migrant communities that are now settled in the country (Coulmas 2007; Satake 2011). In response to this, within Japanese ministries there are diverse discourses around foreigners: foreigners are depicted as potential threats to security (by the Ministry of Justice); as resources for economic growth (by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry); and as human beings with rights (by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [MHLW]) (Chiba and Yamamoto 2015). This multiplicity of discourses around migrants is found in Southeast Asia as well, where attitudes toward labor migrants have been found to be generally negative even when they are recognized to be necessary in certain sectors (Tunon and Baruah 2012).

Running parallel to the introduction of immigrant labor is the encouragement of elderly individuals' continued participation in the workforce; in pension, savings, and insurance programs; and in health programs that aim to extend the number of years of independent living that aging individuals may enjoy. Aging individuals themselves are called on to offset the threat of a "silver tsunami" that could potentially place an unprecedented burden on the Japanese health-care system (Asahi Shimbun Semaru 2025 Shokku Shuzaihan 2017).

These strategies that advocate for labor migration and cultivating self-reliance among the elderly are local articulations of a global campaign for positive, active, or successful aging as a response to rapidly aging populations in industrialized countries. The discourses that arise from these revolve around "new and improved" ways of aging,

2) The new scheme was estimated to invite over 345,000 workers (prior to the 2019–20 Coronavirus pandemic).

emphasizing a neoliberal ethic (Alexy 2011). Public policy is seen to intertwine with people's notions of individual responsibility, self-reliance, and less dependence on social structures (Alexy 2011, 898) as a response to diminishing state support for social services. This encourages citizens to be independent and responsible for their own aging (Laliberte 2006; Fine and Keeling 2010).

Within this evolving framework, foreign residents have come to claim residency, settle, have families, and age in Japan. Although a constant stream of foreign residents have settled across Japan since the 1970s, research has only recently started to highlight the need for cultural sensitivity in dealing with aging foreign residents (Kim 2010; Cho 2012). Within the main resident groups, Filipino migrants comprise the fourth-largest and most widely spread migrant group in Japan. Many of them are (or were) married to Japanese men and are now in their late forties and fifties. It is within this context of a fluid and precariously shifting view of migrants and aging individuals that this paper interrogates how older Filipina migrants make sense of their own experience of growing older in Japan.

This paper, which aims to situate Filipina migrants' experiences within a broader discussion of what it means to age as a migrant outside of one's home country, is structured as follows. First, it discusses the broader framework of shifting discourses on how migrants and aging citizens themselves may contribute to alleviating the problems of a hyper-aging population. Second, it situates Filipina migrants to Japan within this framework and shows how it results in certain practices or strategies related to caring for oneself while aging. Finally, it argues that such practices and strategies expose a neoliberal ethic toward aging while also presenting unique forms of self-responsibility, independence, and subject-making that result from Filipina migrants' struggle to navigate contrasting ideals and desires around their own aging.

Successful Aging in Advanced Industrialized Societies

In 1966 the gynecologist Robert Wilson published the book *Feminine Forever*, in which he described menopause as a curable and preventable disease. It marked the beginning of a significant change in how aging was viewed in Western industrialized countries. Whereas aging was previously thought to be a time of decline, social withdrawal, and dependency, from this point on it came to be portrayed as an extension of a "middle age" characterized by opportunity, independence, and the possibility of continued productivity and fulfillment (Laliberte 2006). Three decades later, the popular book *Successful Aging* (Rowe and Kahn 1998) identified disease avoidance, maintenance of cognitive and phys-

ical functions, and sustained engagement with life as the three components of successful aging. Both these books were published for and positively received by a wide audience, given attention by the media and professionals, and have since continued to influence public opinion and academic research agendas (Holstein and Minkler 2003; Houck 2003). Themes relating to freedom, liberation, and self-fulfillment within the context of aging came to define new norms on how to age. Especially salient is John Rowe and Robert Kahn's claim that successful aging "can be attained through individual choice and effort" (1998, 37). This claim resonates in conceptualizations of positive aging (Davey and Glasgow 2006; Laliberte 2006), the modern retiree (Laliberte 2006), agelessness (Andrews 1999), and the "new midlife" (Hepworth and Featherstone 1982).

However, according to critics, there is a link between the construction of this new discourse of aging and neoliberalism (Laliberte 2006; Fine and Keeling 2010). Several studies have noted the strong emphasis on individual responsibility, consumerism, and "active" or "positive" lifestyles and a neoliberal agenda of decreasing expenditure on social services through privatization. As neoliberal political rationality has grown, "technologies aimed at promoting practices of the self that involve self-reflection and improvement, body monitoring and improvement, risk management, and lifestyle maximization have evolved" (Laliberte 2006, 186). These technologies are employed to construct personal aims aligned with neoliberal political aims, encouraging aging individuals to have desires and make decisions congruent with the reduction of state support in old age. This encouragement is apparent in the global shift toward a greater emphasis on healthy or active aging, social participation, and family responsibility for informal care (Fine and Keeling 2010).

Some posit that the promotion of this new aging reflects the dominance in Western countries of the values of independence, youthfulness, and productivity (Cruikshank 2003). Others (see Thang 2010) have observed that even Asian countries, including Japan (see Japan, International Affairs Division, MHLW 2014), are moving toward an "active aging" discourse, changing traditional views on filial piety, intergenerational support, and what constitutes desirable living arrangements. In ASEAN and Japan there have been high-level meetings on caring societies and dialogues focusing on community resilience for "active aging." These meetings have emphasized maintaining good health, engaging in social participation, and social security as goals for active aging. Individuals are envisioned as living in their communities (either independently or with their families), engaged in productive work (whether paid or voluntary), and having a wide range of options for care services (Japan, International Affairs Division, MHLW 2014). More specifically, in the Philippines the Plan of Action for Senior Citizens has specified a mission that promotes active aging, with self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and financial inde-

pendence among its goals. Notably, Republic Act No. 7432, "An Act to Maximize the Contribution of Senior Citizens to Nation Building, Grant Benefits and Special Privileges and for Other Purposes," clarifies that elderly individuals are citizens who have both obligations and privileges in Philippine society (Republic Act 7432 1992).

Finding Solutions to the Problem of an Aging Population in Japan

Industrialized nations have been undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift toward aging populations, and public discussions about the role of the aged have increased concerns that welfare states will soon find it difficult to support their aging populations. Japan, alongside Finland and Germany, is at the crest of a wave of industrialized nations that have aged most rapidly. Concurrently, in the case of Japan, this has occurred with a drop in the labor workforce. Research has shown that older adults are actively participating in community activities and are coming to be seen as able to help satisfy the labor shortage[3] caused by the "demographic time bomb" of an aging society (Lai 2007, 113). The qualifying age for pensions increased in the 1990s (rising from 60 to 65 in 1995), and the age of retirement was revised to seventy as of April 1, 2020. These suggest that older people are now considered alternative, potential workers rationalized as "not fully utilized human resources" (Kato 2020). Additionally, the market is taking advantage of the burgeoning demographic of elderly, affluent boomers by tapping into the "silver market" and encouraging continued (if not greater) consumption into old age (Coulmas 2007).

To address the increasing cost of care, in 2000 Japan instituted Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI), which reduced spending on the elderly through the integration of medical and nursing care and welfare services (Coulmas 2007). The LTCI created a private, contractual relationship between the various service providers and insured clients (Coulmas 2007; Onuki 2009). Consistent with neoliberal economic policies that have characterized Japan since the Koizumi administration, this program created a market-oriented relationship where clients have a choice over the cost, type, and quality of services they can avail of, and service providers strive to provide the best service with the most profitable margins possible (Coulmas 2007; Lai 2007; Onuki 2009). More important, a review of the program in 2005 led to changes that, for the purposes of ensuring financial viability (i.e., reducing the cost to the government), placed more

3) That said, job opportunities for older people tend to be limited to more vulnerable, part-time jobs for women (Douglass 2000). More women than men who want to work but cannot find any say they need the money (Japan Women's Watch [JAWW] 2009).

costs[4] on clients and shifted from providing services to supporting self-help[5] (Lai 2007). In effect, this passed on more costs and more responsibility to individuals who needed care. The Japanese public accepted such a move as the position of "state beneficiary" carried a stigma, implying that one was not cared for by family. Under the new system, individuals are mandated to make compulsory payments, transforming them into citizens entitled to public care due to their contributions (Coulmas 2007). Such neoliberal policies shift the state's role from provider to facilitator and elderly individuals' role from beneficiaries to paying clients. This coincides with a larger global shift toward "successful," "active," or "positive" aging that views old age as a time of increased opportunity and possibilities and of individuals with greater control and responsibility over their quality of aging (Cruikshank 2003; Davey and Glasgow 2006).

Over the past decade, Japan has experimented with the introduction of care workers from neighboring countries, as is already being done in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. These care workers come mainly from Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Lai 2007; Ohno 2012). The migration of health and care workers has been extensively researched by Japanese scholars in the areas of nursing (Onuki 2009), caregiving (Lopez 2012; Navallo 2020), and domestic work (Matsumoto 2016). Other researchers (for instance, Ogawa 2012) have shown that the international transfer of the care burden in Japan is part of a broader global "care chain" (Hochschild 2000) in which developed countries pass on their care burden to ethnically different and economically disadvantaged women in other nations, for instance, Southeast Asian nations. The rise in the numbers of women migrating from developing countries to do domestic work and care work in East Asian countries has led to a scrutiny of the kinds of migration streams that develop out of interaction with local welfare and care regimes (Ogawa 2018). In Japan, in particular, the increase in nurses and care workers has also raised questions about how institutional programs such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with Southeast Asian nations help with the incorporation of foreign care laborers into both the Japanese market and Japanese society in general (Ohno 2012).

Many discussions at present center on the gendered nature of "solutions" being proposed. Hyper-aging is a gendered issue, and women tend to outlive men and experience aging differently from men. They are more likely to have to care for their elderly husbands, be widowed, and perform more house chores, and yet they also tend to have

4) These are charges for accommodations, meals, and utilities (referred to as "hotel charges") in special nursing homes.

5) For example, better oral care, strength training, training to prevent falls and accidents, preventative nursing care.

better social integration than men. For women, particularly the divorced, poverty incidence is higher because of poorer and more insecure employment opportunities during their youth (Wakabayashi and Donato 2006; Calasanti 2010). Women are also likely to be living alone on an income less than 70 percent of that of elderly men who live alone (Japan Women's Watch [JAWW] 2009). And with the shift from three-generation to nuclear families, it is elderly women who have cared for their own parents or in-laws who will more likely receive care through formal, public, or private agencies rather than from their own families (Coulmas 2007). A recent report by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare indicated that 66 percent of all family caregivers were women and that over half of these were over sixty years old (Japan, MHLW 2016b). A gendered focus on these issues is crucial in analyzing the challenges of aging in Japan and the strategies employed to meet them. Gender functions as a powerful structuring discourse affecting perceptions of who gives and receives care and who has the resources to purchase or secure it.

Situating the Rise of Filipino Communities in Japan

Since the issuance of Presidential Decree 442 in 1974, the Philippine state has relied on labor export as an economic strategy (Battistella 1999; Rodriguez 2010).[6] After five decades of labor export, there are over ten million Filipinos in more than two hundred countries worldwide as temporary and permanent migrants (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2013). Given this exceptionally long engagement with migration, scholars have begun to recognize the necessity of looking into the experiences of aging Filipino migrants who are overseas. Research from top migrant destinations such as Canada and the United States shows that elderly Filipinos suffer from poverty and economic insecurity (Coloma and Pino 2016; Ferrer 2017; Ferrer *et al.* 2020); continue to provide support to their families—not only financially (Coloma and Pino 2016) but also by acting as caregivers to their grandchildren (Treas and Mazumdar 2004; Kataoka-Yahiro 2010); find existing caregiving services to be inadequate or undesirable (Kimura and Browne 2009); and see return migration as an option in old age (Pido 2017). The dearth and relative recency of studies on aging Filipino migrants, a well-studied group among migration scholars, is testament to how little attention is paid to this subject. However, the experience of aging Filipino migrants overseas cannot be said to be the same for all; the context of Japan as a destination for Filipino migrants is unique and deserves its own particular attention.

6) The Labor Code of the Philippines includes a directive to promote overseas employment.

Filipino migration to Japan has been predominantly feminine, with women migrating from the Philippines in large numbers during Japan's economic boom in the early 1980s to the mid-2000s as entertainers on temporary work visas and many settling as wives of Japanese men (with some recruited specifically as brides for Japanese men in rural areas). This coincided with the feminization of Filipino overseas worker deployment: from the mid-1980s, over 60 percent of new hires were women recruited as domestic workers within Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and as Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) in Japan (Ogaya 2006). In 2005, following a report from the US State Department identifying Japan as a Tier 2 trafficking destination, restrictions on granting OPA visas were heightened and the number of Filipinas who entered Japan as entertainers decreased sharply.

From a little over twelve thousand registered Filipinos in Japan in 1985 (Takahata 2015), the Filipino population in 2019 stood at 277,409 (see Table 1), with 131,933 having permanent resident status and 26,699 carrying the status of a spouse or child of a Japanese national.[7] Of the overall resident Filipino population in Japan, 70 percent are female. Many permanent and long-term migrants are women who have married Japanese men, so this proportion is even more strongly skewed for those beyond the age of 35 (see

Table 1 Population Statistics for Filipino Residents in Japan by Age and Sex

Age	Both Sexes	Male Population	Male %	Female Population	Female %
Total	277,409	83,231	30.0%	194,178	70.0%
0–4	7,974	4,025	50.5%	3,949	49.5%
5–9	8,463	4,281	50.6%	4,182	49.4%
10–14	8,983	4,473	49.8%	4,510	50.2%
15–19	9,587	4,673	48.7%	4,914	51.3%
20–24	19,835	9,604	48.4%	10,231	51.6%
25–29	36,887	18,377	49.8%	18,510	50.2%
30–34	32,913	14,644	44.5%	18,269	55.5%
35–39	33,612	8,365	24.9%	25,247	75.1%
40–44	30,609	4,763	15.6%	25,846	84.4%
45–49	34,055	3,421	10.0%	30,634	90.0%
50–54	31,057	2,876	9.3%	28,181	90.7%
55–59	15,196	1,966	12.9%	13,230	87.1%
60–64	5,650	1,083	19.2%	4,567	80.8%
65–69	1,865	494	26.5%	1,371	73.5%
70–74	495	131	26.5%	364	73.5%
75–79	128	26	20.3%	102	79.7%
80+	100	29	29.0%	71	71.0%

Source: Japanese Ministry of Justice, Resident Foreigner Statistics, June 2019 (E-stat 2021a, compiled by authors).

7) Official Statistics of Japan (E-stat 2021a).

Table 1). Through settlement, the population of Filipina migrants in Japan is now aging (see Table 1); the majority are in the age bracket of forty to sixty, and many of them arrived in the late 1990s to early 2000s. The migrants are dispersed in both urban and rural parts of the country, unlike other migrants, who are concentrated in specific areas where industries are dense (Piquero-Ballescas 2009).

The increase in the Filipino population in Japan has been accompanied by numerous stereotypes and discourses that limit them to specific, feminine social roles and stymie their potential. Many are employed in poorly valued (even if not always poorly paid) occupations where mostly women are employed (e.g., club hostesses, chambermaids, factory workers) and are under social pressure to perform their roles as good mothers and wives if they are married and/or have children (Faier 2008). Early researchers highlighted how Filipinas were depicted as falling under one or the other of two extremes —wife/whore or, a related dichotomy, victim/exploiter (Shimizu 1996; Suzuki 2003; Nakamatsu 2005; Fuwa and Anderson 2006).[8] These critiques exposed the multiple limiting constructions that many Filipinas in Japan faced in searching for other employment and integrating into Japanese society. Additional challenges included adjusting to Japanese culture and gaining literacy in the Japanese language (Ofreneo and Samonte 2005; Umeda 2009). All these difficulties together render Filipinas some of the most vulnerable foreign migrants in Japanese society. Filipinos have a divorce rate just under the national average (Japan, MHLW 2016a),[9] a higher likelihood of being victims of domestic violence (Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan 2014),[10] and a typically large age gap with their husbands, which means some will be more likely to be widowed (Sakurai 2002). As such, many Filipinas who divorce or survive deceased partners with children face the risk of experiencing different levels of poverty as they negotiate growing older in Japan.

In the last decade, with mounting pressure to supply care labor for an aging populace, both the Japanese state and private enterprises have turned to Filipinas, among other settled migrant workers in Japan, as a source of affective labor.[11] In 2006 Japan and the Philippines ratified the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement. On paper,

8) A more complex analysis of the discursive maneuvering of the image from prostitute to wife material by marriage brokers was carried out by Nakamatsu Tomoko (2005). Suzuki Nobue (2003) complicates the picture of rural Japanese farmers' Filipina wives as passive victims by looking at their struggle to obtain economic autonomy and establish themselves as sexual subjects.

9) In 2018 this stood at 31 percent for marriages between Japanese males and Filipina women, and for Japanese couples the national average stood at 35.5 percent (see E-stat 2021b).

10) Data from a national government center on domestic violence show that from 2014 to 2017, Filipinos comprised 30–40 percent of non-Japanese callers (PCCC 2019).

11) It is important to note that Japan also sources care labor from other Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and—more recently—Myanmar and Cambodia.

this provided a clause to alleviate Japan's need for care workers and meet the Philippines' need for expanding the market for its prime export: skilled laborers (Onuki 2009). Prior to this policy move were efforts by enterprising businesses and concerned non-profit organizations to fill the care labor gap through the recruitment of Filipina mothers of Japanese children—both from the Philippines (many of the women possess the right to reside and work in Japan) and from those already residing legally in Japan (Takahata 2015). Such use of Filipinas' labor was made possible through their being discursively constructed as being "naturally" skilled or "gifted" at care work (Onuki 2009; Lopez 2012); very experienced in it; or having done care work as hostesses, wives, and mothers in Japan (Lopez 2012; Takahata 2015). The development of this new labor niche should be viewed with caution—on the one hand, it may be seen as providing Filipinas with socially valued jobs; on the other, it can be seen as another instance of the "imposition of constituted categories" (Lopez 2012, 265).

In the context of the increasing currency of the notions of individual responsibility and independence in old age, and migrant labor (including Filipina migrant labor) alleviating some of the problems of a rapidly aging Japanese society, what processes and practices or strategies for caring for oneself while aging become available to aging Filipina migrants in Japan? And might there be alternative forms of responsibility and independence that figure in their practices and strategies for securing "successful" aging?

Methodology

This paper employs a methodology that builds on two critical psychologies: Sikolohiyang Pilipino[12] (SP, or indigenous Filipino psychology; see Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000; and Paredes-Canilao and Babaran-Diaz 2013) and feminist psychology (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Fox *et al.* 2009). Critical psychology is distinguished by its interest in power—how it operates and how it is used by, for, or against people (Prilleltensky and Nelson 2002). Both Sikolohiyang Pilipino and feminist psychology have provided con-

12) Sikolohiyang Pilipino is both an academic discipline and a movement begun in the 1970s, spearheaded by the psychologist Virgilio Enriquez. It is an approach to understanding the Filipino psyche rooted in Filipinos' experiences, perspectives, and orientation (Enriquez 1976), with theories and methods derived from local culture and languages, with the objective of knowledge benefiting the most marginalized in society (Santiago and Enriquez 1976). At its inception, it was a response to the largely American and colonial foundations of the social sciences in the Philippines. With continued critique and development from theorists and practitioners from various fields and disciplines, SP has become more mainstream in Philippine academia and has been productively applied to research, program development, and advocacy work in other countries (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000; Estrada-Claudio 2018).

ceptual, theoretical, and methodological handles for critiquing psychology's role in oppressing groups of people (e.g., women, the Filipino underclass) and for producing more empowering knowledge. Foundational to both is the recognition of research as a political activity; of language as a bearer and producer of culture and ideologies; and of the importance of cultural, social, and historical contexts concerned with individual human behavior and mental processes.

SP has previously been pointed out to have been inadequate at critiquing patriarchy in Philippine society (Estrada-Claudio 2002), and mainstream feminism (at least in Western, highly industrialized countries) has been said to have poorly addressed matters of ethnicity, culture, and colonialism (Burman 1998). Therefore, the use of SP and feminist psychology for the project this paper draws from was crucial for addressing gender and cultural issues underlying the topic. SP was employed mainly for its consistency with a critical psychological position that allowed for an analysis of individuals' meaning-making not as necessarily or inherently Filipino, but more a cultural product bound to particular social, historical, economic, and political moments. SP, as applied in this study, is most useful for its recognition of the idea that while a shared cultural background is relevant in the experience of these participants and that there may be something identified by the participants and other observers as somehow "Filipino," this must be understood to be worked out in the context of migrant life in Japan. The potential of SP as a movement to produce counter-narratives that interrogate an ahistorical, apolitical conceptualization of Filipinos' experiences, problems, and culture is established elsewhere (Ong 2016). This study reaffirms this and puts forward the utility of using critical approaches together with SP for an analytical framework that can illuminate how habits, practices, ways of looking at the world, and whatever else might be thought of as part of one's identity and as structuring one's relationships and daily life are produced by—and a means to resist—larger social forces in the society one inhabits.[13)]

This methodological framework employs a data-gathering method that allows an engagement with participants' language and experiences that recognizes their capacity for meaning-making. Additionally, it necessitates an analysis that provides a means for identifying the discourses or cultural resources in which such meanings are made. Data-gathering was conducted through the use of *pakikipagkwentuhan* (Orteza 1997), a culturally derived method developed by Sikolohiyang Pilipino scholars to provide an alternative for collecting talk-based data in Filipino communities. This naturalistic method has been proven useful for qualitative, ethnographic studies interested in experiences, subjective

13) We note that long-term Filipino residents' language is also shaped by Japanese forms of communication through their long-term stay in Japan. As such, we should remain sensitive to the multiple forms of language that informants turn to when communicating their experiences.

views, and meaning-construction. *Pakikipagkwentuhan* is characterized by flexibility and openness and pays particular attention to the quality of the relationship or interaction (*pagtutunguhan*) between the researcher and the participants as this is expected to affect the quality of the data collected (for an extensive exposition, see Orteza 1997; and Javier 2005).

For this project, *pakikipagkwentuhan* was employed with ten women, ranging in age from 48 to 67, from five different prefectures in Japan. Conversations with the participants covered topics such as migration to Japan (reasons, means, initial impressions, etc.), observations and reflections on bodily changes over time, and plans for the future. Each *pakikipagkwentuhan* session lasted about an hour and a half, with participants typically engaging in one or two sessions. This ethnographic approach proved useful for providing insight on widely circulated social discourses that migrants used when speaking about aging, as well as alternative or opposing discourses. In analyzing the data, it was assumed that the specificities of Japan's and the Philippines' cultural, political, economic, and discursive landscape around migration and aging would shape meanings, subjectivities, and material realities for Filipina migrants. In order to better contextualize the data and the resulting analysis, we provide some key demographic information (age, years living in Japan, employment status, marital status, educational status) about the participants in Table 2.

Seven of the ten participants were still employed (some part time) during the interviews. The range of jobs they currently and previously held included: entertainer, small business owner, factory worker, caregiver, housekeeper, English teacher, and interpreter. Many of the participants were also active as community volunteers in church-based or migrant community organizations. Three had previously worked as entertainers in bars around Japan, where they had eventually met their Japanese husbands. All participants had children. Eight were married or previously married to a Japanese man (three of them were divorced), one was married to a Filipino Nikkeijin (foreign-born Japanese). One was the widow of a Filipino man. The lowest educational attainment was second year of high school, but the majority had a college degree, and two had postgraduate education. In recruiting participants for the interviews, the aim was to have access to as diverse a group as possible in order to obtain a variety of experiences and discourses around aging and migration. Although the sample cannot fully represent the views of the wider population of Filipinas in Japan, we argue that their views would be familiar to the larger group given some important commonalities: continued connections to the Philippines, and participation in churches and migrant community groups popular among Filipinos. The utility of this sample is found not in its representativeness but in its ability to produce narratives that have salience for other

Table 2 Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Current Employment	Years Living in Japan	Marital Status	Highest Educational Attainment
Alli	58	Part-time waitstaff	29	Separated from Filipino husband Divorced from Japanese husband	High school
Evie	67	Retired. Previously an English teacher	43	Married to Japanese husband	Postgraduate
Cora	58	Semi-retired. Part-time English teacher. Small business owner	28	Married to Japanese husband	College
Beth	60	Bento factory	11	Married to Filipino Nikkeijin	High school
Dana	52	Caregiver	28	Divorced from Japanese husband	College
Fara	50	None	24	Married to Japanese husband	High school
Gina	62	Interpreter	38	Married to Japanese husband	College
Hope	55	English teacher	35	Married to Japanese husband	College
Imee	48	Fruit packer	17	Divorced from Japanese husband	High school
Jeng	66	Housekeeper	31	Widowed (Filipino husband)	Postgraduate

Filipina migrants in Japan and possibly for understanding the experiences of other aging migrant groups that share important similarities.

Each session was recorded digitally and later transcribed. Thematic analysis (as outlined by Braun and Clarke 2006) was applied to the data with a post-structuralist approach to language in order to produce an analysis that makes connections between individual subjectivity and larger social discourses.[14] The goal is not to capture truth as such but to situate a specific truth within the context in which it was produced, used, or deployed. Therefore, the interest of the analysis is in the various subject positions made available to Filipina migrants in Japan by existing discourses around aging and migrants, the truths they claim or make from these positions, and the consequences that arise from these truths.

14) A poststructuralist approach allows for interest in language to constitute subjectivity and reality rather than reflect an objective reality or provide access to one's thoughts or dispositions (see Weedon 1997; and Potter and Wetherell 1987).

Embodying Successful Aging through the Management of Finances

Many participants expressed fears or worries about becoming a burden to their children as they aged. They saw it as their responsibility to ensure that they had the financial capacity to meet their needs in the years to come. Several (Beth, Evie, Gina, and Cora) mentioned living more simply and consciously spending less on nonessentials (e.g., designer goods, eating out, travel). Three (Hope, Gina, and Jeng) had already begun to establish businesses to ensure a steady and adequate income, and some were planning to do business in the Philippines or in Japan. More overwhelmingly, participants reported being conscientious about paying for their insurance (of which there are many types and options) to ensure that they received pensions and had medical coverage when they needed it and avoided at all costs becoming state dependents. In one session, Imee talked about these financial concerns:

> **Imee:** See, here in Japan, it's better (than in the Philippines) because here, 60, 65, you can work as long as you can do it. And then here there is a pension when you turn 65, but I don't like to depend on the pension. I think it feels better if you're working. Or have your own income. See, here it feels like, if you say one is pensioned it's like you're merely dependent on the nation's tax, that's what it feels like. So, it's different when you're, like, still strong enough to work. . . . Yeah, you can't stay forever in the Philippines because first of all, there, when you get to 65, you won't be able to work anymore, and you only get a pension at the start. Aside from that, the government here helps with the . . . we have a health card here where you pay, really, only a small amount. . . . Yes [you do pay for it] but it's really affordable. They know your age, that you can't pay very much, so that's it. . . . Whatever happens, here [in Japan], as long as you have a health card and you're qualified, you can go to a hospital without paying a single cent.[15)]

One prevalent theme in participants' explanations of their plans and ideas for their old age, as exemplified in Imee's account above, is that better possibilities are available to them because they are migrants in Japan, and that they must be responsible and take advantage of these opportunities—the opportunity to continue working past 65 (albeit in insecure, low-paid jobs), to pay for insurance that ensures affordable care in the future, and to earn a pension. Participants made comparisons between the opportunities for financial security in the Philippines and in Japan. They arrived at the conclusion that being a migrant in Japan had afforded them certain advantages for securing "successful" aging. These observations are not without merit: data on the elderly in the Philippines show that they tend to be poor, employed in agricultural work or in the informal sector,

15) This is not entirely true, as individuals are required to shoulder 30 percent of medical costs in Japan. However, that this perception is expressed here strengthens the notion that in Japan, health care is accessible to conscientious individuals who make the effort to be consistent with their contributions.

and unlikely to receive a pension or have access to affordable health care (DSWD and DOH 2007; Abalos 2018). In comparison, Japanese elderly who contribute to the national pension system for forty years and have national health insurance can receive a pension of around 780,100 Japanese yen per annum (Japan Pension Service 2021) and support for at least 70 percent of health-care costs.[16)]

However, other perspectives offered a more nuanced view. Two other respondents, Evie and Cora, brought up the fact that hospitalization can be very expensive even with insurance, which does not cover room cost (according to Evie). In addition, Evie observed that the cost of living in Japan was increasing, that pensions were not always enough, and that "everybody worries about it now." In light of these observations, it becomes clear that although the ability to work past age 65, the availability of health insurance, and the opportunity to contribute to a pension fund may be seen as opportunities unavailable in the Philippines, they may also be regarded as necessities—not only by migrants but by the vast majority of people growing older in Japan. To make this clear, Evie remarked, "If you had worked here [in Japan] and contributed to the pension fund somehow, you get some, somehow. But if zero [contributions], then nothing. Only from your children then, if you live with them." This call to choose to work and purchase insurance is a possible outcome of a "taxpayer citizenship," which constructs some groups of people (i.e., taxpayers) as more "deserving" of citizenship rights or support from the state (Cruikshank 2003; King 2006). Imee's poor regard for the status of pensioners, who are "merely dependent on the nation's tax," is reflective of this view of citizenship and hints at the low status occupied by those who are not "strong enough" to continue working, to contribute to the pension fund, and to pay for health insurance.

Migrants, especially women, are disadvantaged under a system that privileges these ways of securing financial stability because they will have worked for fewer years in the country and will have been limited in the job and employment type (contractual, part-time employment rather than permanent, full-time employment) available to them (McLaren and Dyck 2004; Yakushko 2009; Bolzman 2012). Additionally, in Japan social capital (networks, group memberships) rather than human capital (skills, qualifications, or work experience) has been found to determine immigrants' earning capacity—an indicator of the poorer labor market opportunities for and discrimination against migrants (Tsuda 2011). The participants in this study were typically employed part time, usually waiting

16) These amounts may be augmented by making additional contributions, and through other pension schemes (both public and private). It must be noted that these modest amounts are far from enough to guarantee a comfortable and worry-free life in Japan, where the cost of living is high. Also, one may receive even less if one has not contributed consistently, worked fewer hours or years than the average employee, or is divorced from an employed husband.

after their children had grown to find employment (except one who was never allowed by her husband to work). There were those who spoke at length about the difficulties of finding work that they found meaningful, satisfying, and financially adequate given the challenges of language and family obligations (taking care of their spouse and children in Japan and sending remittances back to the Philippines). And yet, they endorsed a discourse of personal responsibility for financial stability in old age as it is strongly associated with the positively regarded identity of the responsible older person in Japan. Despite the disadvantages they face as migrants, as Filipinas, and as older persons in Japan, they are not exempt from investing great amounts of physical, emotional, and financial resources to avoid being a burden to their children and society.

Managing Health

Other than finances, all participants reported feeling concerned about and responsible for their health. Some identified natural changes in old age, work conditions, stress, and genes as reasons for their current health complaints. However, a strong theme running through stories about health, particularly in the maintenance of good health, was the idea of responsibility and self-control. Many participants endorsed the idea of responsibility for health and reported controlling what they ate, exercising (or planning to exercise), consuming health supplements, seeking advice from medical practitioners, and seeking and evaluating health-related information (from television, seminars, and the Internet) in order to maintain or regain good health. The imperative to take responsibility for one's health found in participants' accounts can be seen in this extended discussion with Fara:

> **Fara:** Here in Japan, you really need to go get a checkup all the time. See here, I don't know how it is for others, but me and my husband we go get a medical checkup every year. Because, when you get to forty [years of age], you're obliged to get a checkup.
> **Author (interviewer):** Yearly?
> **Fara:** Yearly.
> **Author:** You have to pay for that?
> **Fara:** Yes, of course you have to pay. And there's also insurance here. Like health insurance in the Philippines. You're really obliged to um . . .
> **Author:** How come you say obliged? You can't not get a checkup?
> **Fara:** No, it's not that. Here in Japan, there are people who don't go for checkups, and then they'll find out when they get sick that it's already very bad. There are cases like that. So that's why they say when you get to forty, that's when your body starts to, um [deteriorate], you'll start to feel a lot [going wrong], so while it's early you need to go on checkups so they can catch it early. Especially the Japanese. It's often cancer that they get. As much as possible, to avoid or solve it immediately, you need to go on your checkups all the time.

Such actions and such a way of thinking are consistent with a growing healthism, a term coined by the cultural studies scholar Robert Crawford (1980) upon observing that health was becoming a moral and social concern (particularly for the American middle class). The concern for health expanded to include more holistic notions of well-being and success, coming to define good citizenship and positive personal identities (Crawford 2006). Self-control in and self-responsibility for health can have important symbolic value even though perfect health can never be guaranteed (Crawford 2006). In the context of aging, the concern for maintaining the health of a body that is progressively moving farther from the ideal of a youthful one has important implications for subjectivity, as evidenced by participants calling themselves "lazy" or implying they were "irresponsible" or "selfish" for being unable or unwilling to pursue health effectively. Compounding the pressure to be responsible older citizens pursuing successful aging is the perception that a major barrier to health—the high cost of health care and monitoring—has been eliminated or drastically reduced in Japan compared to the Philippines. Several other participants note that health care is free or far more affordable in Japan. (For instance, Jeng said, "Thank God, I have general checkups, and that's free.[17] That's what's great here in Japan, you're taken care of.") There is, among participants' accounts, a "no legitimate dependency" discourse. Within this discourse, there are no valid reasons for dependency as everything that happens in one's life is one's personal responsibility; and so, asking for help, or even acknowledging the need for it, is seen as an unacceptable admission of weakness (Peacock *et al.* 2014). For migrants who are regarded with negativity or suspicion, poor health—which may be seen as a result of the poor utilization of "free" health services in Japan—can be read as a willful rejection of the responsibility to stay healthy.

And yet, Beth suggested that her work may have been at least partially responsible for her contracting diabetes,[18] and Imee's back problem is not likely to improve given that her job requires her to lift heavy objects. Beth's limited understanding of Japanese makes doctor visits challenging for her and requires that a family member (with better ability) accompany her. On occasion, she has delayed consulting with a doctor for a health issue because no family member was available to go with her. The difficulties that Filipina

17) This statement is the informant's perception. General health checkups are not free; costs can vary from one location to another in Japan. However, this perception is a point of interest as it reflects the way in which migrants understand their place in Japan in terms of obligations and responsibilities as represented materially by taxes, pension contributions, and insurance payments.

18) Beth said, "[A]s I said, 'Doc, maybe that's how I got diabetes because when I was working the night shift it made me sleepy. I had nothing to take my mind off it but to put my hand in my pocket, which was full of chocolate. I didn't take care of myself. But when I was in the Philippines, I did often check . . . my sugar. . . . I suppose it's also my fault that I got it [diabetes]." Beth explained her night work was a factor, but she also claimed responsibility for having developed diabetes.

migrants in Japan experience—poor facility with the Japanese language, poor treatment from health workers, and poorer employment opportunities, which impact on their health—can be obscured by the dominant discourse of self-responsibility for health.

Exploring Transnational Retirement: The Modern Retiree Migrant's Strategy for Success

Asked about their plans for the future, half of the participants said they would prefer to eventually go home to the Philippines—either to live there permanently or to travel regularly between the Philippines and Japan.[19] They explained that settling in the Philippines meant being able to enjoy a comfortable life (physically, socially, and financially), warm weather throughout the year, the company and care of family members and community (which they say is not likely in Japan), and a lower cost of living. As Fara said, "As long as you have money in the Philippines, life is good in the Philippines." As the discussion goes further, we will interrogate this statement to show what it implies about what a good life is, the differences between Japan and the Philippines, and the necessity of money.

All participants generally spoke highly of the Japanese government's support for the elderly[20] (see previous discussions), and of Japan as a safe, peaceful, and beautiful place to live in. And yet, quite a few planned to go back to the Philippines in their old age because they had negative views of elderly life and care in Japan, as articulated by Dana:

> **Dana:** Back home [in the Philippines], when you grow old, even if, say, no one takes care of you, the neighbors won't let anything happen to you. Isn't it like that back home? I suppose it depends, I don't know how it is in other places, but in our town, I, we had a neighbor there, the old person was living alone, my relative would bring him/her food all the time. Gives them a shower. Takes care of them even if they're not related. Just neighbors. It seems we have what the Japanese call *atatakai* [warmth]. We have love, care. We have all of that.
> **Author:** It seems odd they have that word, *atatakai*, but you don't see them doing that for their neighbor.
> **Dana:** Oh no. Here nobody minds anybody. The best thing about Japan, you know what it is? Discipline. . . . Really, their discipline is great. Number One. But when it comes to love, it's lacking. *Tarinai*[21] [not enough], in Japanese. . . . They're like that, too. They have it too. Anywhere

19) Participants who want to keep their permanent resident's visa must travel to Japan yearly.
20) Other researchers have shown that Filipinas who work in care homes can develop opposing views. It is important to make clear here that a wide range of views are available and that the views depend on the vantage points and experiences of researchers and informants.
21) To clarify the use of the Japanese adjective *tarinai*, the original conversation in Tagalog is "Pero sasabihin mo yung love nila, lack. Tarinai kumbaga sa Japanese."

> you go there is that. But if you want *atatakai*,[22] or you want it good, well, since I'd already worked so hard here, what I want is, when I go home, when you grow old, you're in the Philippines. You'll have a good, uh, even if your life is not all good but your environment is. Here, when you grow old, it's all the same. Your children are busy, too. . . . I'm afraid to grow old here. . . . When I'm old I might get shouted at by my daughters-in-law. That happens often here.

In Dana's account, as in others' stories, care provision in Japan (whether in homes, living with or close to family or by oneself, or in communal homes run by public or private organizations) is contrasted highly with that in the Philippines and evaluated to be unacceptable. Love, concern, or caring is seen to be absent or in short supply in Japan, while the Philippines is idealized to have these in great amounts ("We have love, care. We have all of that"). While clearly and consistently described to be poorer or deficient in other accounts (see above discussions on managing health and finances), the Philippines is almost romanticized as having an abundance of love or warmth for the elderly.

As a way of meeting their needs for a "loving" community in old age, many participants, even the three who said they would not want to permanently live in the Philippines as they grew older (Evie, Gina, and Imee), plan to practice what is now known in scholarly literature as transnational retirement (Gustafson 2001; Toyota and Xiang 2012). Transnational retirement, a fairly recent phenomenon where retirees set up residence in another country in order to maximize their pensions and enjoy a preferred lifestyle, has been made possible by more affordable transportation, greater ease in communication, greater longevity, affluence, globalized systems (Gorringe 2003), changes in lifestyle preferences, and the increasingly common experience of living and working abroad (Gustafson 2008). This practice is one way of doing or imagining aging where individuals maximize their pensions, allowing pensions considered modest or insufficient in one country to afford them better health care, caregiving, and leisure options in another (Gorringe 2003; Bolzman *et al.* 2006; Warnes and Williams 2006; Percival 2013). This strategy is a logical outcome of successful aging's call to self-sufficiency, responsibility, and consumption (Laliberte 2006).

Unique to the participants as migrants to Japan is the option of transnational retirement in a country that they regard (also) to be home, unlike the situation of other transnational migrants more typically discussed in the current literature (for instance, Swedish retirees residing in Spain during winter in Gustafson 2001). The participants who wanted to live in the Philippines clearly articulated the financial advantages of doing

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22) To clarify the use of the Japanese adjective *atatakai*, the original conversation in Tagalog is "Meron din sila nun, kahit saan naman yun eh. Pero kung gusto mo ng *atatakai* or maganda kasi eh siyempre naghirap na ako dito, gusto ko naman paguwi ko, pagtanda mo, nasa Pilipinas ka. Masarap ang ano mo. Kahit hindi masarap ang buhay mo basta yung kapaligiran mo ba."

so, but all participants wished to go there on a regular basis to visit their hometown and families (extended and immediate—a few had children, grandchildren, and parents there). Those who decided they would live in Japan permanently said that their children were there and that the cost of health care in the Philippines was a worry; this worry about finances in the Philippines in case of an emergency was one that was recognized even by those who planned to live there permanently. This dilemma is best summed up in the following excerpt:

> **Cora:** But I'm thinking if I go home like for Medicare, or medical needs, I'm disadvantaged in the Philippines. But the sadness, I'm disadvantaged here. And here, you'll be imprisoned [in a home for the elderly]—you haven't got a lot to talk to. If you're alone. You could die here and your neighbor wouldn't know. Right? But as for hospitalization, all of those things, I'm for here [Japan]. See, here, the [Japanese] government will not neglect you. . . . In the Philippines . . . if you get sick, where will you run if you don't have any money? But then again, it's lonely [here in Japan]. Whereas there, your neighbor, especially if you like to talk, since you're there anyway, you can make friends, you'll be occupied. Even if you start to argue, at least you have someone to argue with.

Cora's back-and-forth comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the Philippines and Japan mirrors the back-and-forth travel that participants plan to do in order to try and gain as much of the positive from both countries as they can: enjoy the perceived peace and (relative) prosperity of Japan and the warm weather and relationships they have nurtured over the years in the Philippines. It also reflects the fact that, despite the seeming expansion of their options as migrants in Japan, the kind of comfortable aging they imagine—one with financial security, relatively good health and access to health services, and meaningful relationships with family and community—remains elusive for most. Although one may take responsibility for one's aging through being conscientious about one's health and finances, transnational retirement between Japan and one's home country may be an important strategy for migrants to take care of their well-being that goes beyond physical and financial health and into claiming one's place in a network of warm and valued interdependent relationships with others.

Conclusion: Never Enough in Old Age

In studies on migration within, from, and to Southeast Asia, those that focus on the social context and individual life experience of aging remain at the margins. Many of the existing themes in migration studies in Southeast Asia, such as citizenship and political integration, health, employment, family life, care labor, and transnational parenting, can

benefit from some attention to aging. In light of the dominance of successful or positive aging discourses in many societies globally, including Asia—where interdependence and filial responsibility are valued—it is increasingly important to investigate how the themes of independence and self-responsibility shape the lived realities and subjectivities not only of non-migrant populations but of migrants themselves. These are individuals who are simultaneously regarded as being crucial to their home and host country's economy through their labor and as potential threats to the host country culturally, socially, and economically. They are also individuals whose status is often suspect even when the host country recognizes their contributions but invests little in ensuring that they have the same access to opportunities for education, employment, and social integration that non-migrants enjoy. This has a deep impact on their health, finances, and overall quality of life in old age.

Japan presents an important site for exploring these ideas for at least two reasons: the dominance of studies on European and North American countries as migrant destinations obscures the unique conditions migrants face in other regions such as Southeast Asia and Japan. Additionally, Japan's increasing recognition of the value of migrants as part of its portfolio of responses to its hyper-aging population dilemma can shed more light on responses within East Asia and Japan's greater dependence on Southeast Asian nations. Although the 2019–21 coronavirus pandemic impacted the variegated flows of migrant laborers into Japan, we will continue to see an increased role of migrants as part of the solution to hyper-aging, inevitably leading to a more diversified population, some of whom will settle and age in Japan. This will demand an integrative response in years to come.

Discussions around a rapidly aging Japanese population have centered on the costs of such a population to society in general, with migrants growing in state discourse as potentially mitigating the economic and social impact of aging. In more recent years, global discourses and policy making on aging have come to reflect neoliberal ideas and focus on individual choice and responsibility for one's aging while diminishing state regulation of and support for services for older people (Coole 2011). The image of the "modern retiree" enjoying "positive" or "successful" aging in popular discourse has been criticized as being deceptively empowering, in that aging persons are given power and choices for securing their own well-being but also blamed when they are ill or poor. The discourse of the modern retiree ignores the diverse social contexts and multiple disadvantages individuals can experience over their lifetime that affect their ability to achieve "successful" outcomes in old age.

This paper argues that such a discourse is familiar to and is valued by Filipina migrants in Japan. It shapes how they think about, plan for, and act on their own aging.

They understand that it is their responsibility to manage their own finances, their health, and their care in the future so as to ensure they are not a burden to society and to their families. At the same time, they contest and fashion their own unique discourses which do counter the neoliberal ethic that finds itself diffusing in Japan. This research suggests Filipinas negotiate different neoliberal ideals whilst developing their own distinct paths that are cautious of as well as attuned to dependency. As inhabitants and navigators of two cultures, participants draw upon relevant counter-discourses: the Filipino concept of *kapwa* or shared sense of self (Enriquez 1978) and a Japanese form of idealized dependence (as *amae*) (Alexy 2011). The articulation of both these situates individuals nested in a network of relationships where separation and individuation are not only impossible but also undesirable—a morally and socially inferior way of *being* in these societies. For Filipina migrants, the desire for connectedness and interdependence results in the cultivation of transnational retirement strategies for successful aging. Although individuals may lay claim to a positive subjectivity through acting responsibly in financial and health matters, ultimately the comfortable aging that they claim responsibility for is a tenuous reality whether in Japan or in the Philippines.

While participants also articulate the difficulties and challenges of being older Filipina migrants in Japan, which make the attainment of all these ideals more difficult than for non-migrants, the impetus for self-responsibility and independence in old age remains a powerful structuring discourse that defines their desires, decisions, and practices. As such, it is apparent that despite the seemingly widespread, more positive, alternative discourse of aging that is available, negative discourses around older people and migrants as a burden to society remain prominent. As migrants who continue to be evaluated and scrutinized for their contributions to both Philippine and Japanese society, Filipinas in Japan bear the burden of making enough and being enough for themselves and their families. Yet, their experiences also point to the possibility of examining alternative practices, strategies, and ideals that emanate from within Southeast Asia, a region that, for the foreseeable future, Japan will continue to be tied to in a very intimate fashion.

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Enlightenment on Display: The Origins, Motivations, and Functions of Hagiographic Buddhist Museums in Singapore

Goh Aik Sai*

The unprecedented emergence of hagiographic Buddhist museums in Singapore in the 2000s superficially appears to be attempts by the Buddhist community to memorialize their deceased venerables. While this is undoubtedly true, the choice of modern museums rather than traditional memorial halls or stūpas signifies that other formative forces may be at work. This article argues that rather than being isolated commemorative events, the successive establishment of these museums points to certain etic socioreligious factors affecting the local Buddhist community in the preceding decades. Through a review of the historical evidence, interviews with crucial museum stakeholders, and surveys of museum visitors, I posit that the museums are a manifestation of the confluence of the effects of the community's response to religious rivalry, Buddhist intellectual and pedagogical reforms, conjoined with the adoption of nontraditional methods for the memorialization of charismatic reformist monks. Lastly, I investigate hagiographic Buddhist museums as sites of didacticism, heuristics, and skillful means.

Keywords: Buddhist museum, Buddhist memorial hall, Buddhist gallery, hagiography, memorialization, reformist Buddhism in Singapore, heuristics, skillful means

Introduction

From the early 2000s, Singapore witnessed for the first time in its history the establishment of Buddhist museums and galleries. This novel event, which went largely unnoticed by the general public as well as the majority of local Buddhists, signified a sea change in the modus operandi of the museums' and galleries' parent organizations. Trends contributing to this change built up over the decades preceding the twenty-first century and

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Table 1 Singapore Buddhist Museums

	Museum	Hagiographic[1]	Year Open	Years since Passing of Monk	Year Closed/ Suspended
1	Nei Xue Tang	No	2005	–	2007
2	Yen Pei Memorial Hall	Yes (Yen Pei)	2006	10	–
3	Venerable Hong Choon Museum	Yes (Hong Choon)	2006	16	–
4	Kong Hiap Memorial Museum	Yes (Kong Hiap)	2007	13	–
5	Buddhas of the World Museum[2]	Yes (Buddha)	2007	–	–
6	Hai Yin Culture and Arts Research Gallery[3]	No	2008	–	2012?
7	80 Gallery	Yes (Song Nian)	2010	13	2016
8	Cultural Center (Museum)[4]	No	2014	–	–
9	Eminent Sangha Museum[5]	Yes (Multiple Monks)	2014	–	–
10	Tzu Chi Da Ai Gallery	No	2016	–	2021[6]

Notes: [1] The memorialized person is named in parentheses.
[2] Previously known as the Nagapuspa Buddhist Culture Museum until 2019 when it changed its name, it gives a narrative of Buddha Śākyamuni's biography and is located within the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum.
[3] It is unclear when the gallery closed, but I estimate it to have been between December 18, 2011 and May 2012.
[4] Located within the Wat Ananda Metyarama Thai Buddhist Temple complex.
[5] The second museum inside the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum.
[6] The gallery's last day of operation was October 31, 2021.

culminated in these museological institutions. Of the ten Buddhist museums surveyed by the author, six are hagiographic museums (see Table 1). This article, supported by interviews with major stakeholders of Buddhist museums and centers in Singapore and visitor surveys at two hagiographic Buddhist museums, seeks to uncover the most salient sociohistorical factors and motivations that may have been instrumental in their establishment.

A Buddhist museum is defined here as a *permanent institution dedicated to collecting, conserving, or exhibiting almost exclusively Buddhist-related artifacts and paraphernalia*. Artifacts refer to the full range of artworks consisting of texts, paintings, and sculptures; while paraphernalia is defined as related items such as the Buddhist clergy's own works, writings, robes, rosaries, artworks, relics, and reliquaries. Included in my definition are Buddhist *galleries* and *museological memorial halls*,[1)] even though they may not self-identify as museums or fulfill all functions of museums as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) allows for the inclusion of "other institutions as having some or all of

1) These are memorial halls resembling museological spaces with features such as spotlights, air conditioning, labels, display cabinets, and informational panels. A prime example is the Yen Pei Memorial Hall, which prohibits photography but is a well-renovated, brightly lit, clean, and air-conditioned environment with a central life-sized statue of the monk, wall panels illustrating his biography and achievements, and his published works, belongings, and relics in glass display cabinets.

the characteristics of a Museum" (ICOM 2017, 3). For the remainder of this article, I use the word "museum" to refer to a museum, gallery, or museum-like memorial hall. While Buddhist museums may be state or privately owned, the ones in Singapore are all privately owned, usually by Chinese Buddhist organizations and more rarely by wealthy individuals.[2] The focus of this study is a subset of these Buddhist museums that are *erected explicitly to commemorate (usually deceased) sangha* (Skt. *saṃgha*; Buddhist ordained monks or nuns). These museums may be standalone memorialization efforts or supplementary to other forms such as stūpas, commemorative volumes, collected works, or the naming of buildings and institutions after the venerables.

The earliest Buddhist museums were set up by British colonial administrators primarily to house archeological finds in Bagan, Myanmar (begun in 1902 and completed in 1904), and Sarnath, India (begun in 1904 and completed in 1908). One of the first privately owned Buddhist museums is the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art in New York, established in 1945. In Singapore, the first Buddhist museological space seems to be Nei Xue Tang (内学堂), which opened in 2005.

The academic study of Buddhist museums appears to have begun in earnest in 2003 in the field of Thai Buddhism with the studies by Louis Gabaude, who observes that Thai Buddhist museums are but a natural progression from the centuries-old Buddhist practice of erecting stūpas (dome- or mound-shaped shrines for relics) to one "where nothing is kept aside or unseen" (Gabaude 2003b, 117) and that these museums are pedagogical instruments showing "Buddhahood in action, Buddhahood here and now, Buddhahood visible, as solid as crystal" (Gabaude 2003a, 181). Paritta Koanantakool (2006, 158) finds that many Thai Buddhist museums' collections originated as gifts and offerings, while Christina Kreps (2014) explores Thai temple museums by highlighting the stark differences between the object-based and information-oriented epistemological practices of Western museology, and the unique practices of these museums, where the emphasis is on "people's emotional, spiritual engagement with and experience of objects" (Kreps 2014, 232). Kreps also observes that "there is not one universal museology but a world full of museologies" (Kreps 2014, 251).

Closer to Singapore, Jack Chia (2017) describes a Buddhist memorial hall in Indo-

2) While the Buddhist religious landscape in Singapore is diverse, with representations from Theravāda, Chinese Mahāyāna, and Tibetan traditions as well as other New Religious Movements, this study focuses primarily on Chinese Buddhist organizations. Some interview excerpts conducted at a Tibetan Buddhist center are also included because this organization has explicitly made known its plan to establish a Buddhist relics museum, which to date has not materialized (*Straits Times*, December 12, 2006; *Lianhe Zaobao*, August 14, 2006). The center is particularly well known for organizing massive year-end Buddhist relics exhibitions. The *Straits Times* and *Lianhe Zaobao* (联合早报) are the nation's main daily newspapers in English and Chinese respectively.

nesia and concludes that "Buddhist museums can also serve as a space to present the hagiography of an eminent monk" (Chia 2017, 274). In one of the earliest studies of Buddhist museums in Singapore, I (Goh 2016) present a succinct account of the Nagapuspa Buddhist Culture Museum; while Justin McDaniel (2016) focuses on the collecting practices of the founder of Nei Xue Tang. In his monograph on "socially disengaged Buddhism"—a twist on "socially engaged Buddhism"—McDaniel (2017, 135–147) devotes a mostly descriptive chapter to the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, which houses the Nagapuspa Buddhist Culture Museum and the Eminent Sangha Museum. None of the above studies, however, investigated the causal factors or motivations that may have led to the general proliferation of Buddhist museums or the particular emergence of hagiographic Buddhist museums in Singapore.

Since no two hagiographic Buddhist museums are homologous, it may be more useful to think of them as occupying points on a spectrum within the definition proffered earlier with varying degrees of emphasis and display strategies. Nonetheless, to give readers a sense of what such a museum may look like, I describe below certain commonalities of hagiographic museums while noting that no museum fits exactly this ideal type. I start with the example of 80 Gallery, which has a balanced mix of hagiographic and peripheral elements, and then explain other features not found there.

The now-defunct 80 Gallery (Songnian Shuyuan 松年书院) was housed in a rented two-story, air-conditioned commercial building in Chinatown and was open daily except Mondays and public holidays.[3] Songnian (松年, 1911–97) was a famed Chinese calligrapher and painter, and a former abbot of Mahabodhi Temple in Singapore. Better-endowed museums may have salaried staff, but 80 Gallery was managed by volunteers. Its ground floor was a merchandise area with a small exhibition space available for rent. The second level was a permanent place for the memorialization of the venerable (see Fig. 1). According to its poster, it featured the "master's belongings such as flywhisk, ink stone, brushes, cassock, and others, together with the masterpieces of calligraphy and painting." It also had a bust of the monk and two panels extolling the life stories and achievements of Songnian and Guojun (果峻, 1974–), the current abbot of Mahabodhi Temple.[4] Admission to the gallery was free, but there were paid classes for meditation, *taiko* drumming, *taiji* (tai chi), Chinese calligraphy, and painting, which attracted non-Buddhist visitors.

Other features of hagiographic Buddhist museums not present at this gallery may

3) Opening dates and times for hagiographic Buddhist museums in Singapore vary greatly depending on the management. They can range from being open for only a couple of special days each year to daily, but admission is usually free.

4) Guojun is Songnian's disciple who established the gallery in 2010. No academic study has been conducted on Songnian yet, despite his prominence in the local Buddhist community.

Fig. 1 Second Floor of 80 Gallery
Source: Goh Aik Sai.

include worship spaces, displays of *śarīras* (cremated somatic relics), honorific titles and fans, texts, Buddha statues, and other artworks previously owned by the monks.[5] Display labels, if present, are generally bilingual in English and Chinese.[6] Some may also have interactive touchscreen displays. The museums' contents depend on the areas their creators decide to focus on and the venerables' achievements. Although there is no standardized format for these museums, a common thread running through them is the impetus to construct an explicitly museological space to commemorate eminent sangha. Unlike Thailand or Cambodia, there is no single authority governing Buddhist monastics

5) This alludes to the collecting practices of individual monastics, which are beyond the scope of this paper. For example, Kong Hiap was the recipient of hundreds of calligraphic works and paintings from his close associates in China, which are now displayed in his memorial museum. By contrast, Hong Choon was not an avid collector, and his museum showcases mainly his personal items such as his work desk and chair.

6) Labels are usually provided for the museums' main exhibits, but their provision may be dependent on factors such as the museums' resources and expertise. The labels are normally in English and simplified Chinese following the nation's promotion of English and "mother tongue" languages, including Mandarin Chinese. Since the hagiographic museums in this study were set up by Chinese Buddhist organizations and most of their devotees are ethnic Chinese, having Chinese labels can be seen as instrumental as well as aligning with a particular form of Asian modernity (Rappa and Wee 2006, 77–104) and China's growing political and economic clout (see Wong and Tan 2017, 27–28).

in Singapore.[7] As such, the question of whether and how a monastic is to be memorialized is contingent on the respective community's leadership and wherewithal. Frequently, decisions are made by the sangha's immediate successor and the temple's board of directors or trustees.

What follows is an investigation into the vicissitudes of the local Buddhist community after World War II, when various monks who settled in Singapore from China contributed to arresting the religion's decline by implementing a gradual but spirited reformation. Since they were approximately of the same age group, a significant number of them passed on in the 1990s, triggering a passionate memorializing movement culminating in the construction of hagiographic Buddhist museums, galleries, and memorial halls in the 2000s. I then show how these museums are related to didacticism, heuristics, and skillful means. It should be noted that the movement is neither organized by a collective body nor systemic but was a trend comprising disparate initiatives by independent organizations which took form ten to 16 years after the demise of each individual monk destined for memorialization.

Religious Rivalry

Like other religions in Singapore, Buddhism is in a constant state of flux due to societal, religious, economic, demographic, and political changes. A significant factor contributing to these changes is pressure from proselytizing religions. It has been conclusively shown that religious competition and conversion were rife in Singapore in the second half of the twentieth century following a "concerted proselytization drive" (Tong 2007, 192) by Christians in the 1960s–80s (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 5; Goh 2014, 127).[8] Scholars concur that from independence in 1965 up to the 1980s, Singapore experienced a "Charismatic Renewal movement" from Christian churches, which resulted in an increase of Christians among the Chinese from 2.4 percent in 1921 to 2.8 percent in 1931, 10.6 percent in 1980, and 14 percent in 1990 according to official censuses[9] (Kuo and Tong 1995, 8). Researchers point out that even though the figure is not high, the converts were "better educated

7) The official regulatory authority of most religious groups is the state's Commission of Charities, because religious groups tend to register as charitable organizations. The closest one gets to a supervisory body for Buddhist centers is the Singapore Buddhist Federation, but it has no authority over its members and membership is not mandatory. The federation usually acts as a spokesperson on behalf of the Buddhist community, even though not all Buddhist organizations belong to it.

8) See Quah (1989, 63) for an exposition of the four main factors accounting for the success of Protestant Christianity in Singapore.

9) This figure further increased to 16.5 percent in 2000 (Saw 2007, 42) and 20.1 percent in 2010 (Saw 2012, 42). Between 1931 and 1980, no data on religious affiliation was gathered in official censuses.

and of higher socio-economic status. . . . As such, they tended to be more visibly involved in evangelistic activities, and exerted much influence in Singapore socially and economically, disproportionate to their size" (Kuo and Tong 1995, 17).

A 1988 report commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development found that "most of the [Christian] converts come from families where their parents are Buddhists, Taoists, or practise ancestor worship" (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 15).[10] In other words, the primary arena of religious change taking place was within the Chinese populace (Kuo and Tong 1995, 32). The authors identified the "push" factors as (1) a "general dissatisfaction among young Chinese Singaporeans with the beliefs and rituals associated with their parents' religion," which was heralded as "illogical," "unrealistic," and "superstitious" (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 15); and (2) young Chinese Singaporeans being benighted with respect to doctrines of their parents' religion. The "pull" factors were (1) the lack of an alternative religion, with Hinduism and Islam being ethnically and racially linked to Indians and Malays,[11] and Christianity being seen as a nonaligned religion (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 16); (2) the perception of Christianity as modern, English-based, "rational, orderly and systematic" (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 17); and (3) the aggressive evangelism sanctioned by churches and the sense of communal belonging engendered by their ecumenical activities (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 17–18). An additional pull factor, I posit, was the introduction of "Religious Knowledge" (see below) as a subject in secondary schools, which further raised consciousness of Christianity (Tan 1997, 616; Kuo *et al.* 1988, 15). Twenty years after the report, other empirical research reaffirmed the persistent concern that Buddhism was still not as attractive as Christianity to the younger generation (Chew 2008).

While the proportion of people self-identifying as Buddhists has increased over the years, there is no monolithic Buddhist identity in Singapore. Those who profess to be adherents of the religion, especially older Chinese, may know little of its essential canons and associate Buddhism with Taoism or Confucianism (Wee 1976, 180). This group of nominal Buddhists—or what some have called "Chinese Religionists," "Shenists,"[12] or

10) The ministry commissioned and published five reports written by scholars (Kuo *et al.* 1988; Kuo 1989; Kuo and Quah 1989; Quah 1989; Tong 1989) that elicited widespread media coverage and drew attention to the dramatic increase of Christians, especially among younger and better-educated Chinese. Michael Hill (2004, 351) asserts that the resultant backlash partly contributed to the withdrawal of the Religious Knowledge syllabus in 1989.

11) Tham Seong Chee (1984) notes that Christians were prohibited from proselytizing to these two ethnic groups, thus limiting their target only to the Chinese. The then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had, as early as 1965, directed Christians to cease proselytizing to Muslims (Thio 1995, 33n18).

12) Shenism (and its adherents, Shenists) derives its name from the worship of spirits (*shen* 神) and is characterized by an "eclectic mix of the wider Chinese cosmology that includes Daoist understanding of the polarity of yin and yang and the five elements, Buddhist understanding of karma, death and rebirth, and selected Confucian values. It also includes the worshipping of various folk gods and deities" (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 3; see also Elliott [1955] 2020, 29).

"Syncretists"—are deemed to be superstitious, conservative, and out of touch with modern society since they possess only a superficial understanding of the religion mixed with non-doctrinal customs and beliefs. Due to the pervasiveness of this usually older group—primarily grandparents, parents, or elders in traditional Chinese hierarchical families—and their inability to satisfy the spiritual needs of the younger generation, Buddhism is deemed to have lost its broad appeal to the latter group of people. As a result, the younger generation has gravitated toward Christianity, which is perceived as modern, rational, progressive, and an asset in striving for upward socioeconomic mobility (Tong 2007, 82, 93) through, for instance, networking with fellow brethren during regular church meetings. In this respect, "dissatisfaction with the existing Chinese religious landscape has provided fertile ground for the Christian evangelists to proselytize and convert a substantial number of younger Singaporean Chinese" (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 272).

Mission Schools and Religious Knowledge

Statistics from a 1988 ministerial survey found a strong positive correlation between the religious affiliation of the school a person attended and his or her religion, and that students from Christian mission schools were three times more likely to convert to Christianity than students from secular schools (Kuo and Quah 1989, 26). The significance of social relationships and the wish to be accepted by peers means that the formative teenage years are most susceptible to religious switching (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 14–15; Kuo and Quah 1989, 35). It has also been hypothesized that once a child reaches the age of 13, a "window of conversion" opens (Kuo and Quah 1989, 34). According to the 1990 population census, 45.3 percent of those who converted did so when they were less than twenty years old (Kuo and Tong 1995, 34). Phyllis Chew (2008, 389, Table 16.5) finds that 60.1 percent, or 95 (n = 158), of her 12- to 18-year-old informants switched to Christianity. Thus, the evidence strongly suggests that one of the principal locales in which Chinese were targeted and converted by evangelistic Christian groups was mission schools, especially among the Protestant denominations (Kuo 1989, 23). Indeed, Tong Chee Kiong (2007, 101) reports that more than half of his interviewees converted to Christianity in school.

In the 1990s, S. Gopinathan (1995, 18) reported that there were a whopping total of sixty Christian mission schools in Singapore: 28 primary, 31 secondary, and one pre-university. These "provide a fertile environment for the promotion of Christian faith and the conversion of non-Christian students to Christianity" (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 38). In sharp

contrast, there are only three Buddhist mission schools[13]—two primary and one secondary—resulting in a feeling among Buddhists that their community botched the chance to play a major role in the local secular educational system. I conjecture here that this is principally due to (1) the lack of cohesiveness and affirmative action within the Chinese Buddhist community during the colonial era and the early years of nationhood; (2) the greater affinity of early Chinese immigrants with their respective clans (Pang 2016, 30), partly on account of their indiscriminate syncretic perception of Chinese religions; and therefore (3) the diversion of any available funds to the Chinese medium school-building efforts of higher-profile local Chinese clan associations (Lim 2019, 426), which by and large catered to the needs of the Chinese population (Pang 2016, 30–31) and thus enervated other analogous endeavors.[14] Overall, these clans founded a respectable total of 44 schools, of which only a trifling 11 survived after the introduction of the national school system.[15]

With only three Buddhist mission schools, it is unsurprising that when the government decided in 1984 to introduce Religious Knowledge in secondary schools, Chinese parents (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 246) and Buddhist leaders alike lauded the gesture, notwithstanding the fact that Bible Knowledge and Islamic Religious Knowledge were already allowed to be taught as examination subjects in Christian mission schools and Malay medium schools respectively starting from 1979 (Tan 2008, 323; Chia 2011, 394). In other words, compared to other religious educational institutions, Christian mission schools and government-aided Malay schools had a head start of five years of ministry-sanctioned religious education for their students.

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13) I distinguish between Buddhist mission schools and other tertiary-level Buddhist schools. The former are schools allied with Buddhist organizations that offer national-level secular compulsory education for children of school-going age. In these schools, Buddhism is taught as an optional and non-examinable subject outside of curriculum time. The latter are non-secular schools, often housed within the premises of temples, that provide diploma and above certificates in Buddhist Studies only. See Table 2.

14) For example, the Singapore Buddhist Girls' School was purportedly closed due to lack of funds (Ong 2005, 120). The huge discrepancy in the numbers between Christian and Buddhist mission schools, and its relationship to religious conversion, is a subject that warrants further research and is noticeably absent from the work of scholars. Tong (2007, 3), for example, sidesteps the issue with his comment that "as the number of Singaporeans who attend mission schools is quite small, it is not sufficient to account for the massive growth in the number of Christians in Singapore." Robbie Goh (2008) remains the authority on Singapore Christian mission schools, and Lim Guan Hock (2019) provides an excellent overview of Chinese education in Singapore from 1819 to 1979 but says nothing about Buddhist mission schools.

15) Of the 11, eight were primary schools, two were secondary schools, and one was a polytechnic (Chang and Yan 2005, 338). There were other non-clan Chinese schools as well: according to Tay Lian Soo (2001, 38), there were a total of 349 Chinese schools in 1949.

During the six years of implementation of Religious Knowledge—from 1984 to 1989[16]—Buddhist Studies quickly became the most popular choice for three reasons: (1) the perceived need for "cultural continuity" by Chinese parents for their children (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 208); (2) its relative ease of study vis-à-vis Confucian Ethics, which was the only other included Chinese "religion" (Tan 1997, 615); and (3) the omission of Taoism as a Religious Knowledge option even though 29.3 percent of the population—the largest group at the time—self-identified as Taoists in the 1980 census (Khoo 1981, 3, Table 9.1). Since nominal Buddhists are not discriminating with regard to the different Chinese religions, as explained above, the only tenable choice for their children—with Taoism out of contention and the relative difficulty of Confucian Studies—was Buddhist Studies.

Buddhism was thus unwittingly propelled into the national consciousness through its inclusion in the official syllabus. The availability of Buddhist Studies in English (as well as Mandarin) also helped lessen its association with the Chinese language, which by the 1980s had been de-emphasized through the closure of all Chinese medium schools or their conversion to English medium schools. In other words, this curtailed the aforementioned "pull" factor of Christianity for its affiliation with the English language.

Early Reformist Monks

Any elation stemming from the Religious Knowledge initiative proved to be short-lived when the government decided to scale down the initiative starting in 1990, which led to enrollment in these classes plummeting. In one school, for example, students taking Buddhist Studies dropped from six full classes in 1990 to only 15 students in 1992 (*Straits Times*, June 28, 1992).[17]

Along with the dismal Buddhist representation in public education, the dire situation of a "zero-sum game" (Tong 2007, 78) taking place between religions gave urgency to the need for religious education to be conducted by the Buddhist organizations themselves. This led to much soul-searching as Buddhist organizations combated dwindling membership driven by the two factors of disillusionment of existing adherents and what

16) Religious Knowledge was gradually phased out beginning in 1990, when it became a non-compulsory subject, and in 1995, when it was no longer admissible as a subject for pre-university admission.

17) Although this affected all Religious Knowledge subjects equally, the impact stemming from its withdrawal affected Buddhists more significantly because, as mentioned previously, Buddhist mission schools were disproportionately outnumbered by Christian mission schools; and without any alternative avenues for the dissemination of Buddhism, Buddhist leaders feared that any fledging interest in schooling teenagers in the religion would wane.

appeared to be en masse conversion to Christianity, which began as early as the 1950s, especially with the introduction of para-church groups whose "primary mission was the proselytization and conversion of Singaporeans" (Tong 2007, 78).

The confluence of the above circumstances forced traditionally non-proselytizing Buddhism to reform principally in two areas: (1) a broadening of Buddhist organizations' social welfare programs, and (2) the intellectualization of Buddhist organizations' religion. The former was pivotal in endearing Buddhism to the populace since religious organizations have been called upon by the government to "walk the talk" by assisting the needy, sick, or elderly (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 244–246). Some such actions are extremely high-profile: for instance, the annual Ren Ci Hospital Charity Show, which taps national television coverage and celebrity endorsement that serve to further publicize and legitimize the religion.[18)]

The intellectualization of Buddhism was a three-pronged effort to revamp the religion through doctrinal education; simplification or extirpation of rituals and customs; and modernization of its institutions, including greater involvement of the laity. Accordingly, Buddhist temples and organizations began holding regular dharma classes in English and Chinese, discussion groups, seminars, lectures, and even holiday camps (Tong 2007, 129–130; Kuah-Pearce 2009, 234–240), amounting to what the sociologist Tong Chee Kiong called the "Christianization" of Buddhism (Tong 2007, 130).[19)]

The emphasis on doctrinal education was part of a demythologization exercise to exorcise Buddhism from other Chinese religions, prompted in part by the efforts of a second generation of modernist-leaning Chinese monks who had migrated to Singapore seeking refuge from the ravages of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. These migrant monks, including Kong Hiap (Guangqia 广洽, 1901–94), Hong Choon (Hongchuan 宏船, 1907–90), and

18) The charity show, first held in 2003, contributed to half of the hospital's revenue. It was suspended in 2008–9 following a high-profile embezzlement scandal involving its founder and then CEO Mingyi but was reinstated in 2010.

19) Some scholars view this phenomenon as mirroring certain common Christian practices such as outings, camps, and Sunday Bible classes. Tong (2007, 130) calls it "Christianization" not only to show that these activities span most Christian denominations in Singapore, but also to distinguish it from another concept encapsulated by the phrase "Protestant Buddhism." Coined by Gananath Obeyesekere (1970, 46–47), the term first referred to cultural borrowing or intercultural mimesis between Buddhists and Protestants in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka but has since been revised by others to denote attributes of Buddhism in many modern societies and is related to the notion of Buddhist modernism (McMahan 2008, 7–8). The majority of Christian denominations in Singapore are Pentecostal, followed by those belonging to non-Pentecostal evangelical congregations, and lastly Catholic churches, with Protestants outnumbering Catholics two to one according to Daniel Goh (2010, 55).

Yen Pei (Yanpei 演培, 1917–96), either directly received their education from or were inspired by the progenitors of what is now called "Humanistic Buddhism" (Renjian Fojiao 人间佛教). These progenitors included famed Republican-era Chinese venerables such as the reformist monk Taixu (太虚, 1890–1947) and the artist-musician turned monk Hongyi (弘一, 1880–1942), also known by his lay name, Li Shutong (李叔同).[20]

Taixu, who visited Singapore in 1926, 1928, and 1940, had advocated "a revitalization of Buddhism through institutional reorganization, modern education, compassionate social action, and ecumenical cooperation in global mission" (Pittman 2001, 2). Taixu's reform activities in China were considered so advanced that a well-circulated Christian newsletter at the time encouraged its clergy to "learn from them" (*Chinese Recorder* 1933, 12, 797, quoted in Tarocco 2007, 121).

On the other hand, Hongyi, who was a peer of Taixu but never visited Singapore, was the spiritual master of Kong Hiap, the subject of the Kong Hiap Memorial Museum in Singapore. Besides his calligraphic works, Hongyi is extolled for composing the music to Taixu's lyrics for the "Three Jewels Song" (*Sanbaoge* 三宝歌), which has become a Buddhist anthem of sorts for Chinese Buddhists (Tarocco 2007, 121). However, unlike Taixu, Hongyi was not interested in institutional Buddhism and did not take up any administrative duties or leadership positions. While Hongyi is now often thought of as leading the ascetic life of a wandering *dhutaṅga* (*toutuo* 头陀), he also traveled to, stayed at, and lectured in various monasteries. His practice of Buddhism integrated the traditions of Pure Land, Huayan, and Vinaya (Buddhist monastic disciplinary rules) (Xu 2009). Of these, it was the Nanshan (南山) Vinaya school of Daoxuan (道宣, 596–667 CE) that he was most intent on reviving, in response to a widely perceived decline in monastic discipline; this can also be seen as an effort to demythologize and strip Buddhism of superstition (Ritzinger 2017, 54, 59–60). Hongyi's prodigious use of calligraphy with photography, for instance, exemplified the process of constructing a Chinese modernity informed by tradition in conjunction with new technologies (Birnbaum 2017, 194). Thus, Hongyi's modernity "did not consist of abandoning a Chinese past, so much as finding different roots in tradition and eventually combining this with the new currents of the age" (Birnbaum 2003, 101).

Other monks who visited Singapore include Huiquan (会泉, 1874–1943), the founder of the Minnan Buddhist Institute (Minnan Foxueyuan 闽南佛学院) in Xiamen, China, who gave dharma talks at Leong San Temple in 1939. Cihang (慈航, 1895–1954), a graduate of the Minnan Buddhist Institute, visited Singapore in 1940 as part of Taixu's

20) The literature on Humanistic Buddhism is vast, but see the recent introductory Yü (2020, 215–216). For Taixu, see Pittman (2001); for Hongyi, see Birnbaum (2003; 2007; 2017); and for Hongyi and Humanistic Buddhism, see Wang (2008).

entourage and stayed there until 1948, during which time he established the Leng Foong Bodhi Institute (Lingfeng Puti Xueyuan 灵峰菩提学院) and gave daily teachings there. These and many other pioneering monks, while steeped in traditional rituals, brought with them notions of modernizing Buddhism. They sowed the seeds for a later generation of monks to take up their mantle when confronted with the need to stem defections resulting from the onslaught of Christian proselytism and widespread dissatisfaction associated with the advent of the national education system.

Buddhist Intellectual Reforms

As explained earlier, the intellectualization of Buddhism took the form of education, simplification of rituals, and institutional modernization. Tong (2007, 127–128) explains that the "intellectualization of religion refers to a process where individuals shift from an unthinking and passive acceptance of religion to one where there is a tendency to search for a religion that they regard as systematic, logical, and relevant." Beginning in the immediate post-war period, reform-minded monks realized the importance of religious education for the laity not only for religious indoctrination but also as a form of social responsibility. These efforts manifested mainly in three ways: (1) the establishment of secular and religious schools, (2) the introduction of regular "Sunday dharma classes,"[21] and (3) the inception of extracurricular Buddhist societies in institutes of higher learning.

The first school established by a local Buddhist organization—the Singapore Chinese Buddhist Association—was the Chinese Buddhist Association Free School, with an enrollment of a hundred students from 1946 to 1961 (McDougall 1956, 38; Shi *et al.* 2010, 315–316). In 1957 the association bought a 3,400-square-foot three-story building at 73 Neil Road to use as its permanent base and school premises. Unfortunately the school closed in 1961, due allegedly to its shabbiness and failure to abide by the stringent hygiene requirements of the Ministry of Education (Ji 2008, 75–76).

The Singapore Girls Buddhist Institute (Xinjiapo Nüzi Foxueyuan 新加坡女子佛学院), which also no longer exists, was established in 1962 by the layman Lin Taxian (林达坚) (Shi *et al.* 2010, 412). Officially registered with the Ministry of Education in February 1962 as a private religious school, which meant it did not receive any government funding, it provided secular as well as religious education from primary to above second-

21) I am utilizing the nomenclature for such classes although they may not, strictly speaking, be held on Sundays. They may be organized on weekdays (usually in the evenings), although the majority are likely to be on weekends.

ary levels for its mix of local and overseas, lay and ordained students.[22] It changed its name to Singapore Buddhist Institute (Xinjiapo Fojiaoxueyuan 新加坡佛教学院), likely in 1977 (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, May 27, 1977).[23] Possibly due to low enrollment, by 1977 or 1978 it was operating as a Buddhist mission kindergarten during the day and holding youth classes in English and Chinese in the evening (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, May 10, 1978).

Two Buddhist primary schools, Maha Bodhi School and Mee Toh School, were founded in 1948 and 1954 respectively.[24] Manjusri Secondary School, the last entrant on the scene of vernacular Buddhist mission schools, took in its first students in 1982.[25] Both Manjusri Secondary School and Maha Bodhi School are now administered by the Singapore Buddhist Federation, while Mee Toh School is a government-aided school with ties to the local chapters of the Taiwan-based Tzu Chi (Ciji 慈济, lit. Compassion Relief) and Fo Guang Shan (佛光山). Mee Toh School is also the brainchild of Kong Hiap, the subject of a hagiographic Buddhist museum, who abandoned his plans for a new temple in favor of building a school on the adjacent grounds of Leong San Temple.

The Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore was set up in 1994 by the Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple, located at 30 Jalan Eunos. Affiliated with the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, from where its certificates are issued, it offers programs leading to a diploma in Buddhism as well as bachelor's and master's degrees in Buddhist Studies. Since 2007 the Buddhist Library Graduate School at 2 Lorong 24A Geylang has offered a postgraduate diploma in Buddhist Studies as well as a master's program in Buddhist Studies in collaboration with the University of Kelaniya, also in Sri Lanka. The syllabi of both these schools are based on the tenets of Theravāda Buddhism.

In 2006 the Buddhist College of Singapore, housed within Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (Guangming Shan Pujue Chan Si 光明山普觉禅寺), opened its doors to its first batch of students. Specializing in Chinese Buddhism, it is open for admission only to the ordained. Its bachelor's and master's programs are offered in Chinese and English. The college is not affiliated with other universities; it awards its own degrees. Chia (2009) suggests that this college can be seen as a product of reformist Buddhism.

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22) Its enrollment was very low: in 1970, for example, it had only four nuns and six lay students in its higher-level class, and three nuns and ten lay students in its primary-level class (Singapore Girls Buddhist Institute Management Committee 1970, 29–30).

23) *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商报) was a daily Chinese-language newspaper that operated from 1923 to 1983, when it merged with another local newspaper to form the present-day *Lianhe Zaobao*.

24) *Mahā bodhi* means "great enlightenment" in Sanskrit (Ch: *Da puti* 大菩提) and in this context refers to the Buddha's enlightenment. Mee Toh (Mituo 弥陀) is the abbreviated name of a celestial Buddha popular in Mahāyāna Buddhism called Amitābha (Amituofo 阿弥陀佛), meaning "limitless light" (see Karashima 2009). This Buddha is the main object of devotion for Buddhist Pure Land practitioners.

25) Mañjuśrī is the name of the Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism symbolizing wisdom.

Table 2 Singapore Buddhist Schools

Year Opened	Name of School	Programs	Premises	Affiliation
1948	Maha Bodhi School	Primary education	Has its own independent premises	Singapore Buddhist Federation
1954	Mee Toh School	Primary education	Has its own independent premises	Nil
1982	Manjusri Secondary School	Secondary education	Has its own independent premises	Singapore Buddhist Federation
1994	Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore	Diploma in Buddhism BA in Buddhist Studies MA in Buddhist Studies	Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple	Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka
2006	Buddhist College of Singapore	BA in Buddhist Studies MA in Buddhist Studies	Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery	Awards its own degrees
2007	Buddhist Library Graduate School	Postgraduate Diploma in Fundamental Buddhist Studies MA in Buddhist Studies	Buddhist Library	University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

The extant Singapore Buddhist schools are listed in Table 2.

Concomitant with the development of schools was the widespread beginning of Sunday dharma classes from the 1940s onward (Ong 2005, 118–119). This category of education arguably reaches the highest number of Buddhists since almost every Buddhist temple or center today offers some form of dharma classes. I present here, by way of example, the case of the Sunday dharma classes organized by the Fuhui Auditorium (Fuhui Jiangtang 福慧讲堂).[26] Yen Pei, the center's immediate past abbot, a graduate of the Minnan Buddhist Institute in China and the subject of a museological memorial hall, strongly felt the need for Buddhist education for the laity in the early 1970s. Accordingly, he and his heart disciple (closest student, usually the designated successor), Venerable Kuan Yan (宽严, 1947–)—the present abbess, whom he ordained in 1969—initiated Sunday dharma classes in Singapore on April 22, 1973, at the Leng Foong Prajñā Auditorium. The duo restarted classes at the Fuhui Auditorium in Punggol when it was completed in 1985.

Currently divided into morning and afternoon sessions on Sundays, the two-hour-long lessons conducted in Mandarin Chinese range from kindergarten to adult levels. They are taught by a mix of nuns and adult volunteers who graduated from the program themselves. Yearly enrollment is perpetually full, with several parents being turned away and their children put on waiting lists. For instance, the enrollment for the 2013 cohort

26) The information and data presented here was gathered during my employment as a senior operations and program executive at its Buddhist Cultural Center from July 2013 to January 2014, which involved supervising, planning, and managing the Sunday class program.

was 293 for children's classes (kindergarten to primary levels), ninety for youth classes (secondary level and above), and 255 for adult classes, for a total of 638 students. These figures remained quite constant from 2009 to 2013. The entire Sunday program is run like a formal school with its own syllabi, textbooks, assemblies prior to classes with the singing of the school song, monthly teachers' meetings, year-end examinations, initiation and graduation ceremonies, and holiday youth camps at rented Ministry of Education sites.

While data for similar programs in other temples is generally not available publicly, it would not be too far-fetched to postulate that similar figures exist for large Buddhist organizations such as the Singapore Buddhist Federation, Singapore Buddhist Lodge, and Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, and on a diminishing scale relative to the size of the Buddhist centers.

Beginning in 1959, Buddhist groups were also set up in local public universities and polytechnics (Ong 2005, 115–116). These provide a last-gasp "catchment" forum for teenagers before they enter the workforce. Incorporated as students' societies in tertiary institutions, these groups serve as indirect legitimation for Buddhism, which has traditionally been negatively associated with educational level (Kuo and Tong 1995, 21). While Buddhist Studies is not offered as a full-fledged course of study or discipline at these institutions, the opportunity to explore Buddhism in a leisurely way as a young adult in the absence of parental or peer pressure—as may be the case at home or in primary and secondary schools—means that individuals can boldly enter into more "mature" and rational conversations about the religion with the groups' spiritual adviser, who is usually a local sangha or respected lay preacher. By meeting and forming camaraderie with like-minded highly educated Buddhists of a similar age and background (Tong 1989, 18), the person is vindicated in his choice and no longer worries about being disadvantaged socio-economically. Indeed, it has been noted that Buddhism is becoming a "viable option" (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 40) and thus has enticed a greater number of learned and younger Chinese (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 27; Kuo and Tong 1995, 57). Echoing these findings, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong commented in a 1997 speech at the annual dinner of the Sagaramudra Buddhist Society that more "younger and better-educated Singaporeans" were now attracted to Buddhism because Buddhist organizations had distinguished themselves from other Chinese religions through intellectualization (*Straits Times*, August 3, 1997).[27)]

Through such multifaceted pedagogical efforts, nominal Buddhists are systemati-

27) Tong Chee Kiong (2007, 89, 92) opines that better-educated Singaporeans are more likely to change from their traditional religions to Christianity or Buddhism, and that religious change is positively correlated with socioeconomic status.

cally "transformed" into "doctrinal" Buddhists. As Peter Jackson (1999, 261) explains in the context of Thai Buddhism, doctrinal Buddhists are those who "imagine their religion as a standardized, internally coherent set of beliefs and related practices" and are concerned with "orthodoxy, or correct doctrinal belief." Accordingly, Buddhists in Singapore self-identify as Buddhists rather than Taoists or Shenists (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 24, 27–28; Tong 2007, 250). This has partly accounted for the phenomenal increase in those professing to be Buddhists—from 27 percent in 1980 to 31.2 percent in 1990 and 42.5 percent in 2000, although the number declined to 33.3 percent in 2010 (Wong 2011, 13). As Buddhists become more knowledgeable about their faith, they see it as a "logical, systematic, and relevant religion," which satisfies their search for meaning in life (Tong 1989, 17).

The second intellectual reform that Buddhists undertook was the simplification, paring down, or abandonment of overly ritualistic practices and droning chanting (Clammer 1991, 87). Anecdotal observations suggest that numerous temples have downplayed these, which are principally practiced by the older generation (who are still an important source of financial support for the organizations), and adopted easier and shorter prayers for younger attendees. These prayers, if conducted at all, are usually followed or supplanted by a sermon, meditation, or discussion class. Y. D. Ong (2005, 192) describes these as the "singing of hymns in Sunday classes, choir groups, question and answer sessions."

The third practice implemented by reformist Buddhist centers was institutional modernization. The administration of temples is now performed by a bureaucracy that is governed by its own constitution and follows the rules of the Registrar of Societies (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 95–99). Accounts are subject to audit and scrutiny, and any impropriety is promptly reported by the authorities and brought before the courts, as evidenced by the high-profile 2007 scandal involving Ren Ci Hospital and Medicare Center (Renci Yiyuan 仁慈医院). Its then CEO, Mingyi (明义, 1962–), best known for undertaking extreme physical feats during televised fundraising events, was found guilty of inappropriate use of temple funds and eventually sentenced to six months in jail (*Straits Times*, May 28, 2010).

Coupled with this bureaucratization is the greater involvement of lay Buddhists. The trend of including the laity began with the introduction and growth of lay Buddhist organizations (Ong 2005, 76–78, 107–110), which in itself was a radical trend since Buddhist centers have traditionally been monasteries populated exclusively by the ordained. The first lay Buddhist organization in Singapore was the aforementioned Singapore Chinese Buddhist Association, founded in 1927, whose claim to fame is its association with the monk Taixu but which has otherwise stayed relatively small over the years.

The second, established in 1934, was Singapore Buddhist Lodge (Hue and Dean 2016, 179), which has risen to be one of the biggest local players in Buddhism.

In brief, in response to religious competition, criticism of irrelevance, and desertion among their ranks, Buddhist organizations reacted by shifting their focus from ritualistic chanting to a more systematic study of the Buddhist doctrine and meditation. Besides embarking on educational programs for their lay community, they sought to reframe themselves as modern, state-of-the-art, and relevant to contemporary society. To elicit wider public awareness, and inspired by the mammoth efforts of transnational Buddhist groups such as Tzu Chi—a socially engaged Buddhist organization well known for its global disaster response teams—they made social welfare activities and charitable fund-raising a major part of their modus operandi. They also introduced English Buddhist classes and secular recreational programs such as yoga, vegetarian cooking, and Chinese calligraphy classes. These legitimated their existence and drew on a larger pool of Chinese who otherwise might have apostatized the religion.

Dubbed as reformist Buddhists, they were a significant counterforce to the perceived popularity of Christianity, so much so that they were seen as the force behind a so-called Buddhist revivalism (Kuo *et al.* 1988, 6) and viewed as the main threat to the expansion of Christianity (Rice 2003). They were also touted as the main reason why, while Christians increased by 1.9 percent between 1990 and 2000, Buddhists grew 11.3 percent (Tong 2007, 80). After that, however, according to the 2010 census, the number of Buddhists fell 9.2 percent while the number of Christians continued its ascent by 3.7 percent (Wong 2011, 13).

Eminent Monks in Singapore

The trend of Buddhist reforms gathered force and came to a head when, beginning in the early 1990s, multiple key second-generation monks and nuns passed away (see Table 3). By then, these clerics had acquired fame and prestige almost equivalent to those regarded as Buddhist saints in other countries. Kawanami Hiroko (2009, 214–215) describes three types of charismatic monks in Myanmar: scholarly monks who have been awarded state recognition; learned dharma teachers; and arhats, those considered to have achieved the final goal of the Theravāda path. In his seminal study of medieval Chinese sangha, John Kieschnick (1997) lists three types of esteemed monks: the ascetic, the thaumaturge, and the scholar-monk. Drawing on these studies but adjusting for the local context, I posit that the following categories apply to Singapore Buddhist sangha:

Table 3 Eminent Singapore Chinese Buddhist Sangha Who Passed Away in the 1990s

Name	Positions Held and Awards Received	Deceased On
Ven. Siong Khye (Changkai常凯) (1916–90)	President of the Singapore Buddhist Federation (1988–90) Founder of Manjusri Secondary School Founder of Buddhist Free Clinic (1969) Founder of Qie Tuo Temple (伽陀精舍) BBM (1985) (first Buddhist monk in Singapore to be given this award) Education Service Medal from MOE (1990)	September 7, 1990
Ven. Hong Choon (Hongchuan 宏船) (1907–90)	Founder of the Singapore Buddhist Federation - Vice-President (July 1949 to June 1964) - President (June 1964 to May 1984) Abbot of the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (1947–90) "Supreme Chinese Monk" Award from Thai King (1987)	December 25, 1990
Ven. Yiu Tam (Youtan 优昙) (1908–93)	President of the Singapore Buddhist Federation (1990–92) Abbot of Beeh Low See Buddhist Temple (1987–93)	July 30, 1993
Ven. Kong Hiap (Guangqia 广洽) (1900–94)	Vice-President (1972–85) and President (1986) of the Singapore Buddhist Federation Abbot of Leong San Temple (1952–94) Founder of Mee Toh School (1954) BBM (1988) Meritorious Award from MOE (1990)	February 24, 1994
Ven. Tat Inn (Huiping 慧平 a.k.a. 达贤) (1912–94)	Founding Abbess of Tse Toh Aum Nunnery (1957), the largest nunnery in Singapore President of the Singapore regional center of the World Fellowship of Buddhists	April 26, 1994
Ven. Guang Ghee (Guangyi 广义) (1920–95)	Co-founder of Nanyang University Buddhist Society and Kwan-In Welfare Society Founder of Mahaprajna Buddhist Vihara	November 9, 1995
Ven. Yen Pei (Yanpei 演培) (1917–96)	Abbot of Leng Foong Prajñā Auditorium (1963–79) Abbot of the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (1991–94) Founding Abbot of the Fu Hui Auditorium and Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services (1981–96) PBM (1986), BBM (1992) Buddhist Representative of the 1st Presidential Council for Religious Harmony (1992)	November 10, 1996
Ven. Songnian (松年) (1911–97)	Abbot of Mahabodhi Temple (formerly known as Poh Tai Kok Temple) (1964–97) Esteemed Chinese calligrapher and painter	August 16, 1997
Ven. Guangjing (广净) (1909–97)	Abbot of Leong San Temple (1994–97) Co-founder of Mee Toh School (1954)	August 23, 1997

Notes: PBM: Public Service Medal
BBM: Public Service Star
MOE: Ministry of Education

(1) The state- or peer-recognized monastic
(2) The scholar-monastic
(3) The engaged Mahāyāna monastic

An outstanding sangha may, in practice, possess more than one of the above characteristics, but this taxonomy will help to explain why early reformist monks in Singapore exuded charisma and holy appeal, thus becoming worthy of memorialization. The three features are not arbitrarily designated but are based on empirical observation of what constitutes eminence for monks in Singapore. For instance, the highly regarded Yen Pei, as we will see later, received state awards, was a prolific writer, and was heavily involved in social welfare. In line with the need to stay relevant in society, these external achievements are prized over intangible qualities such as asceticism, clairvoyance, supernatural powers, meditational prowess, or even nirvāṇa, because these belong to the sphere of "mythical and supernatural elements," which are discouraged by reformist Buddhists (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 8–9). The emphases are reflected in the official narratives in the museums, which generally eschew any references to otherworldly achievements.

With respect to the first category, many of the second-generation monks have been recognized by the state through honorary awards—not as religious figures but as persons who contributed greatly to the betterment of civil society. The most common awards they have received are the Public Service Medal and Public Service Star, known by their abbreviations PBM (Malay: Pingat Bakti Masyarakat) and BBM (Malay: Bintang Bakti Masyarakat) respectively. Three of the nine monks listed in Table 3 and some of the Buddhist leaders alive today were given these awards. As mentioned earlier, there is no central authority in Singapore governing the sangha, and so most local monks do not possess ecclesiastical titles. However, a handful have received such awards and honorary degrees from overseas. In the eyes of the public, these awards further legitimize and raise the allure of these monks. Yet, the Buddhist doctrine of renunciation proscribes striving for worldly goals, and these awards may instead undermine their holiness (Kawanami 2009, 224). It was apparently for this reason that Hong Choon, who developed Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery into the largest temple in Singapore (Ho 2012, 947) and was considered by Chinese Buddhists in Singapore in the 1980s to be their "highest religious leader" (Inter-Religious Organisation Singapore 1990, 13, quoted in Chia 2008, 870), was rumored to have refused any awards offered by the government.

The second classification refers to the monks' scholarly output and oratorial ability in teaching the dharma. As graduates from esteemed Buddhist seminaries in China, these

monks were not only skilled in rituals, which was crucial in meeting the simple needs of the laity, but also in giving authoritative sermons, writing, and publishing articles. Yen Pei, who studied under Taixu and was especially close to Yinshun (印顺, 1906–2005) (Chia 2020, 80–86, 101–102, 104), was famed as a learned monk. His scholarly output (estimated at more than eight million words) was ultimately collected as a 34-volume set called *Mindful Awareness Full Works* (*Diguan quanji* 谛观全集) and an addendum comprising 12 tomes called *Sequel to Mindful Awareness* (*Diguan xuji* 谛观续集).[28] These were reprinted as a 45-volume set on the tenth anniversary of his passing away. As a result of the publications, Yen Pei became known as one of the "foremost scholar-monks of Chinese Buddhism in Southeast Asia" (Chia 2020, 105).[29]

The last category alludes to the Mahāyāna motivation and engagement in compassionate actions of benefiting others. Despite the hardship and austerity experienced by many eminent monks in Singapore due to conflicts, unrest, and the tumults of wartime and post-war Singapore,[30] these monks unstintingly organized social assistance efforts and—not forgetting the spiritual needs of the laity—founded temples, monasteries, and dharma centers (see Table 3) where they imparted knowledge and led rituals. These endeavors became the foundations upon which major Buddhist organizations such as Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery and Singapore Buddhist Lodge now stand. "Engaged Buddhism" has been described as the "effort to express the ideals of Buddhism—nonviolence, loving-kindness, and the rest—in practical action" (King 2009, 26). Examples of the myriad social welfare programs implemented by Buddhist organizations

28) See Chia (2020, 77–116) for a detailed biography and achievements of Yen Pei. The individual volumes in the two sets were not published simultaneously: the *Full Works* were published starting from 1978, while the volumes belonging to the *Sequel* were published from 1982. The former also went through different publishers (Chia 2020, 169–173, Appendix C).

29) In 1982 he was also roped in by the government, together with Sheng Yan (圣严, 1930–2009) from Taiwan, Chao Chen (超尘, 1918–2017) from Hong Kong, and the local Long Gen (隆根,1921–2011), to train the inaugural batch of more than 150 secondary school teachers in the implementation of the Religious Knowledge subject. According to Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng (2009, 127), this appointment "firmly established him as one of the main scholar monks in Buddhism in the Singapore society."

30) This may be viewed as their "ascetic" phase of spiritual development. While some medieval Chinese monks practiced asceticism voluntarily (Kieschnick 1997, 33–35), the Singapore Chinese monks experienced austerity, wars, and general unrest in China in the early twentieth century. Many of them were war refugees when they reached the relative safety of colonial Singapore. Coupled with the upheavals of the Japanese occupation and subsequent nation building in Singapore, the monks were more focused on providing critical wartime and postwar material and spiritual relief than engaging in asceticism or prolonged meditational retreats. As a result, none of these monks were particularly known as ascetics or meditators although they went through periods of hardship together with the general populace.

to relieve the suffering of the destitute, sick, and elderly are plentiful. Almost all large Buddhist centers in Singapore today have a social welfare component that caters to the less fortunate. This may be categorized into six areas: (1) care for the elderly, (2) care for the destitute, (3) care for the intellectually challenged, (4) student care, (5) medical assistance, and (6) financial assistance. Through these various altruistic accomplishments the monks are seen as embodying the qualities of a Bodhisattva, although humility—another important Buddhist attribute—dictates that they will never call themselves or be called Bodhisattvas.

While the Buddhist clergy in Thailand and elsewhere may be venerated for what Max Weber (1968, 241) would call persons "endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities," the decidedly rational, skeptical, and secular Singaporean context prescribes that these characteristics, even if genuinely possessed, should not be publicized or admitted publicly.[31] This relates to the secularism of the Singapore state, depoliticization of religions, and prescription from the government for religions to advance positive social values and support (Tong 2007, 236–237, 241). Nonetheless, this has not prevented information of unknown sources from percolating through the grapevine: Hong Choon, for instance, was supposedly a formidable clairvoyant *fengshui* (风水) grandmaster who had connections with the leading politicians and wealthy individuals of his time.

In summary, the second-generation monks were charismatic because they engaged in selfless social welfarism, intellectual reforms, and educational initiatives, which garnered recognition from the state and their peers. Some were also erudite exegetes, eloquent preachers, and prolific authors. Although the scholarly histories of many of these monks remain to be written, anecdotal evidence suggests that their accomplishments will be a hard act to follow for their successors.

Memorialization of Buddhist Masters and Education

When these eminent monks passed away, Buddhist organizations proceeded to memorialize them according to tradition through the preservation and display of the monks' personal effects, writings, and—most significantly—relics from the cremation of their bodies. As in the case of the Thai monks discussed earlier (Gabaude 2003a, 181; 2003b, 116), the presence of these relics gave followers a renewed sense of Buddhist religious fervor since they were a form of afterlife authentication of the holy status of their deceased

31) None of my informants alluded to this aspect when discussing the eminence of monastics.

masters. Eager to display their devotion and armed with a renewed sense of commitment to the Buddhist cause, the monks' successors—the third-generation Buddhist elites—embarked on a near-frenzied phase of building stūpas, memorial halls, and museums. These well-traveled Buddhist leaders modeled the memorials on Buddhist museums and heritage sites they had encountered during their own pilgrimages to overseas Buddhist sacred sites. For example, Venerable Chuanguan (传观, 1973–), the spiritual adviser at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, revealed that "they visited many other museums way before this [Venerable Hong Choon Museum] was built" and were directly or indirectly influenced by their visits.[32] In a similar vein, Lee Bock Guan (Li Muyuan 李木源, 1945–2015), the former president of the Singapore Buddhist Lodge and one of the individuals responsible for the Kong Hiap Memorial Museum, "has seen many in China such as the Hongyi Memorial Hall located within Dakaiyuan temple (大开元寺) [and] . . . observed how they displayed the items."[33] The efforts of third-generation Buddhist elites were assisted by the comparatively longer history of Buddhism (together with other Chinese religions) in Singapore (Tong 2007, 50), which in turn allowed these elites to tap into and showcase the religion's rich local cultural heritage.

Paul Connerton (1989) explains that commemorative places such as memorials and museums can serve as crucial collective social memory sites for a community lamenting the loss of its pioneers.[34] They are also effective as pedagogical tools when experienced as leisure activities. Since the formation of the first public museum, calls have been made for museums to be actively involved in education (Munro 1933; Forbes [1853] 2008), and the use of museums as an educational tool is one of the earliest professed functions of public museums (Hein 2006, 340–341). Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2007) finds that one of the most effective didactic methods is to integrate trips to the local museum into school curricula. Others highlight that museums also function as places of leisure (Stephen 2007). Thus, by utilizing museums as "edutainment" sites (places that blend educational and entertainment elements), Buddhist organizations can make education more effective for those who are unable or unwilling to attend formal dharma classes.

The theme of education loomed large in the responses from my informants. Almost all of them agreed that one of the main functions of the museums they had established or planned to construct was the dissemination of Buddhist knowledge. This was expressed most succinctly by His Holiness Dromtug Rinpoche (Zhongtu Renboqie 种菟

32) Interview by author, March 30, 2015.
33) Interview by author, March 15, 2015. Dakaiyuan temple is in Quanzhou (泉州), China.
34) Strictly speaking, many of the monks and nuns discussed in this paper were not pioneer monks in the sense of being the first monks to arrive in Singapore, but they were pioneers in founding many temples or initiating multiple programs.

仁波切, 1963–), the spiritual director of the Kadhampa Buddhist Association in Singapore, which has had ambitions to establish a Buddhist relics museum since 2006. He said, "The purpose [of the museum] is to propagate the spirit and education of Buddhism and hope that everyone learns the Buddha's mind of great compassion, love, and bodhichitta."[35]

Sharing similar views, the lay chairman of the Kadhampa Buddhist Association, Teng Hong Hai (丁宏海, 1956–), acknowledged that the "main goal [of the museum] is to promote the dharma."[36] Venerable Yongguang (永光, 1971–), the soft-spoken director of the Kong Hiap Memorial Museum, said that "indirectly the museum helps to publicize Buddhism and provides the general public with some knowledge of Buddhism, especially Buddhist arts."[37]

Likewise, the docents whom I interviewed or interacted with assured me that they would provide religious information when asked. They would defer to the venerables-in-residence or senior volunteers if they were unable to answer the questions posed by visitors. This didactic function extends also to non-Buddhists, as echoed by Lee Bock Guan: "Sometimes we have non-Buddhist foreigners who visit and understand more about Buddhism."[38]

The most explicit manifestation of pedagogy in Buddhist museums can be found in an exhibition put up by the short-lived and now-defunct Hai Yin Culture and Arts Research Gallery (Haiyin Wenhua Yishuguan 海印文化艺术馆) from January 9 to March 28, 2010, where panels on general Buddhist ideology and the history of Buddhism in Singapore were displayed together with fine art pieces.

In brief, hagiographic Buddhist museums serve the dual functions of memorialization and education, with one leading naturally into the other—the visitor may be inspired to follow the esteemed venerable's footsteps, that is, the Buddhist path. The pedagogical aspect was corroborated in the visitor surveys I conducted in 2015 at the Venerable Hong Choon Museum and Kong Hiap Memorial Museum—both hagiographic museums—where a whopping total of 86.9 percent or 53 ($n = 61$) felt that the museums could influence their visitors and 72.1 percent or 44 ($n = 61$) thought that visitors may become more empathetic toward Buddhism, even though only 39 per cent or 23 ($n = 59$) answered positively when asked whether the museums could cause someone to become a Bud-

35) Interview by author, August 1, 2015. Bodhichitta refers to the Mahāyāna altruistic aspiration to attain enlightenment for all sentient beings.
36) Interview by author, March 15, 2015.
37) Interview by author, March 1, 2015. He mentioned Buddhist arts because the Kong Hiap Memorial Museum mainly displays artworks by Republican-era Chinese literati, artists, and monks.
38) Interview by author, March 15, 2015.

dhist.[39] While influences from visiting a museum can be readily discerned, it would take more than a cursory visit to convert a visitor to Buddhism, according to my surveyees.

Hagiographic Museums as Heuristics

For hagiographic museums, the educational function takes on a special significance because the visitor is able to learn about and potentially be influenced by the lives of deceased religious persons. Kieschnick (1997, 7) finds that one of the functions of sacred biographies of medieval Chinese monks is the promotion of Buddhism, while Francesca Tarocco (2007) explains that popular media was used for proselytizing Buddhism in Republican China (1912–49). Chia (2015) focuses on how an eminent monk's biography portrays him as a "worldling bodhisattva" in media such as comics and videos.

The concept of hagiography, as Massimo Rondolino (2019, 4–5) explains, is a "heuristic device" "by which a given community constructs the memory of individuals who are recognized as the embodied perfection of the religious ideal promoted by the community's tradition and socio-cultural context."

As mentioned above, the deceased venerables in Singapore led exemplary lives, initiated reforms, produced tomes of work, and were rewarded with local and foreign accolades (see Table 3). For example, Hong Choon was the co-founder and president of the Singapore Buddhist Federation who initiated the grand development of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery during his abbotship (more so than its founder and first abbot, Zhuandao [转道, 1871–1943], who was memorialized with a stūpa) and was awarded the title of "Supreme Chinese Monk" by the Thai king in 1987 (Ho 2012, 949). He was also pivotal in the reestablishment of relations between China and Singapore (Chia 2008). In this respect, Hong Choon and other eminent monks such as Yen Pei and Kong Hiap were "living" examples of perfected Buddhist saints worthy of the highest veneration and serving as models for future aspirants.[40] Similar to the Ashin Jinarakkhita Memorial Hall in Indonesia (Chia 2017), hagiographic Buddhist museums in Singapore perform the dual pedagogical functions of providing not only Buddhist doctrinal

39) Surveys were conducted on-site at the two museums for seven days each between February and August 2015. Due to the anticipated low attendance rate, all museum-goers who visited on those days were asked just before departure for their voluntary participation in a study about Buddhist museums using a standardized survey form. The surveys resulted in a convenience sample comprising 58 and 25 adults aged 18 and above at the Venerable Hong Choon Museum and Kong Hiap Memorial Museum respectively.

40) The biographies and activities of other monks, except for Hong Choon (see Chia 2008; 2013) and Yen Pei (see Chia 2020, 77–116), await further scholarly treatment.

knowledge—in one case as introductory panels[41]—but also the biography of one who has made the journey to perfection, similar to the Buddha himself. Thus, the revelation of this path may inspire visitors, especially Buddhists, to follow in the venerable's footsteps.

The function of influencing viewers by displaying sacred biographies in museums was corroborated by my interlocutors. The curator for Nei Xue Tang, Wu Yi (吴弋, 1970–), said that Buddhists "feel that the life stories of the masters can inspire them to practice and aim for a goal, to make effort."[42]

Her sentiments were echoed by Liu Sheng Hwa (刘升华, 1948–), the public affairs executive at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery charged with supervising the Venerable Hong Choon Museum, who lamented:

> There is a need to make new devotees understand what Buddhism is. If they practice to a certain level, they will be an exemplar for others. It will have educational value. Some young people think, "I practiced Buddhism for so long, why can't I be like this master?" So they can understand how the masters practice, their hardships, and results [from this museum].[43]

Furthermore, Dromtug explained: "A memorial museum is only to remember one person, but we need to learn his lifestyle and model. As such, we learn the Buddha's spirit and his teachings."[44]

This dual function was explicitly alluded to by Sheng Hwa, who—when queried on the importance of attendance at the Venerable Hong Choon Museum—exclaimed:

> On one hand, we are here to promote Buddhism. On the other hand, we also want to promote the love and compassion of Venerable Hong Choon because he had contributed much to Buddhism and the country. We want to promote his spirit. We are happy if more people visit, but this is not important.[45]

At the Buddhas of the World Museum, the protagonist "speaking" in first-person narratives on the panels is none other than the founder of Buddhism, Śākyamuni Buddha, who is the model par excellence for Buddhists of all traditions (Goh 2016, 120; McDaniel 2017, 143). By eschewing conventional hagiographies of eminent monks and focusing on the well-known biography of Śākyamuni with an accompanying chamber containing his supposed somatic relics, this museum situates itself as the "mother" of all Buddhist

41) At the Venerable Hong Choon Museum, the original plan called for visitors to view panels about Buddhism and Buddhist Gandhāran art displayed along a long corridor leading to its official entrance.
42) Interview by author, April 21, 2015.
43) Interview by author, April 11, 2015.
44) Interview by author, August 1, 2015.
45) Interview by author, April 11, 2015.

hagiographic museums.[46] Alluding to the pedagogical function described above, the executive director of the temple in which the museum is located affirms that the function of Buddhist art lies in its "value to tell a story, to educate, and to inspire visitors" (McDaniel 2017, 135).

Hagiographic Museums as Skillful Means

In addition, the Buddhist museum represents an explicit attempt by Buddhist organizations to disseminate the doctrine tacitly, which can be seen as an integral part of the heuristic project explained above. Through the museum's nonverbal and professionally designed displays in a modern air-conditioned environment, visitors develop positive associations with Buddhism (Goh 2016, 119). When they establish museums, Buddhist institutions also make an effort to link up with schools, community centers, and other nonaffiliated Buddhist centers[47] (*Lianhe Zaobao*, May 1, 2005). Larger museums with ample resources produce guides and have staff or volunteers trained to handle devotees, casual visitors, tourists, and schoolchildren. This strategy ties in well with Singapore's educational system, which favors a nonpartisan approach toward religions following an abortive attempt to introduce religious education in schools in 1984–89 (Gopinathan 1995, 20–26), as explained above. Teachers are frequently tasked to inculcate interreligious tolerance and understanding by going beyond textbooks and the classroom environment. The existence of a less overtly religious place where students can learn about a religion, such as a museum, is greatly sought after by educators who may otherwise face objections from the parents of their pupils. The issue at hand is significantly more sensitive than described here: many pupils and parents have strong inhibitions about entering and abiding in places of worship of other religions. The apparent neutrality represented by museums goes a long way toward assuaging such concerns.[48]

The doctrine of skillful means (Skt: *upāyakauśalya*; Ch: 方便善巧) was first intro-

46) In the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, where this museum is located, a separate museum called the Eminent Sangha Museum was created on its mezzanine level to display brief single-panel-per-person information on various eminent monks, including the founder and ex-abbot of the temple, Fazhao (法照, 1959–). It remained skeletal until 2014, when wax figures were finally added, thus completing Fazhao's original vision for this museum. See McDaniel (2017, 141–142).

47) In this context, nonaffiliated Buddhist centers refer to those not under the aegis of the parent organization of the Buddhist museum.

48) There has not been any study on the motivations of non-Buddhists visiting Buddhist museums, although research on non-Buddhists visiting a Buddhist temple shows that they are inspired by two factors: to learn more about a different religion and culture from their own, and to seek peace and quiet (Choe *et al.* 2015).

duced in Mahāyāna Buddhism as a means to advance the new tradition vis-à-vis pre-Mahāyāna schools and to reconcile apparent contradictions between the two (Federman 2009). It denotes the use of methods, sometimes even trickery or white lies, that differ from their literal meanings in order to guide the faithful onto correct paths. The most famous parable illustrating this stems from the *Lotus Sutra* and tells the story of a rich father enticing his children, who are engrossed in play, to leave their burning house by promising them wonderful gifts outside the house (Pye 2003, 37–38). In the case of Buddhist museums (including hagiographic museums), skillful means refers to their structural forms modeled after Western museums, which appear to be secularized, sophisticated, and modern, with air conditioning and English-language labels—a far cry from the incense-smoke-filled and dimly lit temples associated with rituals, superstition, backwardness, and irrationality. Through the visit, which may not have occurred if the place was styled like a traditional Chinese temple, the viewer is not only influenced subtly by the religion but also impressed by the sense of modernity exuded by the museum.

In fact, the second most frequently cited function for museums by my informants is as a form of skillful means.[49] Chuanguan claimed unequivocally that

> setting up a Buddhist museum is, in a way, incorporating secular methods, and also, we can consider that as a skillful means. . . . The best way is for people to simply practice the teachings, but the Buddhist museum is a skillful means to guide people in that direction.[50]

Similarly, Yongguang averred that through seeing the artworks and information provided in the Kong Hiap Memorial Museum, visitors would "naturally become connected with Buddhism through having karmic imprints in their mind streams. This is akin to the skillful means of connecting someone to the dharma."[51]

When asked about the purpose of the Kadhampa Buddhist Association's proposed museum, Hong Hai framed it as part of a strategy of employing various different cultural activities "to help and connect with others."[52] Dromtug went so far as to claim that the visitor "will be influenced subtly. He will become a Buddhist."[53]

Thus, as Buddhist organizations implement reforms to appeal to an educated, younger, and more sophisticated audience, those with the requisite resources and opportunity aim toward setting up modern museums that replace or supplement traditional

49) It should be noted that since the parent institutions of hagiographic Singapore Buddhist museums discussed here are Mahāyāna, the allusion to skillful means is not unexpected.
50) Interview by author, March 30, 2015.
51) Interview by author, March 1, 2015.
52) Interview by author, March 15, 2015.
53) Interview by author, August 1, 2015.

Buddhist memorializing instruments such as stūpas or pagodas.[54] These are then positioned as biographical portrayals of personages worthy of respect by all religions—despite their primary identity as Buddhist monks—due to their national or regional contributions, such as in the arenas of interreligious harmony (Hong Choon), education (Kong Hiap), social welfare (Yen Pei), or Chinese painting and calligraphy (Songnian). The methodology, whether intended consciously or not, is analogous to the Buddhist concept of skillful means in which the form of a museum showcasing the biography of an acclaimed cleric is utilized as a site "where the dead are regarded as a weapon in the battle for Dharma" (Gabaude 2003a, 183).

Conclusion

While the form of the memorial hall is a well-known trope in Chinese Buddhist history, the modern Buddhist museum, gallery, or museum-like memorial hall is a pedagogical innovation by reformist Buddhists in Singapore reeling from a perceived en masse defection caused by aggressive Christian proselytization and general disenchantment with Chinese traditional religions. The impetus to erect hagiographic museums—as a subcategory of Buddhist museums—was further encouraged by the demise of prominent monks in the 1990s, which demanded of their respective organizations proper posthumous treatment. Propelled by modernist trends and the urgent need to make present the now-absent venerables bemoaned and sorely missed by the Buddhist community, parent organizations with the wherewithal chose to break away from or complement traditional Buddhist entombment practices, and display hagiographic narratives and relics in demythologized spaces designed to elicit approval and visitation from Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.[55] There has been no collective decision to establish Buddhist museological memorial spaces, which makes their consecutive emergence in Singapore in the first two decades of the twenty-first century even more intriguing. There were four museums dedicated to individual deceased local monks at the peak of memorial building, but one has since closed (see Table 1).[56] The museums' effects on viewers are

54) Some Thai Buddhist museums are in fact shaped like stūpas, amalgamating the two forms (see Gabaude 2003a, 174–176; 2003b, 114).

55) The topic of the display of relics in Buddhist museums is beyond the scope of this article, but it should be noted that all the hagiographic museums listed in Table 1 showcase somatic relics except for 80 Gallery and the Eminent Sangha Museum. Nei Xue Tang, a non-hagiographic Buddhist museum, also displays relics from multiple sangha.

56) I exclude the Eminent Sangha Museum, which showcases the biographies of many monks. 80 Gallery closed in 2016.

influential, didactic, and yet construed as subtle, prompting allusions to the Buddhist concept of skillful means.

The hagiographic Buddhist museums in Singapore are instances of a broader trend beyond the confines of the island-state. As mentioned before, senior monks often pay visits to overseas memorial halls and museums as part of a transnational religious network. Nonetheless, the causal conditions outlined here may not be readily found in other countries.

In China, the Buddhist landscape is played out as a tussle between monastics and laity striving to maintain their sacred spaces, and governmental authorities keen to convert temples into touristy museological sites to generate revenue (Nichols 2019), a process some have called "museumification" (Fisher 2011). It remains unknown how many of these Buddhist temple-museums are hagiographic sites, how many Buddhist memorial halls have been "museumified," and how many Buddhist institutions have erected museums instead of traditional memorial halls. Some evidence suggests that apart from figures in the distant past such as Confucius (Kongfuzi 孔夫子, 551–479 BCE) (Flath 2016) and Xuanzang (玄奘, 602–664 CE) (Brose 2016, 151–152), Chinese authorities are loath to valorize the country's religious figures. Insofar as official biographical museums are concerned, secular figures, revolutionary heroes, political leaders, and literati are accorded greater attention (Denton 2014). However, there are exceptions. At least four memorial halls are dedicated to Hongyi, including a lotus-shaped museum at Pinghu, Zhejiang.[57] Given Hongyi's prominence as one of the leading monks in Republican China, it is not surprising that temples and cities capitalize on his prestige—but the futuristic museum in Pinghu takes its name from his secular name, Li Shutong, and not his monastic name. Pending further research, it appears that even in cases where notable Buddhists are lauded, they are celebrated for their cultural achievements rather than their religious appeal, which alludes to China's "Buddhism as culture" policy (Ji 2011, 33–37).

If memorialization of esteemed monastics is a time-honored Buddhist tradition, the findings of my study complicate the notion that eminence necessarily leads to memorializing permanent institutions. The list of clergy in Table 3 is long, but not all are memorialized in memorial halls or museums. The 80 Gallery mentioned in the introduction was even "liquidated" when its lease expired.[58] A systematic archival and

57) The other three are in the Zhejiang Hangzhou Hupao monastery, Quanzhou Dakaiyuan monastery, and a "residence" memorial hall in Tianjin.

58) The word "liquidated" was used by a Mahabodhi Temple staff member who also said that the items from 80 Gallery were in storage with no plans to display them (personal communication, August 4, 2016).

ethnographic approach can uncover nuances for each case, furthering our knowledge of these thought-provoking establishments and what they say inductively about their wider communities. Future studies can examine Buddhist museums in other parts of Asia besides Singapore, not only to document country-specific practices but also to extend the cases here and uncover any regional commonality or heterogeneity in Buddhist memorialization.

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Negotiating Collective Goals and Individual Aspirations: Masculinities in Indonesian Young Adult Literature in the 1950s

Nur Wulan*

This article investigates the portrayal of masculinities represented in Indonesian literature for young adults in the 1950s. The period chosen is a significant marker in Indonesian history, as it was when the newly formed nation was solidifying its national cohesion. The increasingly nationalist and patriotic atmosphere resulted in the emergence of two opposing cultural tendencies: the nationalist and independent spirit that typically spread among citizens of a newly independent country versus the tendency to maintain Indonesian values, the latter requiring submission to collective societal norms. The cultural values—namely, the revolutionary spirit to be an independent nation and the nationalist enthusiasm that required young citizens to be restrained, loyal, and contributing to the nation—are reflected in the masculine norms of the literature. It can be argued that forms of masculinity constructed in a society are closely related to the dynamics of its sociocultural changes. In addition, this article challenges the monolithic association of masculine norms with domination, assertiveness, and individualism.

Keywords: masculinities, Indonesia, young adult literature, revolution, nationalist enthusiasm

Introduction

This article examines forms of masculinity represented in Indonesian literature for young readers published in the 1950s. The texts discussed in this study are narratives targeted toward children and young people from around ten to 18 years old.[1)] Unlike the abundant studies on women and femininities, men and masculinities have been relatively underresearched. Scholarship on gender has largely highlighted the impacts of patriarchy and

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1) In this article I sometimes use the more generic term "young people" to refer to children, adolescents, and youths. I use the term "children" when referring to young people who have not reached adolescence. "Youths" and "adolescents" refer to those aged between 12 and 18 years.

men's domination of women. However, studies on the complexities of masculine norms within patriarchal systems have been less researched. This has resulted in a view of masculine norms as being homogeneous and universal. Such forms of homogenous masculinities are associated with domination, muscularity, and rationality. As a result, sociocultural particularities influential in the formation of diverse masculinities tend to be sidelined.

In his seminal study on masculinities, R. W. Connell (2003) asserts the complexity, nuances, and ambiguities of what it means to be men. By studying different groups of men in Australia, Connell argues that masculinities are dynamic and contextual as they are contingent on a number of factors ranging from personal or individual to global.

The importance of social context in shaping and changing masculine norms is highlighted also by Chris Beasley (2005), Roger Horrocks (1994), and Shelly Errington (1990). Horrocks argues that the pressure to continuously conform to prescribed patriarchal masculinities can lead to despair and mental disturbance in men: "patriarchal masculinity cripples men" (Horrocks 1994, 25). Connell and Horrocks imply that normative masculinities are pervasive and hegemonic; therefore, they are harmful to both women and men. The pervasiveness of normative masculinities encourages men to conform to this ideal manhood to such an extent that it is felt to be the natural and proper way to be a real man (Beasley 2005, 229). The importance of social dimension in shaping masculine norms in a society is summed up by Errington thus: "humans are biologically unfinished and need human culture to develop into humans" (Errington 1990, 12).

Among the limited number of studies on Indonesian masculinities, very little attention is given to the representation of masculinities. Studies on Indonesian masculinities have focused mainly on limited ethnographic or sociological perspectives. This is in contrast to studies on Indonesian femininities, which are more varied in scope. Studies by Tineke Hellwig (1994) and Barbara Hatley (1997), for instance, have identified that stereotypical Javanese notions of womanhood (submissive, dedicated to family or husband, and sexually passive) are widely recurrent images in Indonesian modern literature. In the area of gender practices, Hatley (2002), Julia Suryakusuma (1996), and Saskia Wieringa (2002) have investigated different ways in which gender ideologies were promoted by ruling groups and how they were challenged by different gender practices.

Despite the limited sources on Indonesian masculinities, attempts to find information on the subject can be made by looking at how classical narratives about gender relations inform ideas of male norms. A useful source is provided by Helen Creese's study (2004) on the literature of the Javanese and Bali courts from the ninth to the nineteenth century. Through the investigation of classical court poetry known as *kakawin*, Creese shows that these poems are full of images of the virility of male heroes, which is

frequently associated with the acquisition of women: "sexual prowess, proven by the acquisition of women, is crucial to the all-powerful, conquering hero as is victory in battle" (Creese 2004, 196). It is clear from these examples that in terms of sexuality, males were the controllers and instigators, and their sexuality was meant to be displayed through the subjugation of women. Concerning the construction of the ideal male, a later prose version of the Sutasoma story puts it eloquently: "the basest man is made to marry by his wife, the mediocre man is wedded by his father and mother, but excellent is the man that marries through his conquest in war thus staking his life" (Creese 2004, 110).

The *kakawin* poetry tradition of Java and Bali examined by Creese is heavily imbued with cultural influences from Indian and Sanskrit traditions that flourished in pre-Islamic Java between the seventh and fifteenth centuries and were retained in Bali from the ninth until the late nineteenth century (Creese 2004, 4). Therefore, it is understandable that the classical poems pay special attention to the idealized and prescriptive norms of high-rank males. According to Creese, the presence of male descendants is vital in Hindu traditions because men have to perform appropriate religious rites and ceremonies devoted to their ancestors to ensure the well-being of the family lineage (Creese 2004, 71). Male, not female, roles are the crucial element in the continuation of these traditions.

Creese's study indicates strong Hindu influences in the exaltation of physical prowess to mark high-rank masculinities in Javanese and Balinese courts. This notion is shared by Pam Nilan, Argyo Demartoto, and Agung Wibowo (2014) as well as Marshall Clark (2008). Using interviews with Indonesian men and TV advertisements respectively as the primary data, these two studies highlight the references to bravery and heroism as important markers of what it means to be men in Indonesia. Nilan *et al.* refer to heroic narratives, such as the one about the mythical Javanese warrior Gatotkaca, as sources of inspiration for young Indonesian people to exercise their manliness. Yet, they assert that this heroic masculinity is not permanently adopted by males. As males get older, authoritative but benevolent male norms are usually adopted. This is manifested in the figure of senior and fatherly men, or *bapak* (Nilan *et al.* 2014, 81).

In spite of the references to heroic, brave, and sometimes violent masculine norms that have been highlighted in the three studies discussed above, a study by Nur Wulan (2013) offers a slightly different finding about Indonesian masculine norms. Using literature for young people published in the post-Reformasi period as the primary data, Wulan argues that the notion of restraint, rather than norms based on heroism and violence, is a dominant form of masculinity represented in the literature. In Wulan's study, the norms associated with senior or mature men (*bapak*) become important values that are consistently represented through the male characters in the texts studied.

The studies on Indonesian masculinities discussed above show that such masculinities are dynamic and dependent on a number of factors. Besides individual and particular factors, external factors such as globalization are also instrumental in the formation of masculine norms. It can be said that sociocultural changes in Indonesia have been significantly influenced by external or global forces. These changes include the escalation of nationalist zeal in the 1950s in Indonesia. The increasing nationalist awareness cannot be detached from the escalating spirit to be independent that was affecting newly decolonized countries around the world.

Nationalism is a good site to investigate gender relations. It is an area where collective goals and aspirations of a society can be identified. As the execution of nationalist projects often takes place in political fields, which are considered a public sphere, nationalism is often perceivably associated with men. This accords with Anias Mutekwa (2012), who argues that discourses on nation and nationalism are frequently gendered and masculinized. Masculine norms, which are inseparable from a society's cultural values, are consequently affected by this global nationalist force. However, Nira Yuval-Davis (1993) provides a strong argument for the pivotal and heterogenous roles of women in national collectivities. This means that the roles of women in a nation's collective goals are equally important.

My examination of the dynamics of represented masculinities in the context of nation and nationalism does not justify the association of men with issues of nation building. Rather, I expose the ways in which men and masculinities have been closely linked to nationalist issues. In this way, awareness can be raised about the extent to which men are associated with nation and nationalism.

The 1950s can be said to have been a significant phase in the history of the newly formed country of Indonesia. This period was under the Sukarno presidency, which lasted from 1950 to 1965. Escalating nationalist consciousness was a significant marker of the time. The nationalist and patriotic enthusiasm was frequently coupled with the embrace of change and the mentality of struggle for the sake of a better future. This revolutionary spirit can be traced back to the armed struggles against the Allied troops, who were perceived to be preparing the way for a return of Dutch authority. It was first expressed in the Battle of Surabaya in November 1945, an important symbol of Indonesian resistance to external forces attempting to take control of the former Dutch East Indies (Ricklefs 1993, 217). The ultimate supremacy of the Allies in the struggle for Surabaya at this time did not stop Indonesians from remembering the defiance and resistance of *arek-arek Suroboyo* (Surabaya youths). Although William H. Frederick argues that the Battle of Surabaya did not provide strong evidence of a "*pemuda* revolution" (Frederick 1989, 295), the militant *pemuda* (young men) opposition to the European forces was a

potent symbol for the forces of revolution.

The belief that the *pemuda* accelerated the establishment of a just and free Indonesia was a prominent ideal of Tan Malaka, an internationally known Communist and an early symbol of the Indonesian revolution. His revolutionary ideas aimed at the establishment of a "free and socialist" Indonesia. His uncompromising stance against fascism and imperialism accorded with the militant and revolutionary ideals of the *pemuda*. In line with his idea that a nonrational way of thinking (embodied, for instance, in Hindu-Javanese culture and mysticism) could hinder the progress of Indonesian society, Tan Malaka described his politics as being in opposition to those of Sukarno. In his view, Sukarno represented the older generation, who were influenced by the negative aspects of Hindu-Javanese culture (Mrázek 1972, 38–39).

However, another tendency in opposition to this forward-looking view remained visible in the sociocultural landscape of the period. The more conservative tendency included norms elevating the virtues of the family system: respect for elders, self-sacrifice for the benefit of family (also meaning the nation as a big family), and increased exaltation of so-called *budaya ketimuran* (Eastern culture) as opposed to *budaya barat* (Western culture). A strong familial ideology was internalized by Sukarno during the late phase of his presidency. By constructing the nation as a family, Sukarno placed himself as the head of the family, the father figure who played a central role in the family. This was apparent in one of his speeches, when he said he wanted "to propose the spirit of the Indonesian nation, the spirit of family life" (Jones 2005, 116).

Sukarno's political formulations—such as the concepts of Demokrasi Terpimpin (Guided Democracy); Nasakom (an acronym for "Nasionalisme, Agama, Komunis" or Nationalism, Religion, and Communism); and Manipol Usdek (an acronym for Manifesto Politik: Undang-undang Dasar 1945, Sosialisme, Demokrasi Terpimpin, Ekonomi Terpimpin, Kepribadian Indonesia [Political Manifesto: The 1945 Constitution, Socialism, Guided Democracy, Guided Economy, Indonesian Identity])—proved to be political rhetoric incapable of fixing the ailing Indonesian economy. Sukarno's political innovations that combined substantially different concepts, such as religion and Communism, appeared to be radical. However, they were skillfully created as political maneuvers designed to bolster the president's own rule. For instance, when the influences of Communism were strong, Sukarno showed sympathy to the movement. This resulted in growing support from Russia and China. Nevertheless, in order to limit their influence in his administration, he did not include Communist personnel in his cabinet (Grant 1967, 65).

These opposing and self-contradictory tendencies are reminiscent of the ambiguities that characterized late colonial policies. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten (2000) and Susan

Blackburn (2004) shared similar findings about the ambiguities of the colonial administration's policies in the Indies with regard to gender matters. On the one hand, these policies reflected the paternalistic colonial mentality, which perceived colonized societies as being in need of the tutelage of the colonizer. On the other hand, they suggested a progressive and liberal outlook, which viewed the colonized as having the right to self-government and improvements in their well-being. What the two periods have in common is the struggle between the forces of change, seeking to improve existing conditions, and those that attempted to preserve the status quo.

During Sukarno's administration, the contradictory characteristics of the presidency represented the opposing natures of two political stages: Constitutional Democracy (1950–57) and Guided Democracy (1957–65). As Tod Jones (2005, 14) asserted, Constitutional Democracy was characterized by a liberal and broadly Western outlook that attempted to minimize state intervention in governance. Meanwhile, Guided Democracy was more inward looking and nationalist in its orientation (Jones 2005, 14).

The forms of masculinity represented in literature for young readers published during the Sukarno presidency in the 1950s and early 1960s maintain a strong degree of cultural continuity in the face of great political and social change. The texts discussed in this study are those published by state-sponsored and commercial publishers. As a form of gender ideology, masculine norms are first imposed by cultural agencies affiliated with the ruling power of a particular period. However, this type of masculinity may fail to gain normative status if larger parts of society resist and detach themselves from it. It is only confirmed as normative when many components of civil society accept, endorse, and also spread the ideal masculinity through cultural means.

Methods

The primary data for this study consists of narratives for young people that were published in the 1950s and early 1960s. The forms of narrative include novel, short story, and opinion. Most of the short stories and opinions are taken from newspapers having specific ideological inclinations, which grew significantly during the period. These newspapers had a special section for young people (adolescents). The varieties of newspapers studied in this article represent the varied political ideologies of the period, namely, nationalist, leftist, and Islamic inclinations. This is a good way to discuss the relationship between masculinity and political ideology. In total, four novels, 13 short stories, and two opinions are examined.

This article employs a number of alternative ways to identify ideal norms in chil-

dren's literature. They are derived and implied from a number of studies conducted by Claudia Nelson (1989), Wendy Michaels and Donna Gibbs (2002), and John Stephens (2002). Examining the ways in which male protagonists evolve in the narratives is a common method to identify how they deal with conflicts and go through trials and tribulations. A text can be said to further a form of masculinity that valorizes physical prowess if its male protagonist overcomes challenges using physical strength or by outdoing his enemies through physical fights. Meanwhile, the advancement of a less-centered masculinity can be found in texts that present the protagonist as having the ability to use negotiation skills in solving problems.

Another means to find masculine norms idealized in young people's narratives is by observing the gendered behavior of antagonists or villains. The difference between the good and the bad is frequently more clearly defined in children's literature than in literature for adults. This can inform us about what forms of masculinity are marginalized and not desirable.

The third means to identify ideal manliness in the narratives is by observing the reasons that trigger the gendered actions of the heroes. In the advancement of a less-patriarchal masculinity, for instance, male protagonists' actions are usually based on empathy toward others. More patriarchal actions are usually driven by self-interest to dominate others, show off one's strength, and win competitions.

Paying attention to the role of mothers and female characters, as well as the extent to which they influence the protagonists' actions and decisions, is an alternative way to discern masculinity norms being foregrounded in the narratives. A patriarchal text tends to minimize the presence and role of female characters. On the other hand, less patriarchal texts amplify the significant role of female characters even though the protagonists are male.

The last method used in this study to examine masculine norms in the texts is by examining how the male protagonists resolve disputes and conflicts: whether they tend to use negotiations, physical coercion, or even threats.

As this study attempts to construct a classification of masculine norms based on specific data, I do not use any existing models or forms of masculinity that have been formulated by previous scholars. In line with the notion that masculinities are plural and contextual, I argue that the uniqueness of Indonesian sociocultural contexts in the 1950s resulted in the formation of specific masculine norms and ideals. This will offer more authentic findings and arguments.

Depending on the content of the text, some methods may be used more intensively than others. This is because each narrative has a particular dominant element, which can be explored to identify the forms of masculinity being advanced in it.

Youths and the Development of Literature for Young Readers in the 1950s

Attempts to optimize the role of youths as an important element of the new nation are apparent in the increasing supply of reading materials for them. The expansion of new media for political propaganda was initiated by the Japanese during their wartime occupation. This new media largely comprised materials that were attractive visually as well as appealing to the auditory sense. Thus, forms of media such as pamphlets, speeches, posters, and broadcasting were some of the channels developed by the Japanese to influence people's thinking.

The use of media to convey cultural and political messages continued in the years after the Japanese occupation. This can be seen from the burgeoning of newspapers containing a youth section from the late 1940s. This shows that literature for adolescents or young adults started to be taken more seriously. It was at this time that the category of children's literature started to expand and include literature for older children or adolescents.

Starting from the 1950s, publications for young people became more diverse, particularly in terms of form and writing technique. A number of publishers besides Balai Pustaka emerged during the Sukarno presidency. These publishers, such as Djambatan, J. B. Wolters, and N. V. Nusantara, produced texts intended for young readers. In addition, the emergence of children's magazines, such as *Kunang-kunang* in 1949 and *Si Kuntjung* in 1956, added to the availability of reading material for children. The appearance of increasingly varied children's texts implies that young people started to be taken into account as potential readers and that their need for books was addressed more seriously.

The increasing availability of books for young readers opened up opportunities for the dissemination of cultural values. Books for young readers became a possible medium through which a distinctive Indonesian masculinity could be formulated.

Masculinity Characterized by Noble Character

A form of masculinity quite prevalent in the increasingly varied literature for the young is characterized by noble character. This is similar to the Javanese aristocratic masculinity of the late colonial era. According to Nur Wulan (2009) in her article about forms of masculinity represented in Indonesian young adult literature in the late phase of the Dutch colonial period (the first three decades of the 1900s), the literature foregrounded a masculine norm characterized by restraint. This ideal masculine type is characterized

by, among other qualities, an ability to restrain oneself from anger and worldly passions. Tales inspired by popular traditional folklore usually foreground this masculine norm. They can be found particularly in books published by Balai Pustaka and the children's magazine *Si Kuntjung*. Thus, until the 1950s and early 1960s the existence of Balai Pustaka continued under the new government, and its role as a supplier of "healthy" reading materials did not change.

Folktales published by Balai Pustaka and other publishers tend to minimize elements of Western masculinities associated with individualism, the cultivation of the mind, and a future-oriented outlook. Rather, they foreground a form of masculinity closer to that embodied in the heroes of the Javanese *wayang*. An ideal embodiment of the noble masculinity that combines martial skills and noble character is Arjuna. He is the ideal *ksatriya* in the *wayang* stories, and his noble qualities appear to have inspired the representation of male characters in folklore texts.

The maintenance of a harmonious society is the basis for the portrayal of male protagonists in *Si Kuntjung*. The magazine places emphasis on the construction of morally superior male protagonists. Rather than presenting its male protagonists as subjects with strong individual aspirations, *Si Kuntjung* emphasizes the nobility of being unselfish and altruistic. The advancement of a caring (*penyayang*) and submissive (*mengalah*) masculinity is apparent, for instance, in the short story *Djangan dilawan dengan kekerasan* (Do not resist with violence) (Machroni 1956, 9). The moral message conveyed in this text, as its title suggests, is that we should not resort to violence even when we are physically assaulted.

The presence of caring male protagonists is prevalent also in many other short stories, such as *Tahu membalas budi* (Knowing how to repay kindness) (Gt. M. Indra 1956, 1), *Senapan angin* (Air rifle) (Kak Al 1956, 6), and *Singa jang membalas budi* (The lion that knows how to repay kindness) (S. Pant 1956, 5). It is emphasized in these narratives that being caring toward both human beings and animals is rewarding: love for animals is honorable, and animals will reciprocate our kindness by helping us when we are in trouble.

The heavy emphasis on the moral development of children seems to be the main vision of *Si Kuntjung*. Moral superiority is embodied in the representation of a significant number of male characters in the texts. Qualities considered to be potentially damaging to the maintenance of moral superiority, such as greed, arrogance, and stinginess, are strongly condemned. For instance, a woodcutter in *Penebang kaju jang djudjur* (The honest woodcutter) (Chrysanto 1956, 8) is rewarded with priceless axes made of gold. The axes are presented to him by a fairy after he tells her honestly that the precious golden axes she has found do not belong to him.

The magazine's didactic mission is clearly seen also in one of the criteria for being an official agent of the magazine: "an agent should be a young teacher who is committed, honest, and interested in the well-being of children."[2] The impact of the mission on the structure of the narratives is that the narratives always end happily. Problems can be solved because the male protagonists are of good character, not because of other factors commonly associated with male qualities, such as physical strength and assertiveness.

The fostering of the social dimension in the presentation of male protagonists results in the marginalization of qualities related to individual aspirations. Male protagonists who boast of being superior and who are in the habit of accumulating individual possessions are punished. The absence of elements having to do with individual aspirations significantly differentiates male protagonists in *Si Kuntjung* from those of the prewar Balai Pustaka texts. Although the Balai Pustaka texts have a social dimension, they always make it clear that the male protagonists' keen determination to be successful financially and academically is something that readers should emulate.

The continuous presentation of morally sound male protagonists in texts intended for schoolchildren shows that this male norm was being projected as an ideal Indonesian masculinity. People and institutions involved in the production of children's literature, such as writers, teachers, and schools, clearly were attempting to disseminate this cultural value through the books they produced. Although children's literature is intended for young readers, it is mostly produced and written by adults. These adult producers —authors, publishers, teachers, parents—according to Torben Weinreich (2000) are "mediators" whose aim is to introduce child readers to cultural notions idealized by their society. In the words of J. D. Stahl *et al.*: "since children represent the future in any society, the approach that a culture takes to its children often epitomises what the culture considers to be of central and enduring value" (Stahl *et al.* 2007, 1).

The combination of notions related to military values—such as martial arts, loyalty, and discipline—and Javanese aristocratic norms accords with the basic values fostered through the Boy Scout movement. They can be found, for instance, in a compilation of short stories titled *Tjerita si Pai bengal* (The story of naughty Pai) (Nasjah 1952). In the short story titled *Tjerita si Rahim pandu* (The story of Rahim the Scout), the male protagonist realizes that his motivation in helping an old woman in an accident is not genuine. Rather than being motivated by empathy, he helps her because he wants to

2) This is taken from an advertisement on page 14 of edition number 6, dated September 1956. The advertisement seeks people who are interested in becoming agents for the magazine. The main criterion for becoming an official agent is: "Sebaiknja seorang guru muda jang giat, djudjur dan menaruh minat terhadap nasib dan kesedjahteraan anak-anak. Terutama jang mempunjai hubungan jang baik dan erat dengan sekolah-sekolah rakjat setempat."

show off the moral superiority of *kepanduan* (Boy Scout) members. It is his *kepanduan* uniform that he is wearing when the accident occurs, not his genuine empathy, that drives him to help the old woman. This violates one of the ten basic *kepanduan* tenets, namely, being genuine in thoughts, words, and conduct.

The furthering of a male norm that gives priority to social responsibility and good character is in line with social values that strengthen national identity and bind together ethnically diverse people. It was impossible to advance individualism and the achievement of personal aspirations at a time when values related to togetherness were considered pivotal to the construction of a common identity. Therefore, it is noticeable that familial values, such as mutual cooperation, brotherhood, and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the family's interest, are being furthered in the texts. Familial ideology in relation to the construction of masculinity can be seen from the representation of a male protagonist as the protector or head of a real or symbolic family in which those values are the guiding principles. These communalistic ideas are enshrined in the state's ideological basis (Pancasila).

Masculinity Characterized by Collective Heroism

Collective heroism is another prominent quality of masculinities furthered in Indonesian children's texts of the period. This form of masculinity is marked by a high degree of loyalty to friends and willingness to sacrifice for them. What differentiates this masculine norm from the form of masculinity advanced in texts of the pre-war period is that it contains a significantly higher level of patriotism. Bravery in defending truth (*berani karena benar*) is furthered in more noticeable ways. This is apparent particularly in adventure stories published in the 1950s.

Adventure stories in the 1950s mostly foreground uncomplaining and obedient male protagonists. One example showing how even a naughty boy can be turned into a problem solver maintaining the order in a community is *Si Pitak pahlawan kechil tiga serangkai* (Pitak the little hero and the trio of friends) (R. Soekardi 1961), one in a series of stories about a boy named si Pitak. Si Pitak builds a close relationship with his friends, Aman and Amin, and the three declare their loyalty to the friendship. Their adventures include accidentally witnessing a murder committed by a member of a criminal gang. This happens when si Pitak quietly leaves home late one night to sail to a small island with Aman and Amin. At the end of the story, si Pitak and his friends are praised and admired for having defended justice and maintained the order of the village:

> Dan dengan ini saya perkenalkan kepada khalayak ramai, Munir atau Pitak, sa-orang pahlawan kechil, pembela keadilan, penentang kejahatan, dibantu oleh dua orang kawan-nya Aman dan Amin yang ketiganya merupakan satu tiga-sarangkai, pengawas keamanan dalam kampong dan kota kita.[3)]
>
> On this occasion, I'd like to introduce Munir or Pitak, a little hero, the defender of justice and fighter against crimes. He is helped by his two best friends, Aman and Amin. The trio are the keepers of security in our village and town. (R. Soekardi 1961, 84)

It can be seen that the text emphasizes si Pitak's successful attempts to restore the stability and order of the whole community, not the individual benefits that he can potentially gain.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the prevalence of themes of solidarity, loyalty, and heroism, as they clearly reflect the predominant spirit of the 1950s. In a number of works, these themes are highlighted through the male protagonists' adventures and their attempts to maintain order in their community. Examples of texts that display these themes are the three stories in the *Si Pitak* series by R. Soekardi.

Si Pitak pahlawan kechil tiga serangkai, *Si Pitak jauh di-rantau* (Pitak in a land far away), and *Si Pitak kerani muda* (Pitak the young clerk) share a common characteristic in their attempts to emphasize the importance of giving priority to the group's or community's interests. In the texts, most heroic acts are performed by a group rather than an individual. If they are carried out individually by the male protagonist, they are performed for the sake of the group's or community's interests.

The three stories in the *Si Pitak* series present the protagonist, Munir or si Pitak, as a naughty boy, yet a hero of the community in which he lives. All three texts demonstrate the bravery of si Pitak and his close friends in fighting against crimes that threaten the peacefulness of the community.

Revolutionary Masculinity

Revolutionary masculinity is a way of describing the images of masculinity presented in the youth sections of newspapers and children's magazines published from the end of the revolution to the early years of Guided Democracy.[4)] It is a variant of masculinity characterized by a strong and vigorous patriotic spirit; and it is evident in the representation

3) The quotation is in Malay as the available sources of the *Si Pitak* series used in this chapter are the Malay versions published in Kuala Lumpur.

4) My selection of newspapers with sections for youths mainly follows Marina Paath-Simpson's bachelor's thesis (1986). Paath-Simpson examines the utilization of literature as a tool of propaganda by governments, and how it also functions as an articulation of ideologies in a given culture.

of male protagonists as well as the tone of non-narrative texts such as editorial remarks, news items, and the lists of special vocabulary that accompany these publications.

After the acknowledgment of Indonesia's sovereignty in December 1949, the number of publications and newspapers grew significantly. Edward C. Smith (1983) noted that in 1949 there were about 75 newspapers, with a total circulation of more than four hundred thousand. Three years later, in 1953, the number of newspapers had increased significantly to 104. The diversity of Indonesian political ideologies during this period is also reflected in the newspapers of the time. For instance, *Bintang Timur* and *Harian Rakjat* reflected leftist ideology, *Duta Masjarakat* was the voice of the largest Islamic party, *Merdeka* articulated nationalist revolutionary ideas, and *Indonesia Raja* was an independent anti-Communist newspaper.

Kunang-kunang was one of the children's magazines launched during the 1940s and 1950s. Published fortnightly by Balai Pustaka, the magazine's first issue appeared on February 10, 1949. In the editorial of the first issue, the magazine is described as replacing the earlier Balai Pustaka magazine *Sahabat Anak-anak*. With each issue consisting of twenty pages, the magazine contains a variety of subject matter ranging from short comic strips, short stories, and riddles to national and international news, short biographies of prominent figures, and explanations of important Indonesian terminology.

The general spirit of *Kunang-kunang* is optimistic and vigorous. This can be seen from the choice of prominent figures whose biographies appear in its issues, the descriptions of achievements that represent outstanding scientific progress, and the choice of Indonesian terminology explained in the magazine's vocabulary section. Except for Marie Curie, the short biography section of the first four issues is devoted to prominent male figures, including the Indonesian writer Sanusi Pane; Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore; 11-year-old Italian music conductor Pierino Gamba; Indonesian national hero Ki Hadjar Dewantara; and Imam bin Umar, one of the Prophet Muhammad's good friends. The only advertisement in these issues is for Blue Band margarine, with its prominent slogan *Pemuda sehat rakjat kuat* (Healthy young males, strong people).[5] This is asserted by pictures of physically active boys in the commercial. The vigor of the magazine is reflected also in the terminology listed in the vocabulary section. Most of the words explained here are related to the Indonesian revolution and the current political situation. They include *de facto*, *de jure*, *interim*, *mimbar*, *daulat*, *actief*, *blockade*, and *infiltratie*,

5) During this period, the "-a" form of words like *pemuda* and *saudara* was more commonly understood to include females as well. The gender division marked by the "-a" and "-i" endings became standard usage only later. However, the term *pemuda* in the advertisement is translated into "young males" instead of "young people" as it seems to refer exclusively to young males. This can be seen from the illustration in the advertisement.

terms that are usually associated with formality, authority, and penetration, all qualities generally related to masculinity.

Having a similar tone to *Kunang-kunang*, another children's magazine called *Kawanku* also calls on its readers to take an active role in building the nation. The content of the magazine implies that active involvement by young people will result in a stronger nation that can be competitive globally. A large number of articles, poems, vocabulary items, and stories in *Kawanku* suggest the importance of exploring the talents of Indonesia's young generation in order to develop the glory and dignity of the nation. The frequent inclusion of quotations, short biographies, and short articles related to international figures and scientific themes indicates the magazine's attachment to the spirit of progress (*semangat kemadjuan*) inspired by the achievements of Western rationalism. This is clearly illustrated, for instance, in an article titled *Kalau aku djadi wartawan* (If I were a journalist) (Suwardjo 1955, 1). In this article, Suwardjo describes the reasons why he wants to be a journalist: at a time of progress a journalist has a noble duty to enlighten people with news, just like a lighthouse giving guidance to ships in search of the harbor. The need for a progressive spirit in order to compete globally is apparent also in *Tjita-tjita ku* (My dream) (Achmad Nur 1955, 4). In expressions designed to inspire, Achmad Nur calls on his readers to work hard to achieve their dreams:

> . . . kuingin . . . mengadjak bangsaku madju, tegak membawa pandji kebesaran bangsa! Agar dapat duduk sama rendah, berdiri sama tinggi! Sedjadjar! Sederadjat! Bahkan melebihi bangsa-bangsa lain di dunia ini.
>
> . . . I want . . . to call on my nation to progress, to stand upright holding the banner of the nation's greatness! To be as low and as high as other nations of the Earth, on the same level, of the same rank, and even exceed them. (Achmad Nur 1955, 4)

Semangat kemadjuan is reflected also in the section on health, which frequently suggests that readers should maintain their health based on modern science, not on traditional myths. In short, the young generation of Indonesians are strongly expected to contribute actively to the cause of the nation's progress. This is summed up in John Stuart Mill's words, quoted in the second issue of *Kawanku* (1956): "Orang dapat membawa tjelaka pada orang lain, bukan hanja karena perbuatannja, tetapi djuga karena tak mau berbuat apa-apa [What can harm others is not just one's deeds but also one's unwillingness to act]."

Besides a community-focused *semangat kemadjuan*, individual expression seems to be encouraged in *Kawanku*. This is manifested, for instance, in the presence of themes related to emotional exploration, which is fuelled by dissatisfaction and the loss of loved ones. In a series of short stories titled *Ia dan kekasihnja* (He and his beloved), Kusumardi

tells the story of a teenage boy named Nung, who is discontented with the fact that there is still a big gap between the rich (upper class or *priyayi*) and the poor. As Nung is an artist, he channels his discontentment and restlessness into writing a diary, painting, and making sculptures. In spite of the fact that he himself is a *priyayi* boy, Nung condemns the exploitation of the maids in his house by his aristocratic relatives (Kusumardi 1956, 3).

The focus on the suffering of the poor indicates socialist influences, which were also significant in the 1950s and early 1960s. It also echoes the prominent cultural polemics between the so-called Manikebu artists and those having leftist inclinations in the later stages of Sukarno's presidency.[6)]

It is interesting to note that the values of the Boy Scout movement (*kepanduan*/*pramuka*) have a special place in *Kawanku*. George D. Larson records that the first Indonesian scouting organization, Javaansche Padvinders Organisatie (Javanese Boy Scout Organization; JPO), was founded in 1916 by the head of the Mangkunegaran palace, Soerjosoeparto. Like various other indigenous scouting organizations that burgeoned in Indonesia after 1920, JPO was strongly nationalistic (Larson 1987, 69). Soerjosoeparto himself was known as a nationalistically inclined leader of the Mangkunegaran kingdom who was actively involved in Boedi Oetomo before his formal appointment as the new ruler of the kingdom (Larson 1987, 63–65).

As it spread throughout the British Empire, the Boy Scout movement was adapted to suit the political aims of its leaders in different societies. An example of this adaptation can be found in British colonial Africa. According to Timothy H. Parsons, scouting in that region promoted a nationalist spirit of loyalty to independent nation-states rather than to the empire (Parsons 2004, 5). A similar phenomenon occurred in Indonesia, where scouting was a potential means of strengthening social cohesion. At a time when social order was a prerequisite for building a new state deeply affected by long periods of social chaos, the existence of a movement like the Boy Scouts played an influential role. This explains why the first national meeting of *kepanduan* since the colonial period, called Djambore Nasional, was held in the mid-1950s, on August 10, 1955 (Pak Tjarik 1955, 4).

6) Manikebu stands for "Manifes Kebudayaan" (Cultural manifesto). The acronym was popularized by artists who belonged to Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat; Institute of People's Culture), the cultural organization attached to the Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI. In 1963 the tension between the two groups of artists reached its peak. The cultural disagreement was based on each group's perception of what the arts should explore. The Manifes Kebudayaan artists held the view that art should contain "universal values" and not be used as political propaganda. In opposition to this, the Lekra artists advanced the idea that art should expose social realities, particularly issues dealing with the oppressed and the poor. For a more detailed explanation of the polemic, see Foulcher (1986).

This meeting was seen as the beginning of an important annual event in which *pandu* (Boy Scouts) from all parts of Indonesia would meet and pledge to uphold the state's principles of unity: one language, one nation, and one homeland (Pak Tjarik 1955, 4).

However, as the following discussion shows, the ways *Kawanku* reinterpreted the masculine norms advanced in the movement differed significantly from the narrative discussed previously (*Si Rahim Pandu*). The interest in *kepanduan* is shown by the presence of the *kepanduan* section in each edition of the magazine, reporting on the events held by the Indonesian *kepanduan*. Positive values of the Boy Scout movement are sometimes inserted into the section. At first glance, this seems to be contradictory to the emphasis on taking an active role and the encouragement of individual expression reflected in the contents of *Kawanku*. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that fostering this type of masculinity through the Boy Scout movement was beneficial to reviving the waning power of the British Empire in general and securing the position of the aristocratic class in particular. In Indonesia in the 1950s, the scouting movement was known to promote loyalty and obedience to the newly formed state. In this context, the constructions of masculinity *Kawanku* advanced in its 1950s editions fitted with the movement's locally adapted aims. As the magazine showed, values that were formerly upheld to promote submissiveness to an authority could now be furthered to strengthen the independence of formerly colonized and oppressed societies.

As in *Kawanku*, the literary sections for the young in Indonesian newspapers of the period further politically active masculinity. Tough and socially aware male subjects who are willing to take an active part in improving the nation's social conditions are consistently idealized in the texts. The toughness of this masculinity is manifested mainly in frequent expressions suggesting the need to be mentally strong and not easily surrender to the extremely difficult economic conditions of the period. In *Sikap, prinsip dan konsekwensi* (Attitudes, principles, and consequences) (Santani 1961, 3), an artist or literary critic is said to be not a real man (*banci*) if he does not dare to take a stand on issues concerning the Indonesian sociopolitical situation of the time.[7] This statement implies that an artist or literary critic is a male and the courage to give critical comments on existing social conditions is a gendered social task associated with a male's obligation.

Of the three newspapers discussed here, the masculine spirit in the youth section of *Bintang Timur* is the most pronounced. Having leftist ideological inclinations and

7) *Banci* is an Indonesian term for a male who dresses and behaves like a woman. In the Indonesian context it usually has a negative connotation as it is frequently associated with transvestites who offer cheap sex to males. *Banci* are often represented in the popular media as objects of ridicule. In some cases the term also negatively connotes males who do not behave according to normative notions of being male.

mostly exposing the suffering of the working class, unemployment, and the devastating impacts of poverty on family life, various items in *Bintang Timur* emphasize the need to be determined and confident in giving meaning to independence and to prevent the re-emergence of liberalism, feudalism, and capitalism. Despite the presence of a number of slightly sentimental short stories telling about the grief of losing loved ones during the revolution, many editorial remarks, essays, and readers' letters invite readers to write about topics that are closer to social problems. In one example of this kind of writing, Ansari's *Siap mewakili djamannya* (Ready to represent the age) (Ansari 1960, 3), it is suggested that the newspaper's section for young people should be dominated by patriotic writing. This is because young people were ready to speak up for independence and for the miseries that the ordinary people (*rakjat*) in the republic still suffered.

The association of devotion to the nation with masculine duty is reflected in a number of short stories that use as their setting the politically critical condition of the republic. In *Panggilan* (The call) (S. A. Sambas 1960), the narrator is disappointed by his girlfriend's marriage to someone else. She thinks he died taking part in the military operation to subdue the rebellion against the existing government. The title of the text suggests that participating in protecting the nation from disintegration is more than just an ordinary task for a young man. It is a patriotic and heroic call of duty that demands huge sacrifices, even including the loss of a loved one. What is highlighted in the short story is the value of devotion and the importance of being less self-centered. In other words, sacrificing a valuable possession for the cause of the nation is honorable. The loss of loved ones is nothing compared to the honor of serving the nation. Thus, although the call to serve the nation is considered to be a masculine duty requiring bravery and physical toughness, it is constructed on the basis of genuine devotion to the country. In a broader gender perspective, the same duty can also be associated with femininity, as loyalty and devotion have been culturally associated with norms of femininity.

In addition to heroic duty, the role of males in family life is also advanced in the youth section. The nationalist newspaper *Merdeka* presents a form of masculinity that is mostly related to a man's role in his family. Less political than the youth section of *Bintang Timur*, the section for adolescents in *Merdeka*, which is called *Pemuda Merdeka* (Independent youths), mostly contains reading material (poems, short stories, news) that revolves around family relationships, friendship, and love relationships among young adults. In general, the texts in this section highlight the indispensable role of the father as the breadwinner and the protector of the family. If a father fails to fulfill this role, the stability of the family will be threatened. For instance, *Ajah* (Father) (Sudiat 1962, 3) is the story of a woman who is angry with her husband for always coming home late. Although he has explained that this is because he is working overtime, the wife does not

believe him and suspects that there must be another reason. The story ends happily with the reconciliation of the couple after the husband takes the initiative to buy a bunch of flowers for his wife and she realizes her mistake. The reconciliation and the wife's understanding affirm the notion that men are in charge of the family's welfare. A harmonious relationship in the family can be achieved if there is trust in the ability of the head of the family. Similarly, peace and order in the nation can be maintained if people trust the leaders.

Despite the presence of texts highlighting the romantic side of relationships between husband and wife, as well as teen romance, the tone of *Merdeka*'s literary section for young people in general advances a spirit of optimism in facing the challenges of the age. In one edition, the editor suggests that contributors should not use *Pemuda Merdeka* as a medium for escape from the harshness of reality by writing texts that are melancholic and sentimental. Pessimism in facing challenges should be avoided; the editor warns that this attitude has already afflicted the majority of young Indonesians.

The optimistic outlook is shared by *Duta Masjarakat*, an Islamic newspaper affiliated with the biggest Islamic mass organization of the period, Nahdlatul Ulama. Slightly more political than *Merdeka*, albeit not as straightforward as *Bintang Timur* in its exposition of the problems of ordinary people and opposition to Western capitalism and imperialism, the youth section of *Duta Masjarakat*, *Duta Teruna*, frequently employs the harsh economic and social conditions of the republic as the setting for its short stories. Compared to *Bintang Timur*'s highly gendered association of the revolutionary spirit with masculine qualities, *Duta Masjarakat*'s construction of masculinity is less rigorous. Coping with adversity in these stories highlights the Islamic notion of *takdir* (destiny) and the willingness to accept one's lot. This is conveyed through the representation of male protagonists who willingly accept their fate, even when it has a negative effect on their love relationships and economic circumstances.

An example of the furtherance of a religiously submissive masculinity can be found in *Takdir* (M. Dharto Wahab 1961). This short story presents a male protagonist who is broken-hearted after the death of his girlfriend. However, he realizes that he must accept his fate no matter how bitter it is, as it means that Farida, his girlfriend, was not the girl chosen by God to be his prospective wife.

In this way, *Duta Masjarakat* highlights the less assertive side of being male. In the July 4, 1959 edition, an editorial titled *Takdir* reminds readers to be stoical when experiencing failure. Belief in *takdir* is one of the six pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam*). While advocating hard work and determination, the editor highlights the importance of believing in predestined fate when hard work fails to result in the desired goal.

In young people's literature of this period, a form of masculinity associated with

revolutionary spirit was constructed within a nationalist perspective. This means that the enthusiasm for change was disseminated in relation to attempts to strengthen national cohesion and unity. In newspapers based on a leftist ideology, such as *Bintang Timur*, the spirit for change was not fostered to encourage a rebellious attitude against the nation. Rather, it was ignited to make *pemuda* aware of social and economic injustice and sympathetic toward the suffering of marginal people. Readers might interpret the furtherance of revolutionary masculinity in the newspaper as part of a project to build a just Indonesia, consistent with the newspaper's mission to promote socialist values. In other ideologically inclined literature, being a revolutionary young man could also mean being mentally tough, religiously stoical, and optimistic in facing the challenges of life in a new nation. In short, what was needed at this immensely difficult time was collective awareness to build a more prosperous Indonesia. This could be achieved by maintaining nationalist loyalty and trust.

Conclusion

The period of the Sukarno presidency was a significant phase in the process of solidifying a national identity. This was the time when the so-called Indonesian national culture came into being. Forms of cultural expression, in this case literature for young people, actively contributed to building a national identity. The construction of ideal male norms was significantly affected by this nationalist vision.

The variety of masculine norms fostered in the significantly varied texts of this period, ranging from a less political and docile masculinity to a highly active and political masculinity, reflected the political dimensions that underlay the construction of masculinity. What seemed at first sight to be a less political masculinity, such as the form of masculinity advanced in *Si Kuntjung*, was actually highly political, since it was intended to strengthen the emergent state's social cohesion and advance national progress. The variety also reflected attempts to use literature for young people as a means to challenge the normative, less active, and docile masculinity associated with colonial cultures. Nevertheless, it can be said that the revolutionary-type masculinity was not intended to effect radical social change. Instead, it was constructed to support the nation-building project and solidify the newly acquired national identity that supported the authority of post-independence governments. This illustrates how the conservative tendency was also influential in the construction of the period's masculinity.

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The New Year Festival in the Cultural History of Chiang Mai: Importance and Changes

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The New Year festival, or Songkran, is considered the most prominent festival in Chiang Mai, the former capital of the kingdom of Lan Na in Thailand's Upper North. The festival, held over three days in mid-April, marks the earth's entry into a new solar year. The authors seek to reconstruct the origins of the Songkran festival in Chiang Mai and its historical evolution by analyzing a variety of Northern Thai sources as well as missionary reports from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Special attention is given to the transformation of the state-sponsored *dam hua* ritual of the Lan Na kings into a ceremony under the auspices of the Thai state.

Keywords: Lan Na, Songkran festival, missionary reports

The city of Chiang Mai was founded more than seven centuries ago, in 1296, when it was made the capital of the kingdom of Lan Na. The kingdom existed as an independent polity in the Upper North of present-day Thailand until the Burmese conquest in 1558. When Burmese overlordship ended in the late eighteenth century, the Northern Thai elites recognized Siamese suzerainty over Lan Na, which was not restored as a unitary kingdom but split into five separate political entities, each of which maintained tributary relations with Bangkok. In reality, however, Chiang Mai was the political center of the western part of Lan Na, exercising supremacy over the smaller kingdoms of Lamphun and Lampang, while the kingdom of Nan dominated eastern Lan Na (see Sarassawadee 2005). Even after the gradual integration of Lan Na into the Siamese state from the late nineteenth century, numerous customs and traditions of Lan Na culture were preserved, as reflected in the 12-month tradition of organizing religious festivals and ceremonies according to the agricultural lunar year.

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The most important of these traditions is the New Year festival (Thai: *prapheni songkran*), celebrated in mid-April; it has the most significant value and importance in the region's cultural history. The Songkran festival in Lan Na, celebrated over three full days, has been studied mainly by social and cultural anthropologists. In *Muang Metaphysics*, a seminal study of Northern Thai myths and rituals, Richard Davis has devoted a lengthy chapter to the Lan Na New Year festival (Davis 1984, 99–147). Based on extensive fieldwork carried out in rural Nan during the 1970s, Davis provides the most detailed description and analysis of the various rites performed during Songkran. In *The Lan Na Twelve-Month Traditions*, Sommai Premchit and Amphay Doré give further insights into the Northern Thai New Year festival by focusing on Chiang Mai, where they conducted fieldwork in 1990, and comparing their findings with Songkran traditions in neighboring regions, such as Northeastern Thailand and Laos (Sommai and Doré 1992, 175–192). They were able to build upon a previous study in Thai (of the same title) by Mani Phayomyong (1986). This valuable anthropological and ethnographic research notwithstanding, it is astonishing that the Songkran festival in Lan Na has received very little attention from historians. In particular, the role of Chiang Mai kings and other members of the royal family in the festival has been largely ignored. This article thus intends to study the Songkran festival in Chiang Mai from a cultural-historical approach. Special attention is paid to the changes and adaptations of the festival over time until the present age. After a brief survey of the scanty evidence of the Songkran festival in Northern Thai chronicles and other historical sources, we discuss the origins and special characteristics of the Lan Na calendrical system. This is followed by an analysis of the Songkran festival in conjunction with other religious activities carried out during that time. Finally, we investigate the state-sponsored water-pouring ceremony at Songkran for the kings of Chiang Mai during the nineteenth century and the transformation of this water-bathing ritual during the twentieth century.

Historical Background of Songkran and the Lan Na Calendrical System

The New Year festival is an ancient tradition among Tai ethnic groups. The activities, rites, and customs associated with it reflect the importance of the new year as well as the role of the kings of Chiang Mai. The term "New Year tradition" (*prapheni songkran*) pertains to the customs celebrating the beginning of a new year according to the Thai solar calendar. This is a common cultural characteristic of all Theravada Buddhists in mainland Southeast Asia, including Lan Na, the Lao kingdom of Lan Sang, Siam, Myanmar (Burma), and Cambodia, as well as the Tai Lue principality of Sipsong Panna and the Tai

Noe polity of Dehong in Yunnan Province. The Theravada Buddhist New Year festival is known as Thingyan in Myanmar, Pi Mai in Laos, and Choul Chhnam Thmey in Cambodia (Agarwal 2009–10). The basic principle of the tradition consists of merit making and the use of water with its symbolic value. However, the way the New Year tradition has been performed and transmitted over the generations varies from region to region (see Songsak 1996).

The name of the festival comes from the Sanskrit word *saṃkrānti*, which means "going from one place to another" or "a passage or entry into" (Monier-Williams 1993, 1127). Sathian Koset (1973) has authored a book on the festivals that are performed to mark the end of a lunar year (*trut*) and the transition from the rainy to the dry season (*sat*). He explains the meaning of *songkran* as the passing of the sun from one house of the zodiac (*rasi*) to another, and from one zodiac month to another, which is called *songkran duean*.[1] In the course of one (lunar) year, the sun passes through the 12 signs of the zodiac: it moves through one zodiac sign every month. When the sun shifts from Pisces to Aries, one speaks of the "great passing" or *maha Songkran*, as that day marks the beginning of a new year (Sathian 1973, 6–8; Davis 1984, 99). This is in accordance with Northern Thai chronicles, which count the time when a new year starts. The *Chiang Mai Chronicle* (*Tamnan phuen mueang chiang mai*) states that King Mangrai moved to his palace, built on an auspicious site,

> on the eighth waxing day of the seventh month, a Thursday, a Thai *kot cai* day . . . in the new-year period on the Phraya Wan day as the era was increasing by one year to be 654, a *tao si* year [corresponding to Thursday, March 27, 1292]. (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1995, 42)[2]

The timing of the Songkran tradition in Chiang Mai falls in the seventh, or in some years the eighth, lunar month, according to the Lan Na calendar. This is testified to in the following historical sources:

> [C]S 1127, a *dap lao* year, in the fourth waning day of the seventh lunar month, two days after Songkran, a *poek si* day [as the] Tai [say] . . . (Friday, April 12, 1765). (Sarassawadee 2016, 30)

> [C]S 1146, on the Phaya Wan day, on the seventh waning day of the seventh lunar month, the first

1) As the earth orbits the sun, it appears as if the sun passes in front of different constellations. It is, however, not the sun which is moving. Its move is an illusion caused by the rotation of our earth around the sun.

2) (ในวันเดือน๗ ออก ๘ ค่ำวันพรหัส ไทกดใจ้ . . . ยามสกราชขึ้นวันพระญาวัน สกราชขึ้นแถมตัว ๑ เปน ๖๕๔ ปลีเต่าสี แล) As David Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeeo (1995, 42n48) point out, "[t]hose who would insist that the New Year always falls on 15 April need to be reminded that the Western (Gregorian) calendar only took its present form from October of 1582. In this period, the New Year (the Phraya Wan Day) usually fell around the 27th of March."

> day [of the week], a *moeng met* day [as the] Tai [say] . . . (Sunday, April 11, 1784). (Sarassawadee 2016, 34)
>
> [C]S 1147, a *dap sai* year, on the Phaya Wan day, on the fifth waxing day of the eighth lunar month, the third day [of the week], a *ka pao* day [as the] Tai [say] . . . (Tuesday, April 12, 1785). (Sarassawadee 2016, 34)

As for the start of the new year in the Songkran tradition, the *Chiang Mai Chronicle* confirms that it coincides with the seventh or eighth lunar month of the Lan Na (agricultural) calendar, as it states that a ceremony to worship four sacred relics at Wat Bupphā-ārāma (Wat Suan Dok), where the newly ordained King Kham Fan had moved, was held "in the season at the beginning of the year in the eighth month, the *ka met* year [C]S 1185 (April 1823)."[3)]

Why does the beginning of the new year, or Songkran, fall in the seventh lunar month and not the first lunar month (*duean ai*), as one might be tempted to assume? Sathian argues that the Maha Songkran day was not part of the original Tai calendrical system but adopted from northern India, a region with a cooler and less subtropical climate. The Maha Songkran day marks the end of the cold season and the start of spring, when the flowers are blossoming and the weather is getting warmer, so this time was considered appropriate for the start of a new year. The Indian solar calendar was adopted in the subtropical countries of Southeast Asia, where the beginning of the lunar year coincided with the end of the harvest season and took place before the start of the new rice-planting at the beginning of the rainy season. Thus, people were free to make merit and enjoy themselves (Sathian 1973, 8–11; Agarwal 2009–10, 9–10). The fact that Songkran is determined by the position of the sun and not by that of the moon is observed by Holt S. Hallett in his insightful book on Northern Thailand—which he calls the "Siamese Shan states"—during the reign of King Inthawichayanon. He notes the following:

> Amongst the Ping Shans (i.e., the Khon Mueang of Chiang Mai), New Year's Day is the same as in Burmah, and is fixed by the position of the sun and not by that of the moon. It is the time of the great Water Festival, when for three days Phya In, or Indra—the rain-god and king of the Dewahs—is supposed to descend at mid-night to the earth to stay for three or four days. On the signal of his arrival being given, a formal prayer is made, and jars full of water, which have been placed at the door of each house, their mouths stoppered with green leaves, have their contents poured on the ground as a libation to the god, in order to ensure the prosperity of the household; every one who has a gun hastens to fire it off as a salute to the rain-god. (Hallett 1988, 261)

Prani Wongthet (2005) argues that the Songkran festival is not part of the genuine cultural

3) . . . ในฤดูหัวปลี (ต้นปี) เดือน 8 ปลีก่าเม็ด สกราช 1185 ตัว (ค.ศ.1823) นั้นแล (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1995, 198).

heritage of Southeast Asia. On the contrary, it is a tradition that the royal elites of Southeast Asian polities received from India, where it is known as the Holika festival (Agarwal 2009–10, 11). This originally Hindu custom might first have been practiced in the states bordering the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Siam before spreading farther inland and becoming "Buddhicized." While the Indian calendars are based on the solar year, the original calendars of the Tai and other Southeast Asian peoples followed the lunar year cycle and the Chinese zodiac by letting the new (lunar) year start with the beginning of the first lunar month (*duean ai* or *duean ciang*), shortly after the Loi Krathong festival of the 12th lunar month. Therefore, Songkran marks the original solar new year of India, not the new year of the Tai people (Prani 2005, 64–68; Phiphat 2016, 13). In any case, historical evidence shows that Lan Na adopted the Indian solar calendar system a long time ago and integrated it into the traditional Tai lunar calendar, at least since the reign of King Mangrai, as the above-mentioned quotation from the *Chiang Mai Chronicle* indicates.

As for the new year in the original Tai system, Sathian notes:

> The new year of the Tai might originally have started at the beginning of the first lunar month. The month's name tells us that this was the first month of the year . . . and the names of the lunar months were called according to their numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. (Sathian 1973, 162)

The first lunar month in Lan Na was thus named *duean kiang* or *duean ciang* (Sathian 1973, 162; Udom 2004, 56). The first month of the Lan Na lunar calendar starts two months before the first month of the Siamese calendar. In Central Thailand the Loi Krathong festival is held in the 12th lunar month. After that the first lunar month (of the Siamese calendar) starts, and rainfall is expected to reduce. In the second lunar month (*duean yi*), people start reaping the harvest. In the fourth month the husked rice is stored in granaries. In the fifth month (seventh month of the Chiang Mai calendar), people can relax and perform rituals to offer sacrifices to their ancestor spirits and to repair agricultural equipment to be used in the rice-planting season the following year (Phiphat 2016, 32). Thus, counting *duean ai* as the first month of the year makes sense as it corresponds to the way of life of rice farmers in Central Thailand.

In Lan Na the lunar year starts two months earlier than in Central Thailand and Laos, likely reflecting the specific climatic conditions of Northern Thailand and the way of life of the people in that region. The first lunar month of Lan Na starts roughly between mid-September and mid-October. Thus, it corresponds to the rainy season and the start of the cold season, in which cloudy skies are transformed into clear skies, marking the start of the cold season. The method of reckoning the beginning of the new year thus was originally based on climatic conditions. Ancient customs celebrating the transition

from the old year to the new include sacrifices to ancestral spirits. The *kuai (kluai) salak* ceremony (Thai: *salak phat*), where food is presented to Buddhist monks by drawing lots in dedication to all deceased ancestors, might be considered a custom dating back to pre-Buddhist times that was later modified to conform to the Buddhist teachings of the new religion of the Tai.

The names of the years in the original system of the region were coined according to the zodiac cycle. This method is clearly of Chinese origin and corresponds to the lunar calendar, according to which a year is made up of 12 months. Twelve years form one zodiac cycle. Their names in Lan Na and Siam differ, as listed in the following table, which records the Lan Na year name followed by the corresponding Siamese and the English translation (Thawi 1989, 12):

1. *Cai* (ใจ้) / *Chuat* (ชวด) = rat
2. *Pao* (เป้า) / *Chalu* (ฉลู) = cow
3. *Yi* (ยี) / *Khan* (ขาล) = tiger
4. *Mao* (เหม้า) / *Tho* (เถาะ) = rabbit
5. *Si* (สี) / *Marong* (มะโรง) = dragon
6. *Sai* (ใส้) / *Maseng* (มะเส็ง) = small snake
7. *Sanga* (สะง้า) / *Mamia* (มะเมีย) = horse
8. *Met* (เม็ด) / *Mamae* (มะแม) = goat
9. *San* (สัน) / *Wok* (วอก) = monkey
10. *Lao* (เล้า) / *Raka* (ระกา) = rooster
11. *Set* (เส็ด) / *Co* (จอ) = dog
12. *Kai* (ใค้) / *Kun* (กุน) = pig / elephant

This 12-year zodiac cycle is still widely used. In Lan Na chronicles, both the year of an era (usually the Minor Era or Cunlasakkarat) and the year of the zodiac cycle combined with a ten-year cycle (forming a sexagesimal cycle) are used together, such as the date of the founding of the city of Chiang Mai "in [C]S 658, a *rawai san* year" (AD 1294, the year of the monkey, the eighth year of the decade) (Udom 2004, 36). Such dual dating of events in manuscripts and inscriptions—referring to both the new solar and the old lunar calendrical systems—was common until recent times (for further details, see Eade 1995).

In conclusion, the ancient Tai new year starts with the month of *duean ai* or *duean kiang* of the Lan Na lunar calendar. The years are named after the zodiac. After the adoption of Indian culture, Songkran was defined as the first day of the new year. Thus, the solar year started in the seventh lunar month (in some years the eighth lunar month), with the first six lunar months still falling in the old (solar) year. This dual system has been in use since at least the era of King Mangrai, i.e., for more than seven hundred years. In 1889, during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, it was stipulated that the first day of the new (solar) year was April 1. The government of Marshal Phibun Songkhram proclaimed that the new year should start on January 1. Since January 1, 1941, the start of the new year in Thailand has followed international conventions. However, the cel-

ebration of the Buddhist New Year, the Songkran festival, still followed the traditional calendar, with April 13, 14, and 15 as the three auspicious days. In 1989 the government of Chatichai Choonhavan proclaimed April 12, 13, and 14 as public holidays in Thailand, but in 1997 the government of Chawalit Yongchaiyuth changed the official dates back to April 13, 14, and 15 (Sommai and Doré 1992, 175–176; Agarwal 2009–10, 16–17).

The Importance of the Songkran Festival in Conjunction with Other Religious Activities

The first day of the New Year festival is called Wan Maha Songkran, or "Great Songkran Day." Though Northern Thai chronicles spell it as *sangkran* (สังกรานต์), the word is pronounced *sangkhan* (สังขานต์). It refers to the sun's movement into the next zodiac sign on New Year's Day. Later, the spelling changed to the homophone *sangkhan* (สังขาร), which means "body," "conditioned things," or "mental dispositions" (Pali: *saṅkhāra*; Skt: *saṃskāra*).[4] The term Wan Sangkhan (วันสังขาร) or, in full, Wan Sangkhan Long (วันสังขารล่อง), came to mean "the day when [the human's] bodily and mental dispositions float [to another year]." People believe that the early morning of that day is especially dark, and that the sky can be cleared only by a pair of ancestral spirits: Pu (paternal grandfather) Sangkhan and Ya (paternal grandmother) Sangkhan. It is believed that these spirits put all of the waste (including all bad experiences) from the towns and villages into a huge basket, thus causing the sky to clear. Adults teach children to wake up early in the morning so that they might catch a glimpse of the ancestral spirit couple. Later, the couple is chased away by firing gunshots or igniting firecrackers. The main activity that day is house cleaning. In former times mosquito nets would be washed and people would wash their hair. In the afternoon, Phra Sihing and other Buddha statues would be bathed in a procession going around the city of Chiang Mai (Mani 1986, 56–58).

The second day of the New Year festival is called Wan Nao (วันเนา or วันเนาว์). The word *nao* (pronounced in Thai with a mid-even tone) derives from the Khmer word ទៅ, which means "to live" or "to reside." The Northern Thai, however, have altered the pronunciation of the Khmer word and changed its etymology. Pronounced with a falling

4) According to T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (1989, 664), *saṅkhāra* is "one of the most difficult terms in Buddhist metaphysics, in which the blending of the subjective-objective view of the world and of happening, peculiar to the East, is so complete, that it is almost impossible for Occidental terminology to get at the root of its meaning in a translation. We can only convey an idea of its import by representing several sides of its application, without attempting to give a 'word' as a definite translation."

tone, *nao* (เน่า) means "rotten" or "decayed"; thus, the second day of the festival is considered the "Day of Putrefaction" (Davis 1984, 119). In any case, Wan Nao is considered to be the day between the last day of the old year and the first day of the new year. People are admonished to pay utmost attention to what they say on this day. They are only allowed to say things that bring good luck. The activities carried out on Wan Nao are preparatory works for the following day. In the afternoon of Wan Nao, sand is carried to the temple compound. There is a belief, as explained in the homiletic text *Anisong Cedi Sai* (Benefits [derived from the construction] of sand stupas), that the building of stupas or *cetiyas* with sand will bring tremendous karmic benefits to the donor (see Sommai and Doré 1992, 183–184; Mani 1986, 59). Though the sand may not necessarily be used for such a purpose, it is considered a meritorious deed to carry sand to the temple, as it will compensate for the sand that laypeople who visited the temple during the previous year took away under their shoes; the latter would be regarded as a demeritorious act (*pāpa*) (Mani 1986; Rangsan 2005, 1–2). However, Ploysri Porananond (2015, 168) points out that "the idea behind this practice has hitherto gone unexplained." Furthermore, she convincingly shows how, since the late 1990s, the making of sand stupas has been transformed into a contest among representatives of various temples in the city of Chiang Mai (Ploysri 2015, 170–172). Due to changes in the socioeconomic structure of urban areas, the carrying of sand is nowadays only "marginally performed" in the Songkran festival in Chiang Mai (Sommai and Doré 1992, 184).

The third day is called Wan Thaloeng Sok or Wan Phaya Wan; this is the day when the sun has already entered Aries (Thai: *meṣa* เมษ). On this day, the (solar) year of the era moves forward. Early in the morning, laypeople go to the temple to make merit by *than khan khao* (ทานขันข้าว)—literally, "offering the rice bowl"—which is a dedication of merit to dead relatives. Afterward, food is prepared to be offered to the elderly, who give blessings to the donors. This custom is called *than khan khao khon thao* (ทานขันข้าวคนเถ้า /เฒ่า), or "offering the rice bowl to elderly people." It is briefly referred to by Carl Bock in his description of the New Year festival when he mentions that "people were busily engaged in making cakes of rice and sugar" (Bock 1986, 347). In the afternoon, the water-pouring ritual called *rot nam dam hua* (รดน้ำดำหัว), asking for blessings from respected elders, is performed. The elders forgive the younger people for all infringements. Wan Phaya Wan is considered the best and most auspicious day of the year for people to move to a new house, start learning magic spells, ask for amulets, and tattoo their bodies with mystic symbols and letters (*yanta* ยันต์). Nowadays, the Chiang Mai municipality organizes a *dam hua* ritual presided over by the provincial governor. This ritual, which has been carried out for more than fifty years, will be discussed in further detail below. Sommai and Doré (1992, 176) argue that the myth of Dhammapāla decap-

itating the god Brahma, having won a strange gamble,[5] might explain the origin of the ritual bathing of heads.

On the fourth day, called Wan Pak Pi—literally, "Day of the Year's Mouth"—the *dam hua* ritual is performed to honor parents and senior personalities. It is believed that eating jackfruit curry will make one prosper and be supported by powerful patrons. Finally, the fifth day is the "Day of the Month's Mouth" (Wan Pak Duean). On that day white magic rituals, such as a ritual to exorcise bad lack or karma (*sado khro* or *song khro*)—literally, "releasing misfortune"—and a candle-worshipping ritual (*bucha thian*), are performed to drive away bad things, extend one's lifespan, and win over enemies. Candles are lit to venerate a Buddha statue (Sanan 2005; see also Sommai and Doré 1992, 178).

The Songkran festival takes place in the hot season after the rice harvest, so it is a time when people relax before starting the new planting season. As the weather around the New Year is hot and dry, it is an appropriate time for rest and relaxation. Water is used for refreshment and various rituals, such as the bathing of Buddha statues and the water-pouring ceremony described above. During these days people engage in various local performances, and the Buddhist lay community celebrates the new year by offering alms to the monks, dedicating their meritorious donations to deceased relatives, bathing Buddha statues with consecrated perfume water, carrying sand into the monastery compound, and carrying a Bodhi tree (Northern Thai: *mai kham sali* ไม้ค้ำสรี or *Ficus religiosa*) in a procession around the village or town quarter.

The activities carried out to celebrate the arrival of a new year have great significance for the local population. At the individual level, people are forced to review their actions over the past year. This is also the time for a major clean-up of houses, increased personal hygiene, and the wearing of new clothing. All this is believed to contribute to making one's mind joyful and delighted. Together with the auspicious and merit-making activities mentioned above, people prepare to greet the new year. In private households the *dam hua* ritual creates closer emotional bonds between children, grandchildren, parents, and grandparents, including relatives who have already passed away. The ritual also encourages people to enter the new year with optimism and a sense of gratitude toward others. At the level of community, rural or urban, the New Year festival is a big event marking a joint large-scale activity. The *dam hua* ritual is carried out to pay

5) Dhammapāla, who was able to understand the language of birds, listened to a bird couple solving the riddle "Where is the glory of a man in the morning, afternoon and evening?" The answer was that "in the morning, the glory of man was on his face, because one has to wash one's face every morning. In the afternoon, the glory would be on the body or chest, since one bathes. In the evening it's on the feet, as one has to wash the feet before going to bed" (Agarwal 2009–10, 14–15).

respects to one's boss, teachers, and high-ranking officials. The collective efforts invested in such merit-making activities associated with pleasure and amusement foster a sense of belonging within the community; they also provide opportunities for various kinds of joint endeavors expressing mutual trust and confidence.

State-Sponsored Water-Pouring Ceremony at Songkran in Chiang Mai

The *dam hua* ritual, which plays a central role in the Songkran festival, is considered an ancient tradition in Lan Na. Its origins are unclear, but there is evidence that the ritual was performed for Burmese kings during the Thingyan festival in nineteenth-century Myanmar (Dhida 1995, 146). During the period when Lan Na was an independent kingdom or split into various smaller kingdoms, each of which was a semi-independent vassal state of Siam, this ritual was performed as a state ritual.[6] The king of Chiang Mai, also called *cao luang*, presided over it to demonstrate the stability of his kingdom. The yearly ritual is intended to re-enact the close bonds between the king and his subjects.

The term *dam hua* (ดำหัว) might be rendered as "to wash one's hair." *Dam* (ดำ) is a verb referring to a senior person bowing their head in order to wash their hair. Those who are invited to wash their hair in the *dam hua* ritual are respected elders. The gifts to be brought to such a *dam hua* ritual are turmeric juice (*nam khamin* น้ำขมิ้น), a *som poi* (ส้มป่อย) creeper or *Acacia concinna* (used instead of soap), flowers, fruit, and other consumer goods as a token of apologizing to the senior person for any offenses and insults. The senior person responds with a blessing by dipping their hand into the turmeric juice and *som poi* to wash their own head. In general, the people paying their respects to senior persons in such a *dam hua* ritual line up in a procession. Though the ceremony has its origins in Lan Na, it later spread to other regions of Thailand and became a central part of the New Year festival.

Dam Hua Ritual for Kings of Chiang Mai

Historical evidence of the *dam hua* ritual in Chiang Mai has been found during the reign of only two rulers: King Kawilorot Suriyawong (r. 1856–70) and King Inthawichayanon (r. 1870–97). It seems that later, when the kings of Chiang Mai and the other kingdoms of Lan Na had lost much of their power to the government in Bangkok, local rulers were

6) Rituals can be perceived as extraordinary practices. D. D. Gilmore (1998, 26), for example, defines ritual as "a repetitive sequence of activity, culturally sanctioned and regularized, but always involving an appeal to the supernatural: spirits, gods." Ritual is "social action; its performance requires the organized cooperation of individuals."

no longer involved in such state-sponsored rituals, though the ceremony was still practiced in private.

A *dam hua* ritual performed during the reign of King Kawilorot has been vividly described by Daniel McGilvary (1828–1911), an American Presbyterian missionary who founded the "Laos Mission" in Chiang Mai in 1870. McGilvary attended a *dam hua* ritual overseen by King Kawilorot (whom the author refers to as "Prince") around AD 1868, which he describes in considerable detail in his famous autobiography, *A Half Century among the Siamese and the Lāo*:

> At the Lāo New Year it is customary for all persons of princely rank, all officers and people of influence, to present their compliments to the Prince in person, and to take part in the ceremony of "Dam Hūa," by way of wishing him a Happy New Year. Because of the Prince's absence in the field, this ceremony could not be observed at the regular time; but it was nonetheless brilliantly carried out a few days after his return. The name, Dam Hūa, means "bathing the head" or "head-bath," and it is really a ceremonial bathing or baptism of the Prince's head with water poured upon it, first by princes and officials in the order of their rank, and so on down to his humblest subjects.
>
> The first and more exclusive part of the ceremony took place in the palace, where I also was privileged to offer my New Year's greetings with the rest. The great reception-hall was crowded with the Prince's family and with officials of all degrees. The air was heavy with the fragrance of flowers which loaded every table and stand. All were in readiness with their silver vessels filled with water, awaiting His Highness' appearance. At length an officer with a long silver-handled spear announced his coming. The whole company received him with lowest prostration after the old-time fashion. Seeing me standing, he sent for a chair, saying that the ceremony was long, and I would be tired. The Court Orator, or Scribe, then read a long address of welcome to the Prince on his return from his brilliant expedition, with high-sounding compliments on its success. Then there was a long invocation of all the powers above or beneath, real or imaginary, not to molest, but instead to protect, guide, and bless His Highness' person, kingdom and people, with corresponding curses invoked on all his enemies and theirs. Then came the ceremonial bath, administered first by his own family, his relatives, and high officials—he is standing while vase after vase of water was poured on his head, drenching him completely and flooding all the floor. It is a ceremony not at all unpleasant in a hot climate, however unendurable it might be in colder regions.
>
> This was the beginning. According to immemorial custom, a booth was prepared on a sand-bar in the river. To this, after the ceremony in the palace, the Prince went in full state, riding on an elephant richly caparisoned with trappings of solid gold, to receive a like bath at the hands of his loyal subjects—beginning, as before, with some high nobles, and then passing on to the common people, who might all take part in this closing scene of the strange ceremony. (McGilvary 1912, 84–86)

The extract above shows that the royal *dam hua* ritual was held in two spaces: the private and the public. In the private space the head of the dynasty would perform the "bathing of the head" with members of the royal family and close high-ranking officials (*khun nang*), the order being arranged according to seniority and rank. The ceremony in the public space was organized on the banks of the Ping River, with the king representing

the lord of all of his kingdom's inhabitants. In the *dam hua* ritual that took place in the ruler's palace (*khum luang*), the king stood while water was poured from a gutter or water trough on his head, similar to the use of gutters to bathe stupas, Buddha statues, or monks.

As for the *dam hua* ritual in the Ping River, it is suggested that during the reign of King Kawilorot the ruler rode on the back of an elephant from his palace in the center of the city toward the Ping River until he reached an island in the middle of the river. There a pavilion had been erected, where the ruler could receive the water pouring.

The royal *dam hua* ritual during the reign of King Inthawichayanon was documented by the high-ranking official Phraya Anuban Phayapkit, whose research was posthumously published in the funeral book *Anuban Ramluek* (Phraya Anuban Phayapkit recollects, 1969). He reveals some interesting details about Phracao Inthawichayanon's *dam hua* ritual:

> From the royal palace in the center of the walled city (*wiang*), with the king sitting on a palanquin, the procession proceeded with gongs and drums, accompanied by members of the royal family and high-ranking aristocrats as well as court officials. The procession left the Chang Phueak Gate and proceeded along the city moat until it arrived at the beautiful stupa (Cedi Kio เจดีย์กิ่ว). When the procession arrived there, King Inthawichayanon climbed down and entered his resting place that had been prepared in the middle of the Ping River. The provisional bridge [crossing the Ping River] was made of Maduea (*Ficus moraceae*) wood, and his resting place there was called Pong Duea (shelter made of Maduea wood). Having reached there, he descended into the Ping River and bathed his head in the water. Upon leaving the water [the king] got dressed, and the aristocrats and members of the royal family came to be blessed by him by pouring water [on his hands].
>
> On this occasion the Lua and Karen came and offered orchid flowers (*dok ueang sae*) and tobacco with a tobacco box for the king to smoke. Another gift presented to the king was ginger, which Phracao Inthawichayanon liked to chew. After chewing the ginger, the king spat on the Lua and Karen who had been waiting. They believed that they would thereby escape from calamities and dangers and have a good harvest. After the end of the ceremony, the king ascended to his palanquin and [the procession] moved along Wichayanon Road, passing the market and proceeding in the direction of Tha Phae Road. The merchants, wealthy persons, and elderly people as well as all other people intending to pour water were received by Phracao Inthawichayanon with joy. The procession proceeded along Tha Phae Road until it reached the city center and then turned right, toward the royal palace, where the ceremony ended.
>
> The elderly people add information about the place where Phracao Inthawichayanon performed the ritual in the water of the Ping River: the procession crossed the wooden bridge in front of Wat Ket monastery, then turned right until it reached Wat Si Khong monastery. There the *dam hua* ritual took place in the Ping River near the pier at Wat Si Khong. (Anuban 1969, 329)

The Chiang Mai king's bathing ritual in the river is well known. King Chulalongkorn himself recognized this tradition in his royal treatise on the royal 12-month ceremonies. In one chapter the king discussed the ritual performed in the fifth lunar month of the Siamese calendar (Caitra) as follows:

> [This ritual] is most probably an ancient ritual that has been transmitted by the Lao Phung Dam ("Black-bellied Lao," i.e., the Tai-speaking people of Lan Na) because until the present the rulers of the Lao Phung Dam provinces—such as Chiang Mai, Lampang, and Lamphun—still have to descend into the river to perform the rituals of the fifth lunar month, which they schedule during the New Year festival. (Chulachomklao Chaoyuhua 1973, 134)

The king also expressed the following opinion:

> Since ancient times, kings bathed on Wan Thaloeng Sok (วันเถลิงศก) without any interruption. There were no exceptions. . . . The royal consecration at the Songkran festival is as if the king had to bathe for the sake of the well-being of his country, unlike the bathing of Buddha statues or the water pouring for elderly people. It seems strange that according to the (Lan Na) Songkran tradition, children, grandchildren and siblings pour water for the respected senior persons in their families; but for the ruler, regardless of how old he is, there is no member of the royal family offering water to him as they do for other elderly members of the royal family. For the king there is only this bathing of royal consecration. (Chulachomklao Chaoyuhua 1973, 364)

The Songkran tradition uses water as a symbol. The king played a crucial role in the performance of the water-bathing ritual. How lavishly the ceremony was organized depended on the status of the ruler. The water-bathing ceremony in the river was an important ritual in Lan Na as it was carried out by the king himself. It symbolized the prosperity and flourishing of Lan Na, which consisted of five smaller vassal states of Siam. The *dam hua* ritual was relatively simple and reflected the close relationship between the king and his subjects. The king was the father-lord of his commoners; he was not arrogant but allowed his subjects to approach him closely.

The New Year festival of the Tai Khuen in Chiang Tung was organized as a state ritual in the throne hall of the ruler's palace. The *cao fa* of Chiang Tung invited his officials and the population at large to gather there to perform the ceremony of asking forgiveness. The *cao fa* wore his royal insignia and a Burmese-style headdress. The attendants paid obeisance to the ruler in a clearly arranged order. The *cao fa* blessed the attendants in return. Afterward, the *cao fa* gave special blessings and invited the inhabitants of the whole town to have lunch with him. Thus, the day was called Wan Kin Pang (Day of eating at a temporary shelter). That afternoon, a boat race was held at the Nong Tung Lake in the town center of Chiang Tung to conclude the Songkran festival (Sathian 1973, 197; Khun Suek Mangrai 1995, 8, 45, 61, 147). Klemens Karlsson argues that the Songkran festival in Chiang Tung "was certainly celebrated as a fertility ritual in the late nineteenth century," as observed by J. George Scott (Karlsson 2020, 197). The *Chiang Tung Chronicle* indeed states that the Songkran festival had its origins in a serious drought more than six centuries ago; thus, astrologers advised that "sand *cetiya* are to be constructed on the Sangkhan's day of departure, and then men, elephants, and horses

Fig. 1 The *kanto* (กั๋นตอ) ritual as photographically documented by Max and Bertha Ferrars in the 1890s. *Kanto* is a Burmese word with three meanings: (1) to apologize, (2) to express respect by raising one's hands to a *wai* (traditional form of salutation), and (3) gifts to be given for expressing gratitude. In this image one probably sees gifts presented by village headmen to the ruler (*cao fa*) of Chiang Tung. The gifts are placed on a mat. The four men sitting on the right and left and holding rifles are likely the ruler's bodyguards. This ritual was performed after the end of the Buddhist Lent and during the New Year festival.

Source: Collis (2017, 96)

are to be readied to go in procession to pay reverence on the bank of the Khuen River" (Sāimöng Mangrāi 1981, 237–238).

The New Year festival of the ruler (or *cao phaendin*) of Sipsong Panna encompassed merit-making activities, the ritual bathing of Buddha statues, and the asking of forgiveness from the Triple Gems (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) and teachers. An important state ceremony was the water pouring of the *cao phaendin* of Sipsong Panna in a big gathering at the *ho sanam luang* (council of nobles). The *cao phaendin* was asked for forgiveness by washing his head with perfumed water. This ritual washing was accompanied by igniting long-tail skyrockets and water splashing in the royal courtyard. These are unique features of the original New Year festival among the Tai Lue in southwestern Yunnan (Phra Khamchang 2018).

Songkran and Royal Politics

We see that in the traditional Tai polities, such as Lan Na, Sipsong Panna, and Chiang Tung, the king or *cao luang* in his capacity as the supreme ruler of the country presided over the state-sponsored rituals of the New Year festival marking the advent of a new solar year of the era. In the case of Chiang Mai, the rituals performed during the Songkran

festival were embedded in the concept of a Buddhist state where the king was considered the main body of support in a deeply Buddhist culture. The merit making, the bathing of Buddha statues, the building of sand stupas, and the worship of ancestors were blessings that created spiritual well-being in an agricultural society and ensured a rich harvest in the next rice-planting season. In some years the king organized special activities on the occasion. For example, in 1846, during the reign of Phraya Phutthawong, a procession of Buddha relics to be enshrined at the great stupa of Com Thong entered the city of Chiang Mai on Phaya Wan day (Sarassawadee 2016, 50).

In an agricultural society, it is believed that the king is the person who guarantees wet-rice cultivation; during the New Year festival the ruler informs and advises the people by predicting the rainfall for the year, proclaiming whether the rainfall will be abundant or scanty. Such predictions are documented in historical records (*cotmaihet*) of Lan Na, for example in that of Wat Phumin in the province of Nan:

> In [C]S 1184, a *tao sanga* year, a Phaya Wan day, on the ninth waning day of the seventh lunar month, two *naga* (dragons) arose from the water. (Monday, April 15, 1822)
>
> In [C]S 1185, a *ka met* year, a Phaya Wan day, on the seventh waxing day of the eighth lunar month, staying for two days, one *naga* (dragon) rose from the water. (Wednesday, April 16, 1823)
>
> In [C]S 1186, a *kap san* year, a Phaya Wan day, on the second waning day of the seventh lunar month, staying for one day only, five *naga* (dragons) arose from the water. (Thursday, April 15, 1824) (Sarassawadee 2016, 44–45)

It is likely that the author of the *cotmaihet* was an astrologer who recorded important events that occurred in the course of the year. He paid special attention to the beginning of the year, because Songkran and the activities surrounding it mark the very first event of a year and are followed by other events. Such records were perhaps noted at least once a year.

The local political thinking of *kasem mueang* (เกษมเมือง), or "happiness of the domain," comprises four aspects that are part of the royal duties (*phra ratchakoraniyakit* พระราชกรณียกิจ) to ensure that the people live in peace and happiness (Patcharee 1985, 35). The organizing of festivals, which provide the king's subjects with relaxation from the hardships of daily life, serves this objective. The festival, which does not go beyond Songkran when the weather is very hot and dry, is most appropriate for taking a rest from tedious work in the rice fields. Thus, people can relax before resuming their work with the beginning of the next planting season. The water splashing during the Songkran festival, the merit making and the dedication of merit to deceased relatives, as well as the worship of ancestors and the *dam hua* ritual constitute elements of individual and

collective happiness during that time of refreshment. The water-splashing activities are a source of great enjoyment, notably for young people who play along the streets and roads. This joyful event has occurred for more than a century, based on the vivid recollection of Emelie McGilvary, whose husband was the head of the Laos Mission:

> The holiday which most interests Lao children is the New Year, when all, and especially the young, give themselves up to a peculiar form of merry-making consisting in giving everyone a shower. Armed with buckets of water and bamboo reeds, by which they can squirt the water some distance, these people place themselves at the doors and gates and on the streets, ready to give any passer-by a drenching, marking out as special victims those who are foolish enough to wear good clothes on such a day. It is most amusing to watch them, after exhausting their supply of water, hasten to the river or well and run back, fearing the loss of one opportunity. Sometimes several torrents are directed on one poor individual; then, after the drenching, shouts of laughter fill the air. Elites and royal officials joyfully played in the river. (McGilvary 1884, 487–488)

Sathian provides an interesting hypothesis about the meaning of the water splashing:

> The splashing and sprinkling of water and the joyful playing on Songkran Day are not intended solely for amusement during the New Year festival; they are also a way of praying for abundant rainfall for the wet-rice cultivation that starts soon after Songkran. (Sathian 1973, 127)

Sathian quotes from Luang Phadung Khwaen Pracan's (1937) book about "Lao" (here: Lan Na) customs as follows:

> This water splashing is an ancient custom based on the belief that if elderly people and youths do not throw water, there will not be sufficient rainfall that year. People compare water splashing with the behavior of the Naga king in Lake Anodat. Due to this, people have a preference for water splashing, as they believe that this will bring abundant rainfall, depending on the season or month. (Sathian 1973, 127)

Thus, the water splashing is a symbol of humid fertility amidst dry heat.

Transformation of the Songkran Festival

The integration of Lan Na into the Siamese state entailed a reduction of state power at the local level for the sake of national unity. As a consequence, the Songkran festival, which used to be a state ritual under the auspices of the king (*cao luang*) of Chiang Mai, was transformed after 1961. The social changes also influenced the form and essence of the old-style Songkran festival.

The Siamese government gradually curbed the power of the *cao luang*. From the

1940s, the *dam hua* ritual was no longer presided over by the king of Chiang Mai but by the provincial governor. In 1939 the last *cao luang* of Chiang Mai, Prince Kaeo Nawarat, passed away. The government in Bangkok had decided 13 years earlier not to appoint a new, already powerless local ruler any longer but to fill this position with a governor directly supervised by the Ministry of the Interior. Without a *cao luang* representing the traditional local power, the *dam hua* ritual faded into oblivion. Phracao Inthawichayanon was thus probably the last *cao luang* who performed the *dam hua* ritual in the precincts of the royal court of Chiang Mai. As discussed above, the *dam hua* ritual took place in a public space: it was a state ritual in which all strata of society in Chiang Mai could participate. Even the Lua and Karen living in the mountainous areas descended to the city to pay obeisance to the *cao luang*.[7)]

During the Songkran festival high-ranking provincial officials came to perform the *dam hua* ritual with the *cao luang*. In 1927 the *ammat ek* (chief court official), Phraya Anuban Phayapkit, when receiving his appointment to the position of under-secretary of the office of the administrative circle (*palat monthon*) in Nan Province, participated in the *dam hua* ritual for the *cao luang* of Nan (Anuban 1969, 274). When he was later transferred to a new position in Chiang Mai, Phraya Anuban Phayapkit led his family to join the *dam hua* ritual organized for Prince Kaeo Nawarat at his residence on the banks of the Ping River. After the prince's death, it was the provincial governor who presided over the *dam hua* ritual for members of the former royal family. Wisit Chaiyaphon, the governor of Chiang Mai, sponsored, for example, the *dam hua* ritual for Major General Cao Ratchabut Wongtawan na Chiang Mai at his Lai Na residence (*khum lai na*). Another governor of Chiang Mai, Chaiya Phunsiriwong, headed the *dam hua* ritual for Cao Phong In na Chiang Mai. In contrast to the older tradition under the kings of Chiang Mai, the performance of the *dam hua* ritual had a predominantly private character and was no longer associated with a state ritual performed in public.

The records of the chief court official Phraya Anuban Phayapkit are historical documents showing that in 1929 government service had not yet come to a halt during the Songkran festival, as is the case nowadays. Moreover, the water splashing at that time was carried out in a rather polite and refined manner, unlike later. Phraya Anuban notes that when he returned from the provincial city hall (today the building is the seat of the Office of Art and Culture of Chiang Mai) to his residence on the banks of the Ping River, he had to struggle to evade rude water splashing and reached Charoen Phrathet Road on

7) Sommai and Doré point out that in Luang Prabang the Kassak, a subgroup of the Mon-Khmer speaking Khmu, participated in the Basi ceremony for the Lao king and queen until the mid-1970s. Thus, they deduce that "the Lawa (Lua) had also participated in the *dam hua* ceremony at the Chiang Mai Court in early times" (Sommai and Doré 1992, 187).

the side of Ban Ho (Chinese community). There he saw a group of well-dressed Chinese waiting next to his vehicle. When the Chinese asked the governor if they could splash water on him, he let them pour water on his hands and gave them his blessings. Not far away, he saw a crowd of young women and men throwing water near the Nawarat Bridge in a rather polite manner. However, after the political changes following the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the Songkran water festival became a more exuberant affair, with water being thrown from one car to another, from passenger to passenger. People no longer needed to ask for permission to throw water; thus, the original festival in Chiang Mai underwent drastic changes (Anuban 1969, 330–331). Whether these changes began in the early 1930s or earlier is unknown. The Presbyterian missionary Rev. L. S. Hanna from Lampang complained in 1924 that Songkran was "a time of rioting and drunkenness for four or five days" and sometimes even "Christian young men" were "under severe temptation" and got "into trouble because of the violence of neighbors" (Hanna 1924, 26).

After the demise of the local state authority, the Songkran festival lost its character as a state ritual and became a tradition for the population at large where people could engage in merit making and perform the *dam hua* ritual in their communities, in temples, or within their families, depending on how modest and simple their lifestyle was. When Thai state power spread to Lan Na at all levels, the provincial governor became the highest representative of the Thai state who supervised and controlled all district chiefs and other segments of the provincial administration. Thus, the *dam hua* custom came under the control of the governor, whereas subordinate government officials were forced to perform the ritual with the governor to emulate the now-defunct royal ceremony at the ruler's palace.

The *dam hua* ritual of the provincial governor took place on the Phaya Wan day corresponding to April 15. This tradition began more than fifty years ago, around 1965–66. A procession made up of various groups departed from the center of the city and proceeded to the governor's residence on the banks of the Ping River (Anuson Chaiya Phunsiriwong 1991, 120). This was an invented tradition, created when tourism began to play a major role in Thai society and economy. There was no doubt that this newly created tradition would also attract tourists, which was why the first state socioeconomic development plan of 1961–65 supported the promotion of the Songkran festival as a tradition of the North. This aspect has been continuously emphasized until the present.

The *dam hua* ritual for *cao luang* has been replaced with a *dam hua* ritual for provincial governors. It is interesting to note that there was also a custom to perform the *dam hua* ritual for the deceased *cao luang* or rulers of Chiang Mai at the graveyard of Wat Suan Dok monastery. In the past, it was the incumbent *cao luang* who headed the

ritual *dam hua ku* or *song nam ku* (ritually washing the stupa containing remains), as was the case in 1937 when Prince Kaeo Nawarat hosted the annual ritual (Anuson Phon-ek Phunphon Atsanachinda 1992, 247–248). It seems that during the period of Prince Kaeo Nawarat, this ritual was performed only within the small circle of members of the (former) royal family and high-ranking courtiers in a private rather than public space. Upon gaining a more profound understanding of the past, inhabitants of Chiang Mai began to promote the *dam hua ku* ritual on a much larger scale by extending it to a wider public space where various government units and the population at large could also participate. Thus, the *dam hua ku* ritual became part of a public ceremony in which the people of Chiang Mai commemorated the *cao luang* by venerating their bones enshrined in a stupa (*ku*).

The policies of the Thai state to promote capitalist development and link Thailand to a world of globalization impacted traditional customs such as the Songkran festival, whose cultural significance is characterized by the ritual bathing of Buddha statues, the *dam hua* ritual for high-ranking personalities, the asking for forgiveness, and the joyful water-splashing activities that later became fashionable. The water splashing, along with tourists joining in the building of sand stupas through donations, became more and more widespread with the promotion of tourism, while traditional customs and rituals declined (see Ploysri 2015, 170).

Conclusion

Songkran, or the Buddhist New Year festival, has a long tradition in the Upper North of present-day Thailand, which was the core of the former kingdom of Lan Na and whose culture spread to neighboring Tai-inhabited regions farther north. The Songkran tradition has been passed down over many generations. However, it is not a static tradition. It has changed according to the needs of an agricultural society that has long relied on nature, and it reflects strong and intimate bonds between the people of rural communities at various levels, who have created customs with local characteristics. As Thailand became more industrialized, the mode of production was transformed to capitalism, forcing the people to adapt the Songkran festival according to new social and economic conditions. Water splashing along the streets—a custom practiced by the masses of people, young and old—became dominant and "democratized," while the original ideas of merit making and the *dam hua* ritual and their association with the traditional elites gradually faded. It remains to be seen whether the endeavors of local historians and concerned people to restore the original Songkran tradition of Lan Na—or at least

elements of it—will prove to be successful.

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Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World

KHAIRUDIN ALJUNIED

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018.

The book *Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World* studies the ideas of Haji Abdullah Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah (1908–81), also known as "Hamka," who was a leading figure of the Islamic reformist movements in Southeast Asia in the twentieth century.

Khairudin Aljunied situates Hamka's ideas within a "dialectical analysis," using the term "cosmopolitan reform" to underscore Hamka's attempt to overcome the extremist, communalist, bigoted, and gendered tendencies that defined many societies in the Malay world (p. 6). To do so, the author successfully utilizes Quentin Skinner's method of textual analysis: situating texts within intellectual contexts and frameworks of discourse that allow an understanding of "what their authors were *doing* in writing them" (p. 7)—to enable a holistic understanding of Hamka's writing. Aljunied states clearly that Hamka's work exhibits a "dialectical synthesis" of past ideas with new ones (p. 7). Therefore, he utilizes one of Dominick LaCapra's structures of reading prolific writers, which is dialectical synthesis.

The dialectical nature of Hamka's writings is based on his endeavor to introduce ideas that were reformist but still represented Islam. Consequently, while structured in six chapters, the book's central argument interchangeably utilizes both Hamka's ideas and the historical events that shaped his writings to successfully explain the process of cosmopolitan reform. The chapters' topics constitute a complex range of issues, from reason and revelation in Chapter 1 to moderation and social justice in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. Hamka's cosmopolitan reform was directed at restoring Sufism in the Malay world (Chapter 5) by offering fresh readings of the geneses, boundaries, and objectives of Islamic spirituality. The reform of Sufism, as Hamka saw it, needed to be carried out alongside the reform of the state of women, because both aspects were necessary for the vitality of the social and spiritual dimensions of modern Muslim life. Chapter 6 considers the history of Islam, with all its enlightened ideas, as a reminder for reform.

I consider Chapter 4, which examines the treatment of women in the Malay world, to be central to this book as this issue is central to Hamka's idea of cosmopolitan reform. The seismic

transformation within Muslim societies across the Malay world during Hamka's time provided him with the impetus to think about the struggles of women. It seems that Hamka's personal life influenced his views on the urgent need for women to have a voice in Malay society. There were three factors that structured Hamka's approach to Islamic reform, chief of which was his personal life struggles (p. 14). The state of Muslim women was one leitmotif that pervaded Hamka's cosmopolitan reform ideas. This does not come as a surprise given that Hamka was a child of polygamy and divorced parents. In his memoirs, he documented the painful experience of growing up deprived of the presence of a father figure living with the family. Hamka described himself as an outcast, disliked by his father's family and ostracized by his maternal family. The suffering that he underwent in his early life was among the chief factors that prompted him to write about the relations between men and women in the Malay world (p. 69). In addition, issues related to women were progressed alongside wider intellectual currents that were flowing into the Malay world through Europe and the Arab world (p. 70).[1] Yet it was the colonial and postcolonial governments that pushed for women's education (for girls to be sent to school).[2] Hamka's work triggered a defensive reaction from traditionalist Muslims, even though it was informed by key ideas of European and then-popular Egyptian intellectuals in the Malay world.

Aljunied structures Chapter 1, "Of Reason and Revelation," as a platform for analysis. For him, Hamka was also on a mission to set the foundation for reform, which would be to overcome the stagnant minds or the crisis of thought in Muslim minds. Aljunied successfully articulates how Hamka, unlike other reformists, dedicated his attention to the root of the problem—the stagnant mind (*akal yang beku*)—rather than dealing with the symptoms as exhibited in the practice of *taqlid* (blind obedience). Thus, all matters related to reform in the Malay world fall within two opposing categories: attempts at reform and attempts to impede reform. Conservative ulama viewed the function of reason in religious discourse with suspicion, and at the same time they attacked reformists. As Hamka put it, Muslims with stagnant minds were dismissive of new ideas and manufactured falsehoods in order to defend their established beliefs. They were overly dependent on outdated texts and wary of any new interpretations that departed from traditional understandings (p. 20).

Such thinking is not exclusive to the Malay world; it is practiced to this day in the Muslim world in general: in many cases, attempts to reform Muslim thought to adapt to changing times are met with accusations of succumbing to disbelief (*kufr*). Aljunied refers to how Khaled Abou El Fadl (2002) highlights the moments in Islamic history when the interpretation of texts became "intolerant, hateful, or oppressive" (p. 20). Aljunied thus confirms that in the Malay world of the twentieth century, traditionalist Muslims were prejudiced toward any alternative elucidations of

1) Hamka translated Alexandre Dumas' novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias) under a new title, *Margaretta Gauthier* (Bukit Tinggi: Nusantara, 1940).
2) In colonial Malaya, the British had to devise a system of fines for Malay parents who refused to send their children to school (Blackburn 2004, cited on p. 69).

religious texts. Accusing Muslim reformers of succumbing to *kufr* and heresy (*zandagha*), they called them Muʿtazilites who were destroying the pillars of Islam.

Aljunied discusses Hamka's counterarguments in the face of such challenges: "reason" and "intellect," which occupy a prominent place both in the first chapter and throughout the book. Reason is not only explained per se but also deployed as a method of explaining all questions raised in the book. In Chapter 2, "In Praise of Moderation," and Chapter 3, "Muslims and Social Justice," there is substantial dependence on reason to explain the connection between moderation and social justice. Moderation leads to all good deeds, but good deeds are established within their contexts; this is a form of reasoning guided by the Qur'an and Hadith, by good character, and by changing contexts as well as by the introduction of new knowledge to redefine and reinvigorate how Islam is to be lived and practiced.

The problem of achieving social justice is the foundational structure of Malay society, which was dominated by the ulama. In other words, ulama, who are supposed to be the guiding force for social progress, were the problem. Hamka castigated the ulama for their regressive mentality. He equated them with the priests in Christian churches during the Dark Ages of Europe. They were dictatorial and claimed the sole right to interpret religious texts. They also blocked access to many areas of knowledge by issuing edicts that outlawed the teaching of philosophical sciences (p. 20).

Aljunied's decision to study Hamka in a dialectical synthesis is for a justified reason. The book's six chapters negotiate with one another while responding to the core issue highlighted in the title. This is achieved by Aljunied's own intellectual aspirations, which he states clearly, to offer his own interpretation of one central aspect of Hamka's lifelong writing career: Hamka's thoughts about reforming the Muslim mind. Notably, Aljunied's personal experience reflects his investigative Muslim mind, which does not stop at the receiving end of textual presentations but goes on to "analyse Hamka's project of reform from the perspective of a critical-reflexive Muslim" (p. xii). Thus, Aljunied describes his own book as an attempt to think with and beyond Hamka.

In Chapter 6, "History as a Tool of Reform," Aljunied asserts that Hamka's project was to popularize reformist ideas from the Middle East and South Asia within the context of the Malay world. For Aljunied, Hamka's importance lies in the fact that his historical works obliquely addressed immediate challenges and also exposed his audience to the cosmopolitan reforms he sought to promote. Jeffrey Hadler (1998) has stressed that Hamka's writings were acknowledged as sources of reference for both the general public and for esteemed scholars such as Harry Benda, Anthony Reid, Taufik Abdullah, Deliar Noer, and Azyumardi Azra, among others. Aljunied successfully illustrates Hamka's intellectual utilization of both the zeitgeist and the historicity of religion, which were not just the appositeness of religion but the capability to identify the functions of Islam as means of reform. Subsequently, Aljunied refers to Hamka's "histories" as "reformist histories." These works were guided by the belief that history could be utilized as an instrument to reconstruct the minds of ordinary Malay Muslims.

Aljunied uses time and space and combines temporality with notions of the societal features of Hamka's cosmopolitan reform. He organizes and reorganizes his presentation of cosmopolitan reform through reiteration not only of Hamka's writings but also of the concerns prevalent at the time of writing. An example is Hamka's concern, as noted in Chapter 6, over the rapid growth of secularism among Muslims in Indonesia. This rapid secularization resulted from the lack of modernization of Islamic education.

Aljunied gives extended explanations of Hamka's solutions, such as the following: For the Muslim world to become ethical, it must combine reason with Islamic spirituality. Just treatment of women is the pillar of social justice. Social justice is to "recast gendered paradigms" (p. 71). This involves reinterpreting, reconceptualizing, and reconfiguring various dominant understandings about the roles, functions, and responsibilities of women in Islam, as reflected not only in the Qur'an and *adat* (traditional customs) but also in modern human experiences.

For cosmopolitan reform to be comprehensive, Hamka pointed to Sufism (Chapter 5) as a spiritual precept of the religion, commending it as a way to refurbish the souls and minds of Muslim people. Hamka called for the reform of Sufism alongside the reform of the state of women because both aspects were necessary for the vitality of the social and spiritual dimensions of modern Muslim life. The foundation for achieving such a state of social progress sits in social justice, which is religion itself. Malise Ruthven, a noted analyst of Muslim societies, underlines this point: "If one could sum up in a phrase the essential difference between the two great Western monotheisms, one might say that whereas Christianity is primarily the religion of love, Islam is above all the religion of justice" (Ruthven 2006, cited on p. 53).

In conclusion, Aljunied has succeeded in creating an invaluable reference on the progression of reform, or lack thereof, in the Malay world. Studying a prolific writer such as Hamka requires knowledge of concepts, terms, events, and historical backgrounds, which Aljunied successfully demonstrates in his capacity as a scholar. That may explain why not many books have been written on Hamka, apart from one by James R. Rush (2016). It also may explain Aljunied's hefty undertaking of writing this volume.

The currency and significance of this book is that it covers a writer who presented solutions to dominant and threatening challenges in the Muslim world. The current situation in the Muslim world is even worse than it was in Hamka's time, as hostilities to reform have turned deadly with the expansion of extremism, terrorism, radicalization, religious violence, and above all extreme divisions within the Muslim world. Reading the sophisticated coverage in this volume helps us understand why reforms are urgently needed and how they can be achieved.

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Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia: Focusing on Ethnologist Matsumoto Nobuhiro's Works during 1919–1945

Petra Karlová

Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2018.

Petra Karlová's exhaustive research and insightful interpretation of the work of Matsumoto Nobuhiro is the most thorough English language intellectual history of the ethnologist, who is often referred to as the Father of Southeast Asian studies in Japan. Hidden between the lines of a seemingly straightforward biography, however, *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia* offers revisionist histories of Matsumoto's work itself, the emergence of Southeast Asian studies in Japan, and the prevailing understanding of pre-war Japanese intentions in Southeast Asia. By systematically addressing each of Matsumoto's major academic influences and how they impacted his work during 1919–45, Karlová showcases how scientific interest in the cultures of Southeast Asia existed in Japan outside the scope of the economic and political intrigues encompassed by the Southern Advance Theory and Pan-Asianism of the 1930s and 40s.

Written by a historian, most likely for historians, *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia* meticulously details late nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnological and anthropological theories and theorists in an easily digestible manner. Differentiation between evolutionist, sociologist, and diffusionist schools of ethnology and an understanding of the theories of scholars such as James George Frazer, Marcel Mauss, Wilhelm Schmidt, and Paul Rivet are pivotal to understanding Matsumoto's intellectual evolution and how Southeast Asian studies in Japan came to fruition. Karlová masterfully undertakes the delicate balancing act of not providing too much or too little on these topics, offering just enough insight that uninitiated readers need not look elsewhere for clarification nor lose focus of the narrative.

The main text is parceled into numerous sections and sub-sections within five chapters, each with its own introductory and conclusory clauses. This overly systematic approach disrupts the narrative flow despite moving along a chronological timeline. Unfortunately, numerous copy-

editing errors, from missing letters and wrong tenses to repeated clauses, result in additional speedbumps in the narrative prose. However, *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia* is not a biography of Matsumoto's life intended to immerse the reader in narration, but rather an intellectual history that seeks to evidentially outline the emergence of Southeast Asian studies in Japan. Such errors ultimately do not diminish from this task, and the methodical parsing of chapters provides clear points of reference that tie themes together for readers.

The first two chapters of *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia* cover the Japanese and foreign influences on Matsumoto the student. Karlová first details Matsumoto's studies at Keio University from 1919–23, prior to ethnology becoming a discipline in Japan. The second chapter covers the period of 1924–32, from Matsumoto's induction as a student at Sorbonne University in Paris to his first years as a professor at Keio University. While in Paris, Matsumoto was influenced by the often-contradictory theoretical frameworks of Europe's leading ethnologists, such as Granet, Mauss, Przyluski, and Schmidt, which would become an important theme in Matsumoto's future work.

In the final three chapters, Karlová interprets Matsumoto's work through the lens of his amalgamation of his student-day influences as well as the cultural and political pressures stemming from the rise of Japanese hyper-nationalism in the 1930s and 40s. In Chapter 3, readers learn that during 1933–40, Matsumoto traveled to Indochina and the South Pacific as the beneficiary of private capitalist ventures, including the Mochidzuki Foundation and Nanyo Kohatsu K. K. Taking advantage of these organizations' desire for further Japanese southerly expansion, Matsumoto carries books and cultural artifacts back to Japan and highlights the importance of Southeast Asian studies to economic expansionism. In the fourth chapter, Karlová expands upon Matsumoto's ideation and establishment of Southeast Asian studies through the lens of Orientalism, Social Darwinism, and a melding of popular Japanese beliefs on modernization. As a result of this ideational patchwork, Matsumoto constructed a racialized hierarchy of Southeast Asians plagued by numerous contradictions.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, Karlová outlines the political influences of the Southern Advance Theory and Pan-Asianism during the period of hyper-nationalism in Japan, when Matsumoto incorporated the rhetoric of Japanese propaganda into his work. While other historians have failed to differentiate these ideologies, Karlová carefully distinguishes between Matsumoto's advocacy of the Southern Advance Theory, which promoted peaceful economic expansion to the South within the confines of free trade and the international system, and his opposition to the expansionist doctrine of Pan-Asianism, which incorporated expansion to both the North and South. However, upon the inclusion of Southeast Asia into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in 1940, Matsumoto again attempted to negotiate with a popular doctrine to advance the field of Southeast Asian studies and incorporated tenets of Pan-Asianism into his work.

Although Matsumoto's aim in Southeast Asia was cultural, he managed to co-opt economic

and political interests in the region to establish and expand Southeast Asian studies in Japan during 1933–45. Such adaptation, in conjunction with an amalgamation of influences, rendered Matsumoto's work an ambiguous compromise among diffusionist, evolutionist, and sociologist approaches. Many of his works cannot even be regarded as academic due to his literary style and lack of supporting evidence. Karlová does not shy away from the flaws in Matsumoto's work, but instead details the significance of his ability to co-opt economic and political agendas to promote his cultural interests, establish Southeast Asian studies in Japan, and inspire the next generation of scholars to continue the pursuit of knowledge in the wide array of theories he presented during his career.

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The Primordial Modernity of Malay Nationality: Contemporary Identity in Malaysia and Singapore

Humairah Zainal and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir
Oxon: Routledge, 2022.

The Primordial Modernity of Malay Nationality: Contemporary Identity in Malaysia and Singapore by Humairah Zainal and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir is an attempt at bridging what the authors have described as an "uneasy relationship between the primordial and modern which characterises the formation of identities in contemporary societies" (Abstract). In understanding and situating "Malay Nationality" in today's milieu, they have reviewed and provided significant reference to past and contemporary literature on the Malaysian and Singaporean Malay/Muslim community. This includes works by Rizwana Abdul Azeez (2016), Andaya (2008), Barnard (2004), Kahn (2006), Milner (2011), Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (2012), Hussin Mutalib (2012) and Lily Zubaidah Rahim (1998), amongst others. More importantly, the book sought to address gaps in the literature which may not have been fulfilled by previous scholars. They described how some have not "thoroughly examine[d] the extent to which the lay Malay contest or conform to Malay customs and traditions" (p. 6), and that there was still a lack of works concentrating on the "development and forms of Malay identity that exists in the Singapore [or Malaysian] context" (p. 6).

As such, the book is an important update and contribution to the literature on Malays or "Malayness"—based on the authors' close reading of previous writing, and a closer reading of the Malay community within Malaysia and Singapore. The authors presented two main objectives: (1) to describe "discursive constructions of Malay identity . . . based on discourse analyses of both elite and mass texts"; and (2) to "understand Malay identity more holistically by analysing how

multiple forms of modernity manifest in contemporary societies" (p. 8). These objectives have largely been fulfilled through the authors' take on "primordial modernity" vis-à-vis their observations and assessment of the two societies, and studying primary sources signaling mass voices and agency alongside "elite" sources such as government speeches. The inimitable manner in which the authors presented their ideas and assessment of "Malay nationality"—conceptually and methodologically—reminds readers of the sociological leanings both authors have. This is significant, and arguably a different take from the corpus of literature (including those cited in the book) which have analyzed "Malayness" through more historical, political or ethnographic prisms.

However, there do exist several points of discussion. I will first provide a broad overview of the book and its chapters, before delving into some of the book's strengths and/or topics for further consideration. These will be organized conceptually, operationally, methodologically, and lastly, contextually.

What I observe as a strength of the book is that it effectively sets the stage for a novel understanding of "primordial modernity," before opening to a thematic discussion of this phenomena observed, one where Malays negotiate their identities, and its formation and construction, in Singapore and Malaysia respectively. From the outset, the book makes it clear that taking a transnational and comparative perspective in studying "Malayness" is necessary. While both Singapore and Malaysia have developed along similar modernization experiences and are confronted with identical pressures to their socio-political stability, Malays in each society "embody ethnic nationalism somewhat differently" (p. 145). Therefore, studying the points of convergence and divergence between the two contexts allowed suitable comparisons of how "Malay nationality" may be understood ("core and peripheral identities of Malay identity"; p. 4), while also exemplifying what the authors have forwarded as "primordial modernity." In this vein, the authors argue that "[Malay] national identity takes on both primordial and modernist aspects" (p. 12), where primordialism and modernity should not be "understood as binaries and in dichotomous terms" (p. 13).

The thematic discussion of "primordial modernity" can be found in the chapters on "fragmented cosmopolitanism," "ethnoreligious identity," "development & citizenship," and "the elites." These chapters give adequate focus on the different issues faced by Malays in both Malaysia and Singapore, as embedded within their respective socio-economic and political contexts, and in molding understandings of themselves. More importantly, these chapters show the different trajectories "Malayness" can be conceived in the two countries, and the strategies which have been adopted from a top-down and bottom-up perspective—leading to the impressions the authors share of the Malay communities and of "Malay identity" in each context. One, which seemingly resist and oppose state constructions of Malaysian Malay identity, while the other, a more conformist, loyal, and co-opted disposition (p. 145). "Primordial modernity" itself is therefore a construct, but one which speaks to the events and circumstances experienced by the Malays thus far, leading to conceptions of "Malayness."

Firstly, the conceptual significance and nuance offered by the term "primordial modernity" in framing the book's argument is commendable. The authors have adopted an understanding of "primordialism" which suggest national identity as natural and ascribed, and manifested through language, blood kinship, and customs (p. 11). They also, however, acknowledged that there is a level of social construction at play in understandings of national identity. Here, this is reflected in their adoption of social theorist Dietrich Jung's concept of "modernity," where individuals are "hybrid actors" negotiating their identity through "competing knowledge and social practices" within respective socio-political considerations (Jung 2017, as cited on p. 13).

This can be observed in the subsequent chapters, for example, in Singapore where Malay culture and vernacular idioms such as *kampung spirit* or *gotong royong* have been widely adopted and adapted. However, it hides the systemic socioeconomic and political issues affecting Singaporean Malays (p. 96)—perhaps by (over)compensating one aspect or marker of "Malay identity," to adapt it to be relevant to Singapore's "modern" society. In essence, this example may highlight the selective cherry-picking by the state of communal traits which can contribute to wider state programs of integration, development and/or nation-building. It not only "reiterates Malay national identity" from the point of view of the state (p. 96), but also cements Malays as part of wider Singaporean society despite its claim that Malay/Muslims are problematic (Kamaludeen 2007). This discussion was poignant, because it showed the irony of state policy decisions while inadvertently affecting the position and perception of the Malays—not just by the Malays themselves, but also wider Singaporean society. Through many examples such as this, the authors show how the term "primordial modernity" highlights such duality, and coexistence.

In engaging with the concept as a whole, I contemplated whether the terms in "primordial modernity" were reversed, would it have been able to showcase the authors' assessment of Malay national identity similarly or as effectively? Essentially, I questioned why the authors used "primordial modernity," rather than "modern primordiality." What effect might it have on adjective and noun, and how does the term then fall back unto, or align with, definitions of "primordialism" and "modernity"? If we agree that "national identity" is to also be viewed as historical and social constructions, then primordiality necessarily lies within ethnic and cultural entities, and the traits which mark them. Would the term "modern primordiality" then suggest these entities (and their associated traits) having to suit or adapt to a modern, social environment? Or, perhaps it may be difficult to imagine considering the supposed innate or inherent nature of primordialism?

I surmised that "modern primordiality" may suggest an adapted or shifted function of primordial markers of identity for modern contexts—where "modern" here may take into account time, space and even policy considerations. It would have been similarly necessary to view Malays as a monolithic group (just as the authors did, as observed on p. 4) to be able to put forth an argument not just for modernity, but for primordiality as well. In the intention and purpose of the book, I do not think "modern primordiality" would have been suitable—or even enough—to capture the

essence of what the authors had intended, that is to show the negotiation and (re)calibration of national identity vis-à-vis the primordial and modern. In this vein, therefore, the authors' use and conception of the term "primordial modernity" is expedient.

Secondly, and operationally, several terms stood out in their use in the book. Initially, I wondered if the terms used throughout the chapters, such as "Malay nationality," "Malay national identity," "Malay identity," and "Malayness" held the same meaning, or were given the same treatment. Were there specific nuances—even subtle ones—meant by the authors in the use of these terms? The authors had defined what they meant by "national identity," that is "the sense of belonging to a certain imagined community that shares characteristics that are distinctive from other nations" (p. 16). This referenced Anderson's seminal *Imagined Communities* (1983), although it may have been an attempt for "primordial modernity" as a concept to be more applicable and acquiescent to national identities and contexts beyond just the Malay world. An indication that there was some level of difference between the terms can be implied from the main question the authors asked in their study: "How do Malays in Singapore and Malaysia conceptualise and negotiate their ethnic identity vis-à-vis the state's construction of Malay national identity?" (Abstract). I suggest that perhaps these terms could be viewed on three levels, as an endeavor to assess their use(s) in the book. The first might refer to the source exercising perceptions of "Malay identity," whether elite or mass. It may imply restraint or agency, in situating and understanding "primordial modernity" of Malay identity or nationality. The second might acknowledge these terms' interchangeability to an extent (I have largely taken this position in this review, for ease of discussion). Here, the authors have shown how, for example, "inter-ethnic" and "transnational marriages" (p. 41), as well as "religious teachers" and "religious scholars" have often been used interchangeably by the masses (p. 134). "Malay nationality," "Malay national identity," "Malay identity," and "Malayness," however, have more fundamental implications in the book. The third may simply be accommodating the use of these terms based on prior established works.

It is also difficult to ignore the position and function of religion in "Malay identity." On one hand, Malays are constitutionally recognized to be Muslims, or have to be Muslims in the Malaysian context. The official definition of "Malay" in Malaysia is more rigid, there are clear boundaries between the "In" and "Out" groups. Politically then, Islam is the factor institutionalizing Malay hegemony in Malaysia. On the other hand, in the book and elsewhere, there is discussion around the conflation between race and religion for Malay/Muslims in Singapore. There is also the politicization of the Muslim identity—through the Singapore Muslim Identity (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 2006), for example. There was also substantial discussion on the "racial and religious entanglement of the term 'Malay/Muslim' as continuing to serve a political function" (p. 68). The authors described how the terms "Malay" and "Muslim" are often "collapsed," because Malays are largely Muslims, and Malays make up most of the Muslim population (p. 68). The use of the "/" in the term Malay/Muslim by the state and in the public sphere also prevents the misnomer of

assuming Muslims as also being Malay (p. 68). "Muslim" here becomes the master signifier, or master identity.

This is a significant point of consideration. In my own research, there is some discussion or debate between "Malay/Muslim" ("slash"), "Malay-Muslim" ("dash"), and "Malay Muslim" without any linking symbol at all. There is also an acknowledgement of the use and presence of these terms in everyday life, and that there is a difference between the use of "/" and "-". "Malay/Muslim" seem to suggest "Malay" *or* "Muslim"—coinciding with the authors' point about preventing misnomers—whereas "Malay-Muslim" seem to suggest Malays who are Muslims. There is also some ambivalence about these terms in its differing forms, because it generally refers to the Malays. What is significant to me, however, is that these symbols (or none at all) can connect or separate "Malay" and "Muslim," and in effect give rise to different meanings. This may then result in different perceptions or conceptions of "Malay identity," in respect to being Muslim. One may argue that the term "Malay," whether or not with "Muslim," already has a political function whether viewed from top-down, or bottom-up.

Thirdly, the book is methodologically refreshing. In using a grounded and inductive approach to analyzing elite and mass texts (even though the authors concentrated on the years 2010 and 2015), the book offered a qualitative insight to an assessment of a variety of data sources—both from the mainstream and non-mainstream. Some of these sources were traditional and conservative, such as textbooks and speeches, while others were less conventional and included magazines, novels, or movies. This is one of the book's more important contributions to the literature. It moves away from just being a political, historical, or ethnographic account of "Malay identity," towards one which was also more sociologically analytical. While some of these data sources may be considered outside the norm, they *were* sources of elite or mass/popular voices in Malaysia and Singapore. This undeniably heightened the empirical value and contribution of the book, because it departed from depending only on elite sources of data as per many prior works. It also allowed an insightful view into the masses shaping Malay identities, moving discussions beyond listing socio-economic "problems" patterning Malay communities which was more often found in the literature.

Doing so allowed further questions of who can define "Malayness," and where does power and agency lie? Who defines, or can define, the Malay "problem"? In what ways do the masses negotiate "Malay nationality," "Malay national identity," "Malay identity," or "Malayness" vis-à-vis the state? It highlights public versus private practice and negotiation of Islam, alongside state strategies to manage religion. It also interrogates the presence of intellectual discourse within wider society, and provokes issues of culture and morality. As the authors mentioned in the book, there may be "Elite-Mass contention" which points to "nuances in the lived realities of the masses [which] need to be unpacked" (pp. 78, 93). Or perhaps, there may not be much difference between elite and mass voices at all. Overall, analyzing elite and mass texts can point to or imply how distant "elite" and "mass" may be, in the regard of specific issues, ideology, *et cetera*, and thereafter

the construction or formation of "Malay identity."

Lastly, in terms of context, I appreciate the authors' historical and sociological treatment to different "periods" of Singapore and Malaysia's past. This includes pre-British colonialism, legacies of British rule, Singapore and Malaysia's merger and separation, and most importantly, their respective nation-building efforts. I would argue that these periods, in and of themselves, are both historical and modern. It is historical because it gives an account or representation of what happened, and how "Malayness" could have been understood then. It is simultaneously modern because it also considers the societal changes and complexities of each period. This corresponds back to the Introduction, where the authors used Dietrich Jung's definition of "modern" or "modernity" to refer to how individuals may "base their identity construction on competing knowledge and social practices" (Jung 2017, as cited on p. 13). And undoubtedly, "Malay nationality" goes through a negotiation of sorts in response. Therefore, even though the authors concentrated on an analysis of textual materials focusing on 2010 and 2015, "primordial modernity" as a concept is one which is arguably malleable, and can be used and applied across time.

Overall, *The Primordial Modernity of Malay Nationality* is an important contribution to wider literature on Malays. The book was effective at "expand[ing] current understandings of Malay identity," by assessing how elites and masses perceive it "at the intersection of the macro-level of societal construct and the micro-level of individual construction of their national identity" (p. 7). The strengths of the book lie particularly in its conceptual and methodological inputs, and the depth of discussions within its thematic chapters. These contributions can offer insight into studies and analyses of other national identities globally, residing within the duality and dynamism of both the "primordial," and "modern."

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The Feast of the Santo Niño: An Introduction to the History of a Cebuano Devotion

Resil B. Mojares

Cebu City: University of San Carlos Press, 2017.

Resil Mojares, the author of *The Feast of the Santo Niño: An Introduction to the History of a Cebuano Devotion*, is unquestionably the most prominent public intellectual in the Philippines today. The National Artist for Literature is widely recognized for the diversity of his scholarly contributions, which range in form from fiction and essay to journalism and historiography. That a scholar of the stature of Mojares should renew his focus on the Santo Niño—arguably the most prominent religious icon in the Philippines—would in itself pique the interest of many Filipino readers. After all, several scholars in the humanities and social sciences, including Mojares himself, have already written extensively on this topic. Why would there be a need for yet another book, and an introductory at that, on this very popular religious icon?

The answer to this question, I think, lies in the timing of its release in the years leading up to a particularly significant juncture in Philippine religious history. In 2021, Filipinos commemorated the fifth centenary of the introduction of Roman Catholicism in the archipelago by a Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan. As indicated in the book's cover, the explicit intention of the series, of which this book is a part, is to "prepare for the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan and his Spanish crew on the shores of the vibrant port of Sugbo [Cebu]." In writing a renewed, and compact history of the Santo Niño devotion (the book is a mere 131 pages), Mojares' book is a response to a need for an account of the icon that departs from the "literature on the Santo Nino [that is] memorializing and promotional in nature, whether religious or touristic" (p. 2). As such, what Mojares has provided is a work of popular history that emerges from an intention "to trace the introduction to the history of Cebu itself, through the prism of a celebration that began

in the sixteenth century and remains vital today" (p. 2).

Although the book does not strictly adhere to the conventions of historiography (archival sources are indicated in the bibliography but not always meticulously cited in the text), the book is rich in archival detail, which Mojares skillfully juxtaposes with folklore and popular accounts and testimonies. Rather than provide a simple synopsis of each chapter, I highlight the main analytical movements Mojares makes in elucidating the communal history of the Santo Niño devotion.

The three chapters after the introduction narrate the events that follow the initial European exploratory campaigns to the spice islands in the 1500s. This includes the Spanish arrival in Cebu and the actual circumstances that led to the first Christian baptism of the local inhabitants of the island. Mojares then discusses the significance of the re-discovery of Santo Niño itself some four decades after the initial encounter, an event that "marked the reconciliation of Spaniards and Cebuanos and thus pointed the way to the three centuries of Spanish rule that followed" (p. 23). Nothing particularly novel or pathbreaking is revealed in this first analytical movement, particularly when considered alongside the rigorous scrutiny of Spanish archival documents conducted by Latin American studies scholars such as Christina H. Lee. The value of these chapters, rather, lies in the intriguing speculative insights that Mojares provides on how Cebuano converts reacted to and received Catholicism. In the tradition of looking through the "cracks in the parchment curtain," as the renowned Filipino historian William Henry Scott had famously described it, Mojares reflects on the creative Cebuano responses to missionary ritual practices such as self-mortification and Christian processions. On this score, the book is most insightful and thought provoking.

The next cluster of four chapters discuss how the propagation of the devotion to the Santo Niño advanced in a tentative and intermittent fashion, and in such a way that mirrored the decline and rise of Spanish Catholicism in Cebu from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. In its early stages, the devotion relied much on appeals for Royal subsidies, alms, rent seeking and mandatory contributions from surrounding parishes. The Papal decree of 1721—a proclamation that provided high sanction to the Santo Niño devotion—inspired a concerted effort to reiterate the centrality of the icon, and emphasize its finding in Cebu as a cornerstone of the faith in the islands at a time when the local Church was experiencing a period of decline and withdrawal from 1770 to 1830. Mojares traces the rise of the devotion in the nineteenth century as running parallel with the increased involvement of Cebu in the global economy of exchange and trade, which catalyzed the demographic and infrastructural transformation of the city into a focal point of regional trade and inter island shipping from the mid to late 1800s.

The third analytical movement that constitutes the next four chapters concerns the Santo Niño's rise as the preeminent Christian icon of the Philippines, as well as the establishment of the Santo Niño church as a focal point of pilgrimage for devotees from beyond the Visayas. Again, there is nothing particularly pathbreaking in these observations. Mojares echoes the work of historian Michael Cullinane in pointing out the rising prominence of the wealthy Chinese mestizo

elite who, in their efforts to exert their growing influence beyond Cebu province, thereby became the arbiters of a distinctly Cebuano ethnic identity that had the Santo Niño as an enduring symbol. Mojares collates snippets of Spanish archival sources that demonstrate how religious icons like the Santo Niño came to express and buttress competing social and political claims to legitimacy, amidst racial, ethnic, and ecclesiastical tensions in the city. In examining the indigenization of the icon, Mojares echoes the research of anthropologist Astrid Sala-Boza, who conducted a systematic folklore analysis of the myths and legends about the Santo Niño. The work of anthropologist Sally Ann Ness, similarly, is invoked in Mojares' examination of the process by which embodied ritual practices developed from an amalgamation of various indigenous practices. In channeling the more prominent scholarship on the Santo Niño, these chapters collectively address why the Santo Niño devotion had become so well established by the twentieth century, even while new and revised forms of devotional practices continue to be introduced.

In the concluding section of the book, Mojares emphasizes the significance of the Santo Niño festival as a city-wide social event that "affords Cebuanos the opportunity to celebrate themselves as a community" (p. 115). It is in this regard that Mojares reiterates the overarching rationale of this book: rather than a history of the Santo Niño icon *per se*, the main purpose of the book is to illuminate, and indeed *celebrate*, the "communal, externalized, and public practices through which a faith is lived and realized in a community or society" (p. 2).

The events that commemorate European arrivals in the Pacific have catalyzed renewed interest in the topics of pre-colonial indigenous resistance, the violence and oppression that marked the long history of Western colonialism, and the extent to which decolonization has been achieved. We have seen similar themes arise in 2020, for example, in the course of the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of British explorer James Cook's arrival in Australia. Mojares' book resonates with these issues, albeit tangentially, in providing the 'in-between' episodes that shine light into the dark spaces left by the dearth or inaccessibility of archival resources. Since the book's publication 2017, a host of national conferences, academic seminars, symposia, and public outreach events have revisited long standing debates about popular piety, religious syncretism, the enduring legitimacy of animism and the socio-political impact of religious materiality—topics that had once been the sole preserve of academics and scholars. In effect, Mojares' book is a demonstration of how scholarly concerns can be made to resonate with a readership beyond the academe. In that respect, the book is valuable if not for the specific arguments that it makes or the sources that it uncovers, but for the timely questions about sovereignty, communal memory, religiosity, and identity that it revitalizes and invokes.

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