SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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CONTENTS

KMT Troops and the Border Consolidation Process in Northern Thailand

Cui Feng*

After the Kuomintang (KMT) lost control of mainland China in 1949, some of its troops retreated to mainland Southeast Asia, marking the start of a period of mutual interaction between the KMT troops and Southeast Asian states in the context of the Cold War. The objective of this paper is to focus on the KMT troops who retreated to Northern Thailand. The author argues that the KMT troops, as protagonists in border areas, promoted border consolidation in Northern Thailand through war and village building. The Thai government, lacking effective jurisdiction over the border, took advantage of the KMT, using it as the most effective tool for border management and as a military force to counter the Communist threat along border areas. Through years of fighting with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), KMT troops helped eliminate potential security risks in Northern Thailand. Consequently, border villages with defenses bolstered during the war years epitomized the Northern Thai border being brought under the aegis of state control.

Keywords: KMT, Cold War, Chiang Rai, CPT, Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai

Introduction

After the government of the Republic of China (ROC) was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Chinese Civil War, tens of thousands of Kuomintang (KMT)[1] soldiers retreated to the border areas between Burma and Thailand. Later, in the 1950s and 1961, some of them withdrew to Taiwan; but thousands chose to stay in the mountainous areas of Northern Thailand, mostly the remote areas of Chiang Rai and Chang

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1) The KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) was the dominant ruling party of the Republic of China on the mainland from 1928 to 1949. The KMT regime was defeated by the CCP in the Chinese Civil War and retreated to Taiwan in 1949. This paper focuses on the KMT soldiers who retreated to Southeast Asia after 1949 and later settled in Northern Thailand.

Mai. There are numerous excellent works on these KMT veterans and their descendants stationed in Northern Thailand (Chang 2001; Duan 2008; Clymer 2014; Zhang 2014). However, most of this research has adopted an anthropology focus, such as the transformation of the identity of the KMT soldiers and the integration of KMT soldiers and their descendants into Thai society. Some papers have also concentrated on the interaction between KMT soldiers and the ROC (Taiwan) and the Thai government, as well as Taiwan's aid work for these diasporas (Hung and Baird 2017). In addition, a few outstanding works explore the role of KMT soldiers in drug trafficking, ethnic politics, and military actions in the Golden Triangle (Chao 1987; McCoy 1991; Smith 1991; Lintner 1994; Renard 1996; Gibson and Chen 2011).

This paper, based on previous scholarship and supplementary sources, analyzes the role of KMT troops from the perspective of the consolidation of Northern Thailand's border areas. Northern Thailand, a remote area for the central government in Bangkok, was not incorporated into the territory of the Bangkok regime (Chakri Dynasty) until 1892. A few Tai kingdoms had been established one after another on the border of Burma and Laos in the past, though it should be noted that there was no modern national border. Later, although the Thai government drew its entire national border lines, the border in Northern Thailand remained simply a line on the map, subjected to little enforcement from Bangkok.

Following the specific characteristics of border areas in Northern Thailand, this paper argues that the KMT troops eventually became one of the vital promoters in the consolidation of the boundary areas in Northern Thailand. In other words, the KMT soldiers, as one of the groups of participants, helped the central Thai government to formally launch an effective boundary administration that carried out the physical incorporation of the border areas of Northern Thailand into state power. In order to prove this argument, this article is divided into two main parts. First, it gives an account of the particularity of the history of Chiang Rai, which is one of the main cities in Northern Thailand, followed by a series of historical narratives from KMT soldiers after they entered mainland Southeast Asia. Second, the article discusses the border war between the KMT troops and the Communist armies that lasted several years following the rise of Communist insurgencies in Northern Thailand. The objective here is to analyze the role of the KMT troops throughout these historical events in the border areas of Northern Thailand. The author went on a field trip to conduct research in Mae Salong in Chiang Rai Province in 2018. He visited several border villages where descendants of the KMT lived, and recorded personal conversations with both KMT veterans and their descendants. Additionally, the author was able to collate precious historical materials from these border villages, such as the KMT's military plans and operational reports of attacks on

the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the mountainous areas of Chiang Rai.

From City-State to Province, an Entity without Boundaries

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, political entities, or so-called kingdoms, formed by Thais began to emerge in mainland Southeast Asia. David Wyatt termed the period from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century in mainland Southeast Asia the "Tai Century" (Wyatt 2003, 30–49). In 1262, during the reign of King Mangrai, Chiang Rai was established as the center of the Lanna Kingdom. As a traditional kingdom of Southeast Asia, the Lanna Kingdom had no boundaries in the modern sense; it can be said that the kingdoms of Southeast Asia and Western countries had different concepts of boundaries (Thongchai 1994, 62–80). The British government dispatched a delegate to Chiang Mai from 1834 to 1836 to explore the border (Thongchai 1994, 68)—the first record of a border exploration mission in Northern Thailand. By this time Chiang Rai was already a subsidiary state of Chiang Mai. It can be said that Northern Thailand had been developing independently for a long time, since it contained political entities.

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that Northern Thailand was gradually integrated into the jurisdiction of the central government of Bangkok (Penth 2000, 69–85). Chiang Rai was proclaimed a province of Thailand in 1933. However, even though Northern Thailand has had clear borders on the map since the start of the twentieth century, for people living in the border area the line dividing different territories has not hindered cross-border exchanges. In the early part of the twentieth century, borderland residents in mainland Southeast Asia tended to regard the line itself as "an artificial separation of their centuries-old trade and social networks" (Turner 2010, 267). To the central government of Bangkok, the line was unrealistic and an inefficient way of administering strict boundaries in the remote northern area. The Thai government did not manage to devise an effective way to administer boundary areas in Northern Thailand at that time (Kessaraporn 2015, 16). This was a parlous situation that became a harbinger of what was to come later, during the Cold War.

Homeless Soldiers with Borderless Land

The first time KMT troops entered Northern Thailand was in the spring of 1961, after their base in Burma had been besieged by Burmese troops and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Gu 2019, 273). However, the earliest interactions of KMT

troops in mainland Southeast Asia can be traced back to 1949, close to the end of China's civil war.[2] At the end of 1949, the PLA launched a general offensive campaign against KMT troops in Yunnan. Then, Lu Han, chairman of Yunnan Province, surrendered to the CCP (Bian 2014, 14). On February 24, 1950 the KMT troops in Yunnan were basically either eliminated by the PLA or ceased to offer resistance. But Li Guohui, head of the 709th Regiment of the 237th Division, Eighth Army of the KMT troops, led a retreat of more than two thousand soldiers to the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, an area known as the Golden Triangle (He 2012, 4–13). At the same time, around 2,500 soldiers from the 93rd Division of the 26th Army of the KMT fled the Yunnan border (Sun 2010, 14–19). Soon after this, these retreating KMT troops were effectively reunited and organized by General Li Mi, who had been dispatched by the ROC government (Taiwan). The KMT troops grew rapidly and absorbed many people who had fled from Yunnan.

By the end of 1950, the KMT troops that had retreated to the Thai-Burmese border swelled to about ten thousand (Qin 2009, 7). The KMT soldiers stranded in mainland Southeast Asia attracted the attention of the United States, which provided them with urgent military assistance in order to contain mainland China, which the United States had fought in the Korean War, and also to prevent Burma from becoming the next Communist country (Clymer 2014, 25). In fact, assistance was provided to the KMT by cooperation between the United States and Thailand. CIA personnel set up a company called Southeast Asian Defense Supplies in Bangkok to supply the KMT with weapons, which were delivered to the Thailand-Burma border by Thai police and the CIA (Qin 2009, 124). At the beginning of the Korean War, the United States provided General Li Mi's army with two thousand carbines, one thousand rifles, and two hundred machine guns (Kanchana 2003, 32–33).

On May 15, 1951, after the KMT troops had accumulated enough numbers, General Li Mi commanded more than eight thousand soldiers to counterattack Yunnan. The KMT troops, boosted by their strong morale, quickly seized several cities along the Yunnan border, including Lan Cang, Meng Lian, Xi Meng, and Nan San. Nevertheless, the KMT had to retreat from Yunnan again under siege from the three divisions of the PLA in July 1951 (Gibson and Chen 2011, 78–82). Although the counterattack against mainland China failed, the KMT troops led by Li Mi continued to grow in mainland Southeast Asia; and

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2) During World War II the KMT army was an important participant in the Burma battlefield. After the end of World War II, this army also participated in the takeover of Northern Vietnam. Both these actions represented the deep engagement of KMT soldiers in mainland Southeast Asia. However, this paper focuses on the KMT soldiers who retreated to Southeast Asia after the KMT's defeat in the Chinese Civil War in 1949.

by 1953 Li Mi had three corps with a total strength of thirty thousand to forty thousand soldiers, with the assistance of the CIA (McCoy 1991, 162–174). However, the rapid growth of the KMT army in northern Burma had aroused great concern and hostility on the part of the Burmese government (Chang 2001, 1092), and in 1953 Burma sought to mobilize elite troops to annihilate the KMT troops in one fell swoop in order to restore national security. However, the Burmese army was defeated after some brutal combat and so had to find a diplomatic way to resolve the issue of the KMT troops being stranded in Burma.

On March 28, Burma submitted the appeal of "Complaint by the Union of Burma Regarding Aggression against Her by Kuomintang Government of Formosa" to the United Nations. The resolution was passed by the United Nations, and the KMT troops had to withdraw from the region. Burma's diplomatic appeal brought tremendous diplomatic pressure to bear on the United States and the ROC. Therefore, the United States also exerted pressure on the ROC to facilitate the withdrawal of the KMT soldiers from Burma to Taiwan. Dean Acheson, who was the United States secretary of state at the time, told the ROC government that Burma's appeal to the United Nations had caused great embarrassment to Taiwan and asked Taiwan to estimate the specific withdrawal time (Clymer 2014, 28). Between November 1953 and June 1954, some 6,568 KMT troops retreated from Burma to Taiwan (Qin 2009, 168). This represented only a partial withdrawal, though, as the KMT still had five thousand soldiers left on the border between Thailand and Burma, an area that was being used as a base for counterattacks on mainland China (Kanchana 2003, 66–67). The remaining troops renamed themselves the Yunnan Anticommunist Volunteer Army (*yunnan fangong ziyuanjun*) in order to distinguish themselves from the regular army of the ROC. However, the ROC government still connected with them covertly. Both mainland China and Burma viewed the KMT troops remaining in Burma as a huge threat. Therefore, between 1960 and 1961 the PLA and the Burmese army conducted two joint military operations in order to completely eliminate the remaining KMT troops.

The PLA dispatched the 13th and 14th Armies, and three border defense regiments of the Yunnan Military Region, with a total force of ten thousand troops. On November 12, 1960 the PLA entered Burma for encirclement and suppression (Xu 2014, 78–79). The first military operation lasted two months, but the outcome was not ideal as the main force of the KMT troops was left damaged. Therefore, on January 25, 1961 the PLA carried out a more draconian operation, this time employing four regiments. This military onslaught dealt a withering blow to the KMT troops, who suffered the loss of two division commanders and 740 soldiers while one deputy division commander was captured (Xu 2009, 5–9). The remaining KMT soldiers fled to Laos and Northern Thailand. At the

same time, Taiwan stepped up the last round of withdrawal of the remaining KMT troops from mainland Southeast Asia.

From Burma to Thailand, Becoming Alien Border Guards

The last evacuation of KMT troops to Taiwan took place in 1961. According to a CIA report, the ROC government (Taiwan) had withdrawn 3,371 soldiers and 825 dependants from Burma-Thailand-Laos border areas to Taiwan between March 17 and April 12, 1961 (CIA, July 29, 1961). However, many soldiers and officers were reluctant to retreat to Taiwan, since most of them were from Yunnan and saw Taiwan as a distant and unfamiliar place. General Duan Xiwen, the leader of the Fifth Army, explained:

> Well, most of us here are from Yunnan, just across the Burmese border with China. We all have relatives there. Someday we hope to be able to return when the Communists are beaten. Between Taiwan and mainland China, there are many miles of water. It is not so easy to get to China from Formosa. (*New York Times*, September 8, 1966)

Officers were also concerned that they would lose their military and political cachet in Taiwan since most of them came from irregular troops, which were not trusted by the ROC government in Taiwan. Accordingly, the Third and Fifth Armies refused to retreat, which then compelled the ROC government to officially cancel the designation of these two troops and halt their supplies. After that, these KMT troops became active in the border areas of Northern Thailand. The Third Army numbered 1,400 men and was stationed in Tham Ngob in Fang District (later in Chaibrakan District) under the leadership of General Li Wenhuan, while the Fifth Army, led by General Duan Xiwen, comprised 1,800 men and was stationed in Mae Salong, which lay north of Chiang Rai (McCoy 1991, 352).

An important reason why these KMT troops were dotted around Northern Thailand was that the Thai government had still not been able to implement effective national management of the northern border. Apart from the historical reason, as mentioned above, the Lanna Kingdom (later the Chiang Mai Kingdom too), which had once been a traditional Southeast Asian kingdom without clear boundaries, had only recently been incorporated into Thai territory. The borders of Northern Thailand faced Burma and Laos and were lush with mountains and forests. Thailand lacked sufficient human and material resources to manage its more remote borders, but with the arrival of the KMT troops and the ongoing Cold War the northern border became dramatically more significant. Mutual cooperation between the Thai government and the KMT troops resulted in tremendous changes in the border issue in Northern Thailand. The collaboration

between the KMT and the Thai government created a more effective form of management and a safer border around Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. The KMT helped the Thai government to solve two major border problems in Northern Thailand: the lack of border security and the lack of human resources.

Because of border security concerns and a fear of Burma, Thailand had always wanted to use the KMT soldiers to defend its border. As early as the end of March 1954, when the Thai government realized that Taiwan was going to withdraw all the KMT soldiers, it disagreed with Taiwan's decision to withdraw the troops on the pretext that the Burmese army and the Karen army were at war in the border area (Xu and Liao 2016, 37). The Thai government wanted Taiwan to leave some troops in situ as a bulwark to defer incursions of armed forces from Burma or Laos into Northern Thailand. As General Li Mi said:

> If our army remains in this area for a long time, it can prevent the threat of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) toward the north and west of Thailand. Therefore, the Thai government regards us as harmless. (Xu and Liao 2016, 37)

A declassified archive of the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that the Thai government had asked the ROC ambassador to Thailand to resume the deployment of KMT troops in Northern Thailand in order to fight the Communists in Laos and Burma in 1961 (ROCMOFA 1961, A303000000B).

Between 1961 and 1969, the remaining KMT troops built about twenty radio stations along the Salween River, which is part of the natural dividing line between Thailand and Burma. Each of these radio stations was guarded by eighty to a hundred soldiers (Kessaraporn 2015, 27) and served two purposes: providing border intelligence and enabling an exchange of information on the transportation of opium.[3] After more than ten years of fighting along the border areas between Burma, Thailand, and China, these KMT troops were now entirely familiar with the mountainous areas in Northern Thailand. According to merchants from Shan State, all cross-border trade was subjected to inspection by Chinese (KMT) forces in Northern Thailand. Thai senior military and government officials also used the KMT troops as a means to profit from the opium trade in the northern border areas. As a frontier patrol force, the KMT troops acted as custodians of the opium trade in the region and shared the profits with the Thai elites (*New York Times*, August 11, 1971). The KMT army profited from protecting the transportation of opium, which helped to strengthen it and bolstered its role as the guardian of the Northern Thai

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3) Since Taiwan cut off supplies to the troops who refused to retreat to Taiwan, the remaining troops began to protect the opium trade in order to ensure the survival of the army. For references to the KMT and the opium trade, see Hung and Baird (2017).

border. General Duan Xiwen said, "If we were not here, the Communists would be. We are the watchdog at the northern gate. In other parts of Thailand, there is subversion, but not here"—a sentiment that some Western diplomats privately shared (*New York Times*, September 8, 1966, 5). Soon after, by the mid-1960s, the ranks of the CPT swelled in Thailand's mountainous northern border areas and became a threat within the country. At this time, KMT troops had begun to be recruited by the Thai government to participate in the new border fighting.

Formation of a Stable Boundary in Northern Thailand by Fighting with the Communist Guerrillas

The CPT was founded in December 1942, during the first National Deputies' Party Congress (CPT 1978, 2–3). It attained legal status in Thailand after World War II, when the Thai government repealed the Anti-Communist Act (Alessandro 1970, 200). In the meantime, the CPT's main focus was on urban areas and on augmenting its power in the cities (Baker 2003, 522). However, after Phibun won power in 1947 the Thai government began to suppress the CPT and left-wing politicians; and in 1952 the Phibun government enacted the second anti-Communist law (Wyatt 2003, 254–257). Many leftist politicians were arrested by the government, while others went into exile because of the increasingly oppressive political environment. In 1952 the CPT held its second National Deputies' Party Congress in Bangkok in secret in order to adapt to the new situation. After this congress, the CPT began studying the specter of an army struggle in mountainous areas (Baker 2003, 524).

When the CPT gradually shifted from cities to remote areas, Communism had begun to meld with regionalism in Thailand. The combination of these two ideologies in remote areas represented a threat to the border in the eyes of the Thai government (Lovelace 1971, 16–18). The CPT quickly trained Hmong guerrillas as anti-government forces in the border mountains in Chiang Rai (Lovelace 1971, 16–18). On August 7, 1965, CPT guerrillas launched their first attack on security forces in Northern Thailand (Saiyud 1986, 180), and after that armed struggle expanded rapidly in remote areas of Thailand. A document from the United States Armed Forces, 7th Psychological Operations Group, showed that there were about one thousand official members of the CPT operating in Thailand around 1966 (Department of the Army Headquarters).[4] The CPT, based in the

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4) The 7th Psychological Operations Group is a psychological operations unit of the United States Army Reserve.

border mountain areas, easily obtained supplies from ethnic tribesmen (Lovelace 1971, 52). *People's Daily* reported that the CPT's armed action had spread to 25 provinces and included over five hundred incidents of conflict. In total, more than one thousand enemies were wiped out by the CPT's armed struggle between 1965 and 1967 (*People's Daily*, August 17, 1967). During this period, the Royal Thai Government implemented a series of measures to counter the Communist insurgency. In General Saiyud Kerdphol's opinion, the local authorities could not handle the Communists' violence in the 1960s and so it became necessary to respond to the CPT threat with the establishment of national-level security (Saiyud 1986, 14–17).[5] However, the Thai government did not achieve effective results during this period due to inadequate cooperation between the Royal Thai Army and the police force. In addition, much of the leadership's approach was based on its anti-insurgency experiences of the past in remote areas and so did not adapt well to the new landscape (Marks 1994, 99–109). Bob Bergin, a former CIA official, admitted that the CPT forces had increased in the 1960s despite the government's severe suppression (Bergin 2016, 27).

In September 1969 Prayad Samanmit, the governor of Chiang Rai, and other senior officials were assassinated by the CPT forces, sending shock waves through Thai society (Gu 2019, 318–320). The Thai government accepted that its actions to eliminate the CPT over the years had not been very effective, so it decided to use the KMT troops; the latter did not only possess greater knowledge of the border terrain but were by now armed with battle experience too. The government sought to have the KMT and other warlords create a buffer zone in Northern Thailand to sever the territorial connection between the CPT and external Communist forces (McCoy 1991, 430; Smith 1991, 297).

At the end of 1969 Thai Defence Minister Thanom Kittikachorn contacted General Duan Xiwen and General Li Wenhuan, the main leaders of the KMT troops at the time, seeking their help to suppress the CPT and maintain order at the border, in exchange for the Thai government providing supplies to KMT troops (Shen 2002, 320). After lengthy consideration, the KMT troops accepted the proposal, and from then on they began to fight for the consolidation of Thailand's border areas and the KMT's own survival in Thailand. Tangwo and Mae Salong, two small towns located in the mountainous border area of Northern Thailand, served as the headquarters of the KMT's Third and Fifth Armies. The general headquarters were set up in the Border Police camp of Chiang Rai. Thousands of KMT soldiers went to war in Northern Thailand in the name of the Volunteer Defense Corps (Gibson and Chen 2011, 293–302). By this time, the CPT had estab-

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5) Saiyud Kerdphol is a four star general and former supreme commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces. He was the director of the Internal Security Operations Command, which was in charge of Communist insurgencies within Thailand.

Fig. 1   Road Map of Chinese Army [KMT] Attacking Doi Yao Area in 1970
Source: Collection of Chinese Martyrs' Memorial Museum

lished two Military Area Commands in Chiang Rai: the 24th Military Area Command in Doi Pha Mon, which bordered Laos; and the 52nd Military Area Command around Doi Yao, which bordered Burma (Gu 2019, 321). According to the KMT's *Zhenjiao zhanyi baogao* 征缴战役报告 (Report on the campaign of expedition and suppression), KMT troops waged six large-scale encirclement and suppression campaigns against the CPT guerrillas in these areas over a period of five years, from December 10, 1970 to the end of 1975 (Personal Collection of Zhang Taihua). As shown in Figs. 1 and 2, battles between the KMT and the CPT took place in the border areas between Chiang Rai and Laos in 1970. There is no doubt that the KMT was one of the instrumental forces employed by the Thai government at that time to defend the national border.

It should be noted that although the CPT lost some of its bases in Northern Thailand with the KMT attacks, a large number of CPT forces remained intact, having retreated

Fig. 2 Sketch of the Battle of Lai-Yao in 1970
Source: Personal Collection of Zhang Huatai

to Laos by virtue of the geographical advantages of the border (Gu 2019, 343–344). Therefore, the CPT frequently gathered forces from Laos to enter the border area of Chiang Rai and attack the KMT on the front lines (Gu 2019, 343–344). In order to effectively control the border areas, from 1971 the KMT troops cooperated with the Thai government to build roads in remote border areas. At times the CPT disrupted the road construction process, compelling KMT troops to fight against the CPT to ensure that road building remained on course, an endeavor that lasted until 1979 (Xu and Liao 2016, 87–88). In addition to taking the KMT's help for building roads, the Thai government dispersed KMT troops across critical strongholds on the northern border of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, adjacent to Laos and Burma. There they set up villages with armed defense forces in order to prevent the CPT from fighting back and to develop the economy of the border areas. Zhao Xueyuan, a former guerrilla in the Fifth Army of the KMT in

Chiang Rai, said that in order to prevent the CPT from damaging roads, the Thai government organized the KMT to help build it. He recalled:

> The KMT troops also set up a death squad to attack the CPT. I signed up to join the death squad and be responsible for logistics supply. The CPT had slightly more people than the Third and Fifth KMT Armies, mainly Yao and Hmong people. They often organized guerrilla groups with about ten people to set up mines and cut off water sources everywhere. We were often ambushed by them, resulting in sacrifices. After fighting against the CPT for more than four years, we were stationed at the border to maintain order and patrol. (Bian 2014, 144–145)

The KMT troops' gradual establishment of villages equipped with border frontier defense functions represented a critical step for the Thai government in completing border construction in the remote areas of the country. After 1971 the government resettled these KMT soldiers in 13 border villages in northern Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai: Doi Mae Salong, Ban Mae Aep, Ban Pha Tang, Ban Huai Khrai, Ban Piang Luang, Ban Kae Noi, Ban Muang Na Tai, Tham Ngob, Ban San Makok Wan, Ban Luang, Ban Muang Ngam, Ban Napapaek, and Ban Hua Lang. It was an extraordinarily arduous process to develop the border areas, as recounted by Wang Huifen, a second-generation Chinese in Mae Salong:

> The village used to be a forest, and in the beginning there was no road. Those [KMT] veterans cut grass and trees to make the main road in our village. At that time, people in the village did not go out after 3 or 4pm because there were many dangerous wild animals outside. (Wang Huifen, February 12, 2018)[6]

A Thai observer at the time said:

> The guerrillas (KMT soldiers) are well trained and well armed. They do the work of maintaining law and order in the border areas for the Thai government. If there were no guerrillas (KMT soldiers) to do this job, Thailand would need to dispatch at least two divisions of troops from other places to garrison in these places to protect the border. (Bian 2014, 65)

The last major battle between the KMT troops and the CPT took place in 1981. Two years earlier, General Serm Na Nakorn of the Supreme Command Headquarters of the Royal Thai Army had issued a direct order to notify the KMT armed forces on Thailand's northern border to enter into war against the Communists in the Phetchabun region.[7] In January 1981, around four hundred KMT soldiers commenced battle in the name of the Volunteer Defense Corps. This military action was part of Operation Phamuang Padetsuek, which lasted four months—from January to April (Saiyud 1986, 183). Even-

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6) Personal conversation with Wang Huifen in Mae Salong, February 12, 2018.
7) Source from Chinese Martyrs' Memorial Museum in Chiang Rai.

tually, these KMT forces captured the entire Khao-Ya and Khao-Khor areas and destroyed all the Communist bases in this region (Lintner 1994, 260–261). One Chinese source stated:

> The Volunteer army played an important role in attacking the guerrillas and occupying the CPT's armed bases. They captured the Khao Khor area, which was considered an invincible Communist armed base. Under the crackdown by targeted armed forces, the CPT was steadily losing ground. (Ding 2015)

The KMT's contribution to national security was recognized at the highest level by the Thai military (Fig. 3). Major General Theb Kromsuiyasakdi (เทียบ กรมสุริยศักดิ์) of the Third Military Region wrote:

> Volunteer Defense Corps [KMT soldiers] captured the whole of the Khao-Ya area in Operation Phamuang Padetsuek. . . . [KMT soldiers] have made great contributions to national security. . . . I would like to express my highest respect to all the soldiers of the Volunteer Defense Corps [KMT soldiers]. (Third Military Region 1981)

The success of the military operation also accelerated the demise of the CPT. The KMT began a completely peaceful transformation, and its members became border residents of Northern Thailand. KMT soldiers and their descendants developed the border area's economic activities, for example, the tea industry and tourism in Mae Salong. The former headquarters of the KMT troops continues to attract increasing numbers of tourists. Even though these veterans and their next generation have obtained Thai identity cards, they still maintain a firm Chinese identity. Zhang Taihua, a second-generation veteran, affirmed:

> My father died in battle when I was five years old. Later, General Duan [Duan Xiwen] paid my tuition fees and living costs. At that time the Thai government did not allow us to learn Chinese, and Thai police often came to check Chinese schools during the day. Therefore, our school moved Chinese lessons to the evening. . . . We are Chinese. We must learn Chinese; that is our mother tongue. (Zhang Taihua, February 12, 2018)[8]

A conversation with Mo Xianghai, a second-generation veteran who broke his leg when fighting the CPT in 1980, also underlined a strong sense of Chinese identity: "My ancestral home is in Yunnan. No matter where I go, I am proud that I am Chinese." In explaining his and others' willingness to fight on behalf of the Thai government, Mo was keen to emphasize that they fought purely as a means of survival. He lamented: "We are foreigners, and our pension after being injured is much lower than that of Thai soldiers. We are

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8) Personal conversation with Zhang Taihua in Mae Salong, February 12, 2018.

Fig. 3   Commendation Letter Issued by the Headquarters of the Third Military Region to the Volunteer
Defense Corps (KMT Soldiers), Which Took Part in the Military Action against the CPT in 1981.
Signed by Major General Theb Kromsuiyasakdi (เทียบ กรมสุริยศักดิ์) on April 19, 1981

Source: Collection of Chinese Martyrs' Memorial Museum

not Thai soldiers but Chinese who want to survive in Thailand" (Mo Xianghai, February
12, 2018).[9]   It is particularly noteworthy that although most of these first- or second-
generation veterans tend to support the Republic of China (Taiwan), they love watching
China Central Television (CCTV), which is run by the CCP.   TV channels from mainland
China also enhance and remind them of their Chinese heritage.

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9)   Personal conversation with Mo Xianghai in Mae Salong, February 12, 2018.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of China's civil war, after 1949 some KMT troops found themselves in exile in mainland Southeast Asia. Shortly thereafter, their fate was greatly impacted by the Cold War in Southeast Asia. These soldiers first established bases in Burma. Both the ROC government in Taiwan, which wanted to launch a counterattack on mainland China, and the United States, which participated in the Korean War, saw the value of the KMT troops. Consequently, with the help of the United States and Taiwan, the KMT troops launched two large-scale attacks on Yunnan in the 1950s—though ultimately both failed.

Later in the decade, due to changes in the geopolitical landscape along with no small amount of diplomatic pressure, the United States retracted its support of the KMT troops while Taiwan repatriated some of the soldiers. The rest of the troops were reluctant to go to Taiwan, but China and Burma launched two large-scale encirclement and suppression operations in the 1960s in an attempt to wipe out the KMT troops. As a result, the remaining KMT troops chose to retreat to Chiang Rai in Northern Thailand, where border controls were weak. Although the Thai government harbored considerable doubts about these troops, it was unable to effectively control its northern border at the time and was also faced with the threat of armed groups from Burma and Laos from the 1950s. Therefore, the Thai government decided to use the KMT troops for border defense.

From the 1960s onward, the CPT changed its revolutionary strategy and began to follow Maoism while also shifting its activities from cities to remote mountainous areas. Due to the complex terrain and the lack of effective state governance, Northern Thailand became one of the places where the CPT flourished. The CPT developed several well-armed forces by mobilizing the tribes in Northern Thailand. In retaliation, the Thai government launched a series of attacks on the CPT along the northern border of Thailand by employing KMT troops with considerable combat experience. After four years of armed fighting between the KMT and CPT in Chiang Mai and in the mountainous areas around Chiang Rai, the situation stabilized in the early 1980s. The KMT troops also gradually formed defensive villages along the border in the battle with the CPT, at the behest of the Thai government. At the end of the Cold War, the border villages of KMT troops witnessed a transformation as their hitherto dormant economies grew, driven by agriculture and tourism. Executive control of these borders eventually returned to the Thai government.

In summary, the KMT troops in Northern Thailand helped the Thai government to eliminate Communist insurgencies by means of war. Meanwhile, the border villages formed by the KMT troops with the help of the Thai authorities also promoted effective

management of the border areas. This was an instance of Thai state power spreading to remote border areas in Northern Thailand. Although first- and second-generation KMT veterans have gained legal Thai nationality after decades of fighting for the country, they still maintain a very strong Chinese identity.

Acknowledgments

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The Struggling Aristocrats? Noble Families' Diminishing Roles after the Splitting of Tana Toraja Region

Ratri Istania*

How did the splitting of the Tana Toraja region in 2008 challenge the local aristocrats' dual role in *adat* and politics in the new North Toraja? Why and how did these aristocrats fail to secure their dual role after the 2015 election? After 32 years of the New Order regime, *adat* rights were finally revived through the Return to *Lembang* regulation in 2001. The law channelled noble families' hereditary rights back to local political affairs. However, the splitting of the region, or *pemekaran daerah*, opened a new venue for power contestation in North Toraja District. Following the second direct local head election in 2015, noble families' role in politics gradually diminished due to the participation of a growing class of wealthy and politically strong non-traditional elites in democratic elections. Using interviews, triangulated with government archives and media resources, I extend previous studies of North Toraja aristocrats' advantage to reassert their dual role—in *adat* and politics—after the region's split. I argue that decentralization policies initiated through democratic elections came with high risks for aristocrats to again secure their traditional hereditary rights. This study was inspired by Lee Ann Fujii's (2014) accidental ethnography study based on stories and unplanned encounters in Bosnia, Rwanda, and other places. It aims to contribute to an understanding of decentralization and indigenous minority groups' survival in Indonesia's multicultural society.

Keywords: decentralization, regional splitting, aristocratic role, hereditary rights, North Toraja, Indonesia

How did the splitting of the Tana Toraja region in 2008, into Tana Toraja and North Toraja Districts, challenge local aristocrats' dual role in the new North Toraja? Why and how did aristocrats fail to secure their dual role—in both *adat* and politics—after the 2015 election? Following the breakdown of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, the World Bank advocated for an aggressive decentralization reform throughout the country. One of the many decentralization-related policies—Government Regulation 129/2001 on the

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Requirements and Criteria for the Creation of a New Administrative Unit, or *pemekaran daerah*—allowed regions to split into autonomous regions and territories. This culminated in a sudden proliferation of territories across the nation. As mentioned earlier, the region of Tana Toraja was split in two in 2008, leading to the creation of the new Toraja Utara (North Toraja). The region now has two separate governments and administrative boundaries. However, the people remain connected to their 32 original *adat*[1] jurisdictions.

Decentralization also introduced democratization. Many localities celebrated the transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic, decentralized one as liberation from central government control. Torajans live on Sulawesi, the fourth largest island in Indonesia, where noble or aristocratic bloodlines remain predominant. They are found mostly in Tana Toraja and North Toraja, but also in neighboring districts. The Torajan aristocrats' privileged status is embodied within traditional practices such as land distribution, feasts, wedding ceremonies, and gift-offering rituals (Schrauwers 1995). The regional split, or *pemekaran daerah*, brought the aristocrats new hope of their dual role in *adat* and politics being restored, and the first direct election in 2010 did help them reassert themselves in both roles.

As is showcased in this study, the Tana Toraja government passed Regulation 2/2001 on the Return to *Lembang*[2] in 2001 to replace the uniform *desa* or village structure imposed by the New Order regime. Under this new regulation, anyone could be a candidate for the head of a *lembang* (smaller administrative unit). In addition, the statute provided aristocrats with room to bring back their *adat* influence (hereditary rights) to politics and government affairs. Unfortunately for the aristocrats, this lasted only until 2010, when their dual position was challenged through a democratic election.

The direct election for *bupati* (regent) in 2010 challenged the aristocrats' dual position. The caretaker *bupati*, the aristocrat Y. S. Dalipang, ran independently. He lost to other aristocrats from Papua who had a vast political network and were backed by the previous South Sulawesi provincial government. In 2015 the aristocratic family from Ke'te' Kesu' fully supported Kalatiku Paembonan, a noble himself, and Yosia Rinto Kadang, a successful Papua-based businessman acting as the largest campaign contributor during the 2015 election. Kalatiku's easy win was followed by the dramatic demotion of 18 government officials. Even the *bupati*, who was of noble blood himself,

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1) *Adat* is customary law applied mainly to the indigenous population within Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula. The unwritten community rules of conduct cover various events and activities such as birth, marriage arrangements, rituals, way of life, and death.

2) *Lembang* is a centuries-old traditional structure with a universal village system adopted within Toraja.

seemed helpless in preventing the massive demotion of high-ranking officers to government officers without an assigned position (Interview with demoted North Toraja officer 1, 2017).

Using accidental ethnography (Fujii 2014), I extend previous studies of the North Toraja aristocrats' dual role—in *adat* and politics—and address the challenges facing North Torajan aristocratic leaders after the 2015 election for *bupati*. Previous studies confirm the advantages of regional splitting for aristocrats seeking to reassert their role in politics (Li 2001; Roth 2007; Tyson 2011; Sukri 2018). However, the evidence in this study suggests the opposite: the splitting of the region diminished the dual role of aristocrats within society.

For analytical purposes, I conducted series of in-depth interviews in addition to a careful examination of government archives and media sources. I argue that North Torajan aristocrats' struggles to maintain their dual role with the advent of democratic elections weakened their attempts to preserve their traditional hereditary rights under the new decentralized system of government. Ultimately, the diminishing presence of traditional elites in policy-making bodies, local government, and parliament crippled the elites' means of securing funding and maintaining their centuries-old *adat* and tourism objects. Thus, this study contributes to the discussion of decentralization and minority groups' survival in Indonesia's multicultural society.

Literature Review

Territorial Autonomy in a Decentralized Indonesia

The 1997 Asian financial crisis impacted most Asian economies. As a result of the crisis, Indonesia had to give in to the World Bank's prescription for "big bang" decentralization reforms.[3)] The reforms democratized the country but divided it into additional regencies and provinces (Snyder 2000; Hadiz 2004; Fitria *et al.* 2005). The divisions further accelerated the growth of identity-based groups aiming to pursue autonomy (Rizal 2012). The issuance of Government Regulation 129/2000 and its revision, 78/2007, on the Requirements and Criteria for the Creation of a New Administrative Unit broke the sub-national government structure into four tiers—province, district/regency (*kabupaten*), subdistrict (*kecamatan*), and village (*desa*) (Booth 2011). From 1999 to 2001 the number of provinces

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3) "Big bang" is a term used by the World Bank and decentralization advocates to describe the first wave of decentralization in developing countries after the Asian financial crisis in 1997. The term indicates an abrupt implementation of decentralization, marked by the dramatic splitting of a region (regency or province).

increased dramatically, from 26 to 31, while the number of regencies rose from 292 to 341. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of regencies almost doubled in number to 514, and the number of provinces increased to 34. In 2019, at least 524 regencies were recorded in the Komite Pemantauan Pelaksanaan Otonomi Daerah (Regional Autonomy Watch) (Indonesia, Setkab 2019).

Decentralization policy is formulated to, among other actions, split a territory into smaller autonomous administrative units. Decentralization is also a devised strategy for Territorial Autonomy (TA) in order to break the concentration of power in one dominant identity-affiliated group (i.e., an ethnic or religious group). Across nations, decentralization has been widely credited with increasing public expenditure and providing better services for the people (Tiebout 1956; Fitria *et al.* 2005; Grossman and Pierskalla 2014). Decentralization generally takes two forms: vertical and horizontal. Both processes include the substantial transfer of political, economic, and administrative power from the central administrative unit to a local one—province, district, or subdistrict. While regional splitting has often been perceived as interchangeable with decentralization, each has different characteristics and consequences within a locality.

On the one hand, decentralization has been associated with a vertical process in which there is a delegation of authority from the central government to lower-level government units (Litvack *et al.* 1998; Falleti 2005). Among the various forms of delegation, political decentralization provides local governments with a significant amount of decision-making power that is intended to serve local needs (Berger 1983; Fox and Aranda 1996; Litvack *et al.* 1998; Treisman 2007). Advocates of decentralization view a decentralized system as one that leads to a more efficient provision of public goods to the people (Tiebout 1956). Under a decentralization arrangement, the government works better in more densely populated districts while also increasing the people's welfare (Pierskalla 2016). However, the ongoing policy debate on decentralization and government efficiency depicts the ambiguity of reforms in various developing countries from sub-Saharan Africa (Asiimwe and Musisi 2007; Grossman and Pierskalla 2014) to Southeast Asia (Fitria *et al.* 2005; Lewis 2017). Pessimists argue that decentralization policies do not improve either governance or service delivery (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006).

On the other hand, regional splitting has been connected with a horizontal process that involves "a large number of local governments splitting into two or more units over a relatively short period" (Treisman 2007; Grossman and Lewis 2014). The split mainly involves a territorial division that is not directly related to the power distribution and authority argument described in vertical decentralization. Thus, regional splitting is a TA strategy that considers the quantity and size of government units. Since the mid-1990s, the breakdown of authoritarian regimes in ethnically divided societies in Southeast

Asia, including Indonesia, has been followed by a dramatic increase in the number of territorial units (i.e., districts and provinces). This TA strategy has been prevalent also in developing areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, where half the countries have increased their number of local administrative units by about 20 percent (Grossman and Lewis 2014).

The logic of regional splitting is different from that of an ethno-federal arrangement. Instead of providing ethnic groups with a separate autonomous territory or allowing them to secede from their mother country, unitary states pursue regional proliferation to close the gap between the government and the people. For example, district splits bring the government "closer to the people" and promote more responsiveness and accountability (Tiebout 1956; Pierskalla 2016). In addition, establishing homogeneous smaller units creates better opportunities in an ethnically diverse society for local people to organize and manage their collective action (Pierskalla 2016; Bazzi and Gudgeon 2021).

Studies on Indonesia's decentralization offer conflicting theoretical analyses on the significance of TA implementation (Ganguly 2013; Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeddin *et al.* 2016). Some suggest that the rapid regional splits set the stage for identity-affiliated groups to compete for access to political power and economic resources; one way of competing was through contesting local elections (Snyder 2000; Hadiz 2004). Other studies indicate that decentralization may promote conflict within a diverse population (Van Klinken 2007; Wilson 2008; Pierskalla and Sacks 2017; Bazzi and Gudgeon 2021). A close investigation of regional elections in Maybrat regency, West Papua Province, revealed political candidates' likelihood of using ethnic identity (based on territory, class, and blood lineage) as an electoral strategy to appeal to constituents. However, this strategy frequently resulted in long-standing conflicts among groups with different affiliations aiming to win the election (Haryanto *et al.* 2019). Meanwhile, one study found that regencies with greater ethnic homogeneity were likely to have reduced communal conflict (Pierskalla 2016; Bazzi and Gudgeon 2021). Other studies have revealed that new homogeneous regencies with greater polarization are likely to experience more violence (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005).[4] According to Samuel Bazzi and Matthew Gudgeon's study (2021), districts with a more homogeneous population are likely to be more stable after a split than heterogeneous ones. However, no single territory is populated with only one homogeneous group. There is always a tiny fraction of minority groups within the bigger group. In this connection, Bazzi and Gudgeon also state that a district with greater polarization among ethnic or identity groups has a greater probabil-

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4) Ethnic polarization is a situation in which individuals from one group can be easily identified as different from individuals from other groups.

ity of engaging in an identity-led conflict. Polarization refers to a situation in which one group can identify themselves as different from other groups (e.g., Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda; Bodos and non-Bodos in India). The greater polarization means that one group can tell that they are very different from others.

To understand the underlying cause of a conflict arising from ethnic identity, scholars must examine the intricacy of local historical backgrounds and the social processes behind the contestation of power transformation (Peluso and Watts 2001). Sometimes the tension between groups is simply to gain *adat* power over a depleting resource (Henley and Davidson 2008). However, other deeper causes, such as ethnic rivalry, may push a group to assert its domination over other groups. Democratization provides the group with leverage to win executive government control over the desired territory and natural resources (Crystal 1974; Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Roth 2009).

Toraja's Social Structure and Governing Systems

Prior to its split in 2008, Toraja was a large regency in South Sulawesi Province's highlands. It was inhabited largely by a minority ethnic group, the Torajans. After the split, Tana Toraja District—the government and agricultural center in the Toraja area—has an almost homogeneous population, with 87.51 percent Torajans. Meanwhile, 94.7 percent of the North Toraja population is accounted for by the Torajan ethnic group (Evi *et al.* 2015).

However, the Torajans form a minority group within South Sulawesi Province's predominantly Muslim population. After the 2008 split, the ethno-religious Torajan Christian group continued to dominate in Tana Toraja and North Toraja, in a nation that is 87 percent Islamic (Indonesia, BPS Sulawesi Selatan n.d.). Few Torajans maintain the practices of their ancient religious heritage, Aluk to Dolo or "ancestor's guidelines" (Sukri 2018).[5] While Torajans generally adhere to *adat* customs, their struggles to reclaim *adat* rights are long overdue. Since 1993, the movement for a return to the *lembang* system has established a connection with global networks calling for the government's awareness of political rights and protection of the *adat* community (Tyson 2011).

Before the splitting of their region, the Torajans lived in a hierarchical structure based on family connection, age, wealth, and occupation under 32 *adat* jurisdictions. In precolonial times they were divided into three strata: the aristocracy, or *puang* or *to*

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5) Aluk to Dolo or Alukta is an ancient animistic belief system adopted by the indigenous Torajan population in South Sulawesi. Since 1969, Alukta has been considered an offshoot of Hindu Dharma. According to the South Sulawesi Province Central Agency on Statistics, approximately 4 percent of the 618,578 people in Tana Toraja, North Toraja, and Mamasa still adhere to this belief system (Indonesia, BPS Sulawesi Selatan n.d.).

parenge'; ordinary commoners or *to buda*, *to sama*; and slaves or *to kaunan* (Adams 2006). Their status was primarily assigned by birth. The noble families lived widely spread apart in Toraja's mountainous terrain and often engaged in rivalries, even warfare, with neighboring villages. The rivalries ended with the imposition of Dutch colonial rule, and the noble houses were forced to unify in 1906 (Bigalke 1981; 2005; Adams 1997; Nooy-Palm 2014). The Dutch colonial government found it easier to control the sparsely populated areas in the northern Toraja region by centralizing the leadership under the largest *tongkonan*[6] house due to its significant share of the population (Interview with a Papua-based North Toraja businessman, 2017; Sukri 2018).

However, Toraja's governing system is not monolithic and straightforward. There are at least three observed governing *adat* systems in three regions. The first is a highly feudalistic system in Tana Toraja. Tana Toraja's social structure is hierarchical, with three *tallu lembangna* (kingdom alliances)—Mengkendek, Sangalla, and Makale—that preserve feudalistic governing traditions even in current times. In addition, noble families in Tana Toraja, called *puang*, lead society in both *adat* and government.

The second system is less feudalistic: often referred to as *demokrasi terpimpin* or Guided Democracy, it applies to the political arrangement of North Toraja. The reference to Sukarno's *demokrasi terpimpin* to characterize North Toraja's governing system does not necessarily relate to the 1950s–1960s era of Sukarno's single-strongman leadership.[7] For North Toraja's noble families, it is merely the simplest way to describe a system of organization between the smaller houses and the largest house under the principle of equality (Interview with a Papua-based North Toraja businessman, 2017).

The final governing system, the liberal one, characterizes the free western Toraja people who are ruled by the *adat* elder called Makdika (Muhammad Fadli *et al.* 2018). In general, all noble houses and their leader, *Ambe'* or *To parenge'*, enjoy a similar status and voice.

The three types of governance system discussed above (feudalistic, less feudalistic, and liberal) determine the interaction between local aristocratic leaders and their supposed followers, the commoners. In the less feudalistic or more democratic system of North Toraja District, ordinary people have more freedom to contest aristocratic power than in the feudalistic Tana Toraja District.

Recently, the social mobility of North Toraja's non-traditional elites has increased

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6) A *tongkonan* is an ancient Torajan Austronesian-style house with a unique and massive boat-shaped saddleback roof. This type of house may be found in numerous places in Indonesia.

7) *Demokrasi terpimpin*, or Guided Democracy, was a term used by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, who was dissatisfied with Western liberal democracy. He established a new political system that blended three different political ideologies—nationalism, Communism, and religion—under the leadership of a strongman, Sukarno himself.

due to acquired wealth (Hollan and Wellenkamp 1996). While the hierarchical structure still applies, the influence of modernization since the 1960s, the growing size of the Torajan diaspora, and the influx of money from those working outside North Toraja District have brought significant changes to Torajans' perception of the role of aristocrats in society (Volkman 1985). Furthermore, following the fall of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, many indigenous groups gained impetus to revive their traditional practices. According to eyewitnesses, *adat* revivalism became part of a continuing effort to recover *adat* rights through any available means, legal or otherwise (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2010).

Decentralization, Democratization, and Dual Role of Aristocratic Leadership
The territorial homogenization policy of Suharto's New Order era replaced the *lembang* governance system with a *desa* or village arrangement. The abolishment of the *lembang adat* government practice aimed to promote equality in development and modernization (Robinson 2020). However, the traditional elites and aristocratic leaders perceived the village system as endangering their position within the *adat* communities (de Jong 2013). Therefore, alongside the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara's (Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago) (AMAN 2019)[8] struggle to reclaim the rights of indigenous groups, Torajan aristocrats launched their own movement to revive the *lembang* system taken away by the Suharto regime. The return to the *lembang* system gave aristocrats new legal ground to reassert their dual role in *adat* and government. The *lembang* structure paved the way for aristocrats to regain their power to control the government.

Law 22/1999 on Regional Autonomy, followed by a return to the *lembang* policy, resulted in a restructuring of the Tana Toraja territorial units to the *adat* governing unit or *lembang* and the administrative unit. This process involved unification or amalgamation of *lembang* and a reorganization of units at the regency level (de Jong 2013). Suddenly, the *adat* leaders saw an opportunity to reclaim their dual position in *adat* and politics by using their influence to intervene, for instance, in the leadership recruitment process.

On January 1, 2001, the movement for a return to the *lembang* system achieved some success when the Tana Toraja parliament passed Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Tana Toraja (Local government regulation) 2/2001 on the Return to *Lembang*. This policy restored the villages' administrative structure to the *lembang* system and recognized *kobongan kalua*, the representative body of 32 *adat* communities (Klenke 2013). The

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8) AMAN is an Indonesian alliance of indigenous groups to protect and fight for their rights. *Adat* is a system of customary law characterized by its historical narrative and interpretation through generations via oral transmission rather than written legal documents. The oral history becomes law, which is internalized within the community.

lembang system consists of a government structure, social and cultural leadership customs, and an *adat* territorial boundary: a geographical territory wherein populations with similar predecessors share social and cultural customs within a traditional way of government. A lower administrative unit under the *lembang* structure, the *kampung*, replaced Suharto's *dusun*, a sub-village unit (de Jong 2013).

Besides the restoration of the *lembang* system of government, a new democratic institution was introduced: Badan Permusyawaratan Lembang (*Lembang* consultative council), to bridge people's interest in *lembang* and *lembang*'s executive government. *Lembang* is a system of government that has two features: a representative council and an executive government. Members of the representative council articulate the concerns of ordinary Torajans before the executive government. After the passage of Regulation 2/2001 on the Return to *Lembang*, council members were still descendants of aristocratic families directly elected by people living in *lembang* (de Jong 2013). Although the rules did not clearly indicate the privilege of aristocrats to claim elected office or the highest membership status in the representative council, the law channelled the hereditary rights of nobles back to local politics. For example, according to Regulation 2/2001, Article 19: "The establishment and membership of a *lembang*'s consultative council is hereby decided through consensus among the *adat* community, social and political organizations, professionals, and youth leaders, as well as other local respected figures within the respective *lembang*."

In the highly hierarchical Torajan society, this arrangement led to a strengthening of the aristocrats' dual role. However, the previous *lembang*'s non-aristocratic officers did not make it easy for the aristocrats to return to *lembang* politics. The claim for *adat* rights disrupted the political patronage secured under Suharto's 32-year rule at the *desa* level. Notably, non-traditional elite government officials still felt entitled to control land usage and tenure (see Tyson 2011). Former officials from the *desa* or village apparatus and its subordinate units opposed the *lembang* governing system (Noer Fauzi and R. Yando Zakaria 2002; de Jong 2013). In addition, wealthy non-traditional elites—mostly migrants—contested the power of aristocratic families through at least two means. First, they challenged the older aristocrats' traditions by creating their own *lembang*. Second, they competed directly for power with the aristocrats by participating in democratic elections (de Jong 2013).

The struggle between Torajan aristocrats and non-traditional elites carried over into the early days of the *pemekaran daerah*, or the splitting of the Tana Toraja region into North Toraja and Tana Toraja Districts. The division was carried out with the intention of delivering more effective public services to both districts. Law 22/1999 on Regional Autonomy and Law 25/1999 on Inter-governmental Fiscal Transfer resulted in three types
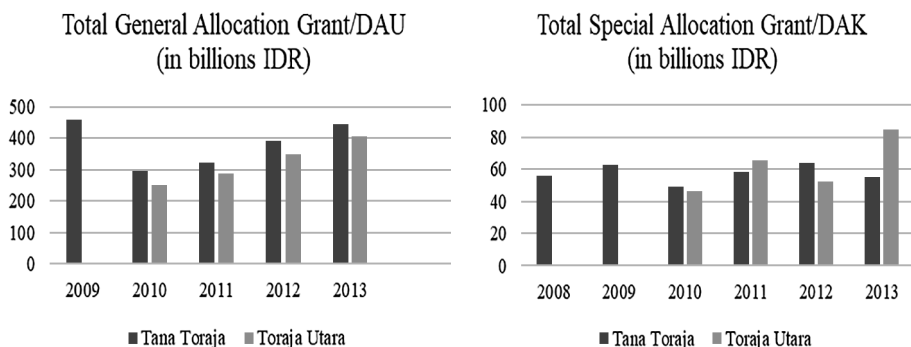
Fig. 1   Comparison of Decentralization Transfer between Two Torajas
Source: World Bank INDO-DAPOER Political Economy Data (2019)

of fiscal decentralization. The first transfer was to be a general allocation grant (*Dana Alokasi Umum*) distributed to all regencies every year based on a calculation of the amount of land and the size of the population. The second was to be a special allocation grant (*Dana Alokasi Khusus*), an earmarked fund intended to ensure that the new units would follow the national priority program. The third was to be shared taxes that generated significant amounts of revenue.

Tana Toraja, being the original district government headquarters, collected a substantial amount of the revenue generated by North Toraja's prospective tourism resources prior to *pemekaran daerah*. This allowed Tana Toraja to build its infrastructure, such as asphalt roads, the *bupati*'s residence, government and local parliament buildings, and many beautiful and massive monuments.

Under the government regulation on district splitting or *pemekaran daerah*, the parent district (Tana Toraja) was required to assist the child district (North Toraja) for a fixed number of years (please see Fig. 1). Approximately three years after the split, North Toraja received its own funding from the central government as well as South Sulawesi Province. This amount was calculated based on the amount of the parent district's budget. The amount would subsequently be prorated based on the population and land area. Resources from either national or provincial fiscal decentralization funds were allocated mostly for infrastructure and restructuring government personnel (Fitria *et al.* 2005). Amidst the national and provincial transfers, the child district, North Toraja, needed to work harder than Tana Toraja to catch up on its own infrastructure projects by diversifying its sources of income, which were very limited.

Methodology

This study utilizes a series of interviews with individuals from diverse social backgrounds in both regencies—Tana Toraja and North Toraja—and South Sulawesi Province conducted in the summer of 2017. The interviews involved twenty participants: government officials, local parliament members, and aristocrats from both Tana Toraja and North Toraja regencies as well as the provincial level. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling, with the average time of each interview being one to two hours. Thus, each respondent could be interviewed multiple times. Subsequently, the interview data were triangulated with national news and online news media, government archives, and scholarly publications to better understand the most prominent factors behind the declining role of aristocrats in politics after the 2015 election.

One way to understand the context is by observing and comparing the surroundings, pictures, monuments, buildings, government offices, infrastructure, and people's interactions in daily life. I followed the accidental ethnography approach suggested in political science research for studying mainly post-conflict situations (Fujii 2014). Unlike lengthy ethnographic fieldwork, accidental ethnography involves the researcher as a participant-observer (Emerson *et al.* 2011), even if only for a brief period, to watch for any unplanned or accidental events systematically beyond an interview or any other structured qualitative research methods. For instance, I attended the annual Torajan music festival at Ke'te' Kesu' to observe the dynamic between the national, provincial, and local North Toraja governments and the aristocratic family member hosting the feast. I also visited burial sites and talked to the cave guide to gain an insight into the possible causes for the lack of support for infrastructure (e.g., decent roads) and basic services (e.g., public restrooms, trash cans). Furthermore, I undertook a two-hour trip with my adviser's fieldwork family to observe more tourist destinations, had conversations with ordinary Torajans in local cafes, and talked to souvenir sellers on the street and in the market. I engaged in casual conversation with demoted officers, observed newly built *tongkonans* belonging to wealthy non-traditional elites, attended festivals, and attended a prominent aristocratic leader's funeral. These engagements were carried out to better understand how the Torajans viewed their identity, the dual role of aristocrats, and the aristocrats' interactions with people in North Toraja before and after the district's splitting. Such a research method allows the researcher to gain in-depth contextual knowledge about the nature of groups, boundaries, and perhaps cultures (Wimmer 2013; Fujii 2014). In 2019 I revisited North Toraja to observe *mangrara*, a ritual to consecrate a *tongkonan* house. During this second visit, I reconnected with earlier acquaintances to clarify some of my previous findings.

Analysis

Before the Split: Strong Dual Role of Aristocrats

After the enactment of the Return to *Lembang* legislation in 2001, aristocrats regained their dual role to serve as government officers and in *adat*. The dual role prompted the aristocrats to exercise their hereditary rights of leadership power within *adat* and politics. By reasserting their influence in both positions, aristocrats could reap more benefits by securing funding transferred from provincial and national governments. One way of using the funding was to build better infrastructure, maintain *adat* sites, and strengthen their influence, especially in the case of the non-traditional elites.

Many of them served as high-ranking government officials in various local offices. Their bureaucrat-aristocrat status was evident especially when resolving identity-related issues, such as conflicts due to *adat* rituals. According to a former subdistrict head, the dual role of the nobility was apparent in a 2004 incident involving two subdistricts separated by the Sa'dan River—Kecamatan Makale Utara on the eastern side and Se'ke and Bontongan villages in Kecamatan Sanggalangi (Landah after the split):

> As the story goes, there was a Torajan resident who died in Irian (Papua). The death became a source of conflict between the two groups [though affiliated with the same family, they lived in different subdistricts]. Both groups claimed the right to perform the *adat* funeral feast. The people who lived in Makale Utara, across the Sa'dan River, felt entitled to conduct the ritual since the deceased was one of their residents. They did not allow the deceased to be transported to the other side, Sanggalangi Subdistrict [where the family burial site was located]. Therefore, the Makale Utara people insisted that the feast had to be performed at their location. Since the rituals usually take two to three days, it just did not make any sense to repeat the same rituals on the other side [at the final resting place for the dead]. This issue escalated into conflict. (Interview with a former *camat* or subdistrict head, 2017)

While two groups may belong to the same familial community, disputes related to identity (prestige) can often occur during funeral rituals.[9] Since the most significant source of income for a Torajan family is generated from the practice of rituals, it is not surprising that the two groups above fought for the right to perform the ceremony. Additionally, the location and event that determine where the money is circulated can be a source of tension between families of similar socioeconomic backgrounds that are separated by administrative boundaries.

The influx of money from the diaspora as well as tourism and revenue from rituals

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9) *Rambu solo'* is a massive and prolonged ancient Toraja funeral rite to pay tribute to the ancestors' spirits and send the deceased into eternity. *Rambu tuka* is a big feast to celebrate a wedding, the blessing of a new *tongkonan*, or a successful harvest.

benefit both the population and the government. However, the enormous cost of funerals —which includes building structures, procuring a decorated coffin, building a small *tongkonan* house for the ceremony, buying food to serve the family and guests, and renting buildings for the lavish funeral service—can amount to more than USD 70,000, or nearly IDR 1 billion. Not surprisingly, families that sponsor funerals sometimes fall heavily into debt.

In the above case, trouble arose when the poorer side of the population, which felt entitled to receive equal benefits from the ritual, was prevented from receiving such benefits because of the territorial divide:

> Although the conflict was generally resolved before the split period, some provocateurs could not be dismissed entirely. Those people agitated others to persistently claim the body for the sake of performing the ritual. People from Makale Utara Subdistrict refused to ask for permission from the other side. At that time the *bupati*, the head of the local police, had given up, and the *camat* was called out to mediate the conflict. With military backing, the *camat* met the disputing parties, who had already prepared themselves with blocks and machetes. (Interview with a former *camat*, 2017)

Acknowledging the presence of the *camat* or subdistrict head, who was also a renowned aristocrat from the same family as both groups, the feuding parties agreed to resolve their differences. The *camat*'s approach of using his concurrent positions of bureaucrat and aristocrat to mediate the conflict was practical. The *camat* successfully united the two groups by proposing funding to build a connecting bridge and install electricity in the more impoverished region in Makale Utara Subdistrict.

After the Split: The Issue of Resource Competition and Diminishing Role of Aristocrats
The elites' intention behind the splitting of the Tana Toraja region was to provide better public services (i.e., education, health, and identity-related paperwork services) and bring the government closer to the people. However, the changing boundaries worried some of the aristocrats about their *adat*. The process of splitting Tana Toraja into Tana Toraja and North Toraja, like any *pemekaran daerah*, had its pros and cons. Different perceptions also arose among the Torajan aristocrats. Following were the thoughts of an aristocratic leader who had also served as a high-ranking official in North Toraja:

> Those who opposed the idea of Toraja divided into two argued that the *adat* and culture were going to be breaking apart. . . . Again, *pemekaran* [*daerah*] was intended solely for government administrative purposes, for the sake of service delivery. While some disagreed, the idea continued to persist, and we always tried to approach those who contradicted it. (Interview with a former high-ranking elected government official and aristocrat from North Toraja, 2017)

Immediately after the split, the North Toraja transitional government was led by Dalipang, the then caretaker *bupati* (2009–10), who was from an aristocratic background. It appeared that the appointment of someone from the nobility signalled a solid reference to the three dearly held principles for selecting a leader: *tomaluangan ba'tengna tomasindung mayanna*, which can formally be interpreted as kindness, wisdom, and skill/knowledge; sometimes it is construed as defining an individual who is from an upper stratum of society, wealthy, and skillful/knowledgeable (Priyanti 1977).

Law 32/2004 on Regional Autonomy changed the election system into a direct voting system or *pemilihan kepala daerah langsung*. Thus, regardless of their status in society, people would be able to participate in elections and vote for their favorite candidate without fear of being sanctioned by, for example, *adat*. However, due to the local-head election, aristocratic leaders expressed widespread concern about the increasing rivalry between traditional elites in North Toraja (Sukri 2018). They were also worried about the disruption of the hierarchical structure in the *adat* community, which ultimately caused political instability in Tana Toraja and North Toraja Districts.

During the first direct election in North Toraja, in 2010, Dalipang ran as an independent candidate with Simon Liling. Dalipang, an aristocrat from the most prominent house in North Toraja, previously served as an important bureaucrat: the regional secretary, or *Sekretaris Daerah*, in Tana Toraja's government. His dual role in the government and *adat* boosted his confidence to run as an independent candidate. However, he was defeated by a pair of candidates also from an aristocratic background: Frederick Batti Sorring, a former deputy *bupati* in Asmat, Papua; and Frederik Buntang Rombe Layuk, a former public officer from the Tana Toraja government. Although Frederick Batti Sorring spent most of his life outside Toraja, his vast political network provided him with enough political parties backing him to win the election.

To ensure a smooth election, the governor of South Sulawesi, Syahrul Yasin Limpo, appointed Tautoto Tanaranggina as the caretaker *bupati* of North Toraja. This was necessary to ensure the smooth transition to the elected *bupati*, Frederick Batti Sorring, who was officially sworn in on March 31, 2011. However, Tautoto's appointment was controversial owing to his alleged support of a particular candidate and political partisanship among rank-and-file bureaucrats (*Antaranews*, July 14, 2010; July 30, 2010). Angered by the widespread violations in the second round of elections, Dalipang and Simon decided to bring the case before the Constitutional Court, or Mahkamah Konstitusi. However, the court rejected their appeal and declared their opponents as the winners in 2011. The status quo of the aristocracy was now being challenged by non-traditional elites under the new democratic electoral system. In North Toraja, the increasing political polarization between the old aristocrat-led administration and the new political newcomers may

stem from their different social strata.

After recuperating from his loss in the 2010 election, Dalipang decided to run in the North Toraja House of Representatives election under the banner of the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party, or PKPI, in 2014. However, his political comeback was not successful. Meanwhile, a wealthy Jakarta-based Torajan high-ranking officer, Kalatiku Paembonan, then secretary of the director general of community development from the Ministry of Home Affairs, won the election for local head in 2015. Kalatiku used his vast nationwide political and bureaucratic networks to win the seat of North Toraja *bupati*. On March 21, 2015, Kalatiku and Yosia Rinto Kadang, a wealthy Papua-based business-man, were sworn in as North Toraja *bupati* and deputy *bupati* for the term 2016–21 (later changed to 2016–20).

Dalipang's losses in the 2010 *bupati* and 2014 House of Representatives elections impacted his life as well as the careers of aristocrats who followed his career path in the North Toraja government. Dalipang decided to withdraw from public life. Despite hav-ing been one of the most influential figures in North Toraja's *pemekaran daerah*, he ended up surrendering his dream of building his homeland.

The dramatic story of Dalipang shows how his belief in a bright future of maintaining a dual role as an aristocrat and high-ranking bureaucrat was easily broken. The changing nature of North Toraja's high politics also rearranged the bureaucratic structure within the government's rank and file.

The transition from the old parent district, Tana Toraja, to the new child district, North Toraja, also required a significant transfer of government officers to the new region. For those officers who were already residents of North Toraja District, the transfer guaranteed them new positions in the executive and legislative branches. In other words, officers who were originally from North Toraja continue to strengthen their traditional dual role as bureaucrats and aristocrats.

However, the district split came with a cost. A democratic election soon posed a direct challenge to the circulation of elites in the government, once dominated by North Toraja aristocrats (Interview with a Papua-based North Toraja businessman, 2017). Specifically, in the 2015 election, the first local election to simultaneously elect local heads of government—the governor at the provincial level and *bupati* (regent) and *walikota* (mayor) at the district/city level—the aristocratic family from Ke'te' Kesu' fully supported Kalatiku, a noble himself. However, the deputy *bupati* was not an aristocrat. He was a successful Papua-based businessman and allegedly the most prominent finan-cial donor during the 2015 election. Afterward, there was a dramatic dismissal of 18 government officials from various ranks. They were replaced by loyal supporters of the current *bupati* and mainly of the deputy. Unfortunately for them, these 18 high-ranking

North Toraja government officials were stripped of their positions while undergoing training in Jakarta to be promoted to levels of higher office. While such incidents are common in politics, this shocking episode still disturbs North Toraja aristocrats, since many of the 18 were affiliated with noble families. These demoted high-ranking officers were made to occupy a small, confined place with only one table and two benches. They sarcastically referred to themselves as occupying "the special place" while awaiting the outcome of their appeal through a class action suit against the sitting *bupati* (Interview with demoted North Toraja high-ranking official 1, 2017). The suit has not been settled at the time of writing.

Even though the window of opportunity would soon close for members of the nobility to win elections, some of them were hopeful about their future. As one of the demoted high-ranking officials from the North Toraja government said:

> Members of aristocratic families are proactive [when it comes to legislative elections]. Since many families live under one big *tongkonan*, if one figure—the elder—leads one *tongkonan*, everyone [will follow] the *adat* leader who holds [the strongest influence] over the *tongkonan*. (Interview with demoted North Toraja high-ranking official 2, 2017)

According to a prominent *adat* leader from one of the biggest *tongkonans* in North Toraja, it was essential to have an aristocratic family member in every level of politics. To provide context, he recalled the past success of two Torajan members of the nobility in the national parliament in guarding the passing of Law 5/1992 on Preservation of Cultural Heritage (*perlindungan cagar budaya*). The leader continued that the involvement of nobility in revising Law 11/2010 "allowed more severe financial sanctions on those who steal objects. [The previous law] only fined the thief 100 million rupiahs (around USD 7,000), while the total value of the object could be two billion rupiahs (around USD 140,873)" (Law 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage [Cagar Budaya], Article 107).

The changing nature of power contestation after the 2015 election prompted aristocratic leaders to lower the bar for the involvement of their members in government. Despite eyeing the highest elected office, they were satisfied with a few lower government positions in order to assert their aristocratic influence in politics:

> Therefore, we encourage members of our family to be involved in politics. [This is important] to safeguard, [for instance] proposed policies. . . . One of us should be government officials, such as *camat*, *lurah*, to harmonize the regulation with the *adat*. (Interview with North Toraja aristocrat leader, 2017)

In this regard, a smaller number of aristocrats working in the government office could also translate into lower funding, for example, to maintain *adat* sites (i.e., objects, artifacts,

tongkonans). An *adat* leader had to personally find sources of *dana abadi* (endowment) to maintain the site. Of the tourist contributions, 60 percent went to the *adat* community and 40 percent to the district government. The recent quest to recover stolen artifacts, such as *tau-tau* (effigies of the dead), still has a long way to go due to lack of funding and support from the local and national governments. Effigies are *adat* objects that have substantial monetary value and are meaningful for the *adat* community as they are believed to harbor the spirits of the dead (Adams 2006). Stolen effigies bring sellers a significant amount of money, primarily in the black market.

Instead of increasing their ability to secure funding through political influence, aristocrats must compete tirelessly with ordinary Torajans who are swiftly adopting modern carving styles (Interview with a local craftsman and souvenir seller, 2017). Though hesitant, they need to bring in money by selling souvenirs and performing in an annual festival in collaboration with the government (Casual conversation with visitors to a local cafe, 2017). Unfortunately, ordinary Torajans' adoption of new, modernized carving techniques jeopardizes the preservation of traditional carving methods that have been passed down through the generations (Adams 2006). Modern carving techniques are a modification of conventional carving methods in which patterns have been well preserved through generations of noble houses (*tongkonans*). Traditional carving patterns and styles are considered sacred and cannot easily be passed down or adopted. Aristocrats see the modification of conventional carving patterns and techniques as a direct challenge to their social status.

Discussion

Many studies have been carried out on Toraja after the fall of Suharto's regime in 1998 and a few years after the split in the region, for example, the crucial period when the return of *lembang* was just newly introduced in 2001 (Li 2001; Roth 2007; de Jong 2013; Sukri 2018). However, the evidence in this study shows a different narrative regarding the diminishing dual role of bureaucrats-aristocrats within society, which may be due to the different study periods.

This study also attempts to capture the role of the elites both before and after the regional split in 2008. However, it emphasizes aristocrats' gradually declining role, mainly after the 2015 election for local head. The dual role of traditional elites has continuously been challenged by new elites from a non-traditional background who have been eyeing power. Unsurprisingly, the declining presence of aristocratic families in politics may also have contributed to North Toraja's failure to fulfill the original intent

of the *pemekaran daerah*, or splitting of the district, in order to bring welfare to the people.

A 2019 study evaluating regional autonomy in Indonesia found that among the 524 regencies that split between 2001 and 2019, North Toraja and Lanny Jaya in Papua Province received the least funding from the national and provincial governments (Siregar and Rudy Badrudin 2019). North Toraja's impoverished state is a paradox. The beauty of Tana Toraja and North Toraja has been known for centuries, long before the Toraja region became one of UNESCO's World Heritage nominees (UNESCO World Heritage Centre n.d.).[10]

After the 2015 election, political dynamics prevented aristocratic family members from holding multiple positions in government. The politically motivated purge of high-ranking North Toraja government officials from the previous administration left just the two largest North Toraja noble houses' family members with middle-ranking official positions. One was the *camat*, or subdistrict head, in the North Toraja government at Ke'te' Kesu'; and a second was on the border between North Toraja and Tana Toraja. Rather than feeling threatened by the decreasing number of aristocratic family members holding office in North Toraja's government structure, the aristocratic leader from Ke'te' Kesu' seemed to accept this arrangement as fair compared to having no aristocrat serving in the government. While *pemekaran daerah* introduced an opportunity to strengthen the dual role of noble families in *adat* and politics (Li 2001; Roth 2007; Tyson 2011), North Toraja's aristocrats appeared to be on the losing side of the power dynamics, as suggested by Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts (2001).

The aristocrats' diminishing role in politics reduces their leverage in securing legislation to protect their hereditary rights. It also reduces their leverage when it comes to other development projects, such as infrastructure, that are necessary to maintain *adat* objects. Deteriorating infrastructure in the region, such as roads leading to popular cave burial sites (i.e., Ke'te' Kesu' and Londa), is in need of repair. North Toraja's aristocrats are increasingly powerless and losing their battle to influence decision makers to help them protect their ancestors' valuable heritage.

During my field research, there was a sense of frustration among aristocratic leaders at the annual Toraja International Festival in Ke'te Kesu' village. Initially, the festival gave slight hope to a particular noble family for finally getting all the attention they needed from national and provincial policy makers, such as high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Tourism. The family was struggling to maintain their *adat* site and search

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10) Ten traditional settlements in Tana Toraja are still on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage nominations. The nomination was submitted on June 10, 2009, but no decision has been announced yet.

for stolen artifacts, such as effigies (Informal communications with a member of a noble family and a foreign expert on North Toraja, 2017).

The three-day festival was supposed to attract overseas and domestic tourists to see the beauty of the oldest *tongkonan* complex and enjoy performances by international artists. The noble family invited a renowned foreign expert on North Toraja to help them negotiate with Indonesian officials to retrieve stolen effigies from the international black market. The expert held a casual discussion with Indonesian officials, with no members of the noble family in attendance. Disappointingly for the family, the discussion ended unsuccessfully due to bureaucratic obstacles. Apart from missing this strategic lobbying opportunity, the aristocratic leader preferred to take on an insignificant backstage role; he was not even willing to deliver the opening remarks at the ceremony. Unsurprisingly, after the festival there was no significant change in the area. During my second visit, in 2019, the area still had no adequate parking lot for tourists, decent public restrooms, or well-constructed roads; and unfortunately, the noble family had still not found a way to bring the *tau-tau* home. The absence of strong regulations allowing North Toraja aristocrats' voices to be heard in protecting *adat* objects may jeopardize the sustainability of the entire *adat* system.

The recognition of *adat* rights in written regulations, such as *perda* or regional government regulations, is viewed as vital for noble families to gain legal standing to preserve their hereditary rights. However, written rules are just a "dishonest illusion" (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2010), because local governments are half-hearted in enforcing them. Therefore, noble families' hopes of preserving their rights may never be realized. North Toraja's less feudalistic governance system welcomes ordinary people to participate in decision making. After North Toraja's split from Tana Toraja in 2008, the aristocrats' acceptance of democratic values quickly opened a new way for North Toraja's non-traditional elites to contest aristocrats' dual role in *adat* and government through elections. This backfired for the aristocrats, since the democratic election was an open invitation for non-traditional elites to replace the domination of aristocrats in the government (Snyder 2000; Hadiz 2004). Under democratic rule and aristocrats' lack of representation in political bodies or government, aristocratic rights can be easily revoked or ignored in favor of a new line of rulers.

While many aristocrats are still convinced that the democratic system does not threaten their *adat* position, their presence is diminishing within politics, and the government may ultimately weaken the noble families' efforts to protect their hereditary leadership. The new open democratic governing system allows non-traditional elites to directly contest aristocrats' dual role. The new line of leadership may not necessarily value *adat* as much as aristocrats do.

Conclusion

Democracy brought about a new way of governing people through decentralization. Decentralization and democracy were expected to provide more efficient delivery of public goods and ultimately provide better welfare for the people, including indigenous people such as Torajans. Unfortunately, after more than a decade of district splitting or *pemekaran daerah*, North Toraja has not come face to face with its promised future. The increased funding from the national and provincial governments along with income from the tourism sector do not cater to the neediest among the residents, nor to the *adat* sites that made North Toraja famous as a tourist destination in the first place.

This study is an in-depth investigation into how the dual role of North Toraja's aristocrats is diminishing amidst the dominant non-traditional government rule. With the weakening of their role, aristocrats are hampered from maintaining their *adat* heritage and securing funds from the government for the preservation of *adat* sites. The finding of this study is limited to one potential cause for the diminishing role of aristocrats in politics: democratization and its concomitant decentralization. This evidence does not necessarily suggest that more people from the upper social and economic strata should be added to the North Toraja government. However, the study points to an ambiguous effect of *adat* revivalism on the minority indigenous group in a decentralized and democratized Indonesia. Moreover, I recognize the weakness of basing this study on individuals' recollections of past events and relying too much on interview data. Thus, future studies may consider an alternative approach to the phenomenon by focusing on the literature on power sharing among elites.

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Dharmawara Mahathera, Sihanouk, and the Cultural Interface of Cambodia's Cold War Relations with India

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Following Heonik Kwon, this article explores the social and cultural underpinnings of the Cold War (and Cambodia's stance of neutrality in relation to it) as illustrated through the life of a colorful Cambodian monk, Dharmawara Mahathera. Long resident in India, Dharmawara became a confidant of Norodom Sihanouk as the latter negotiated independence and Cambodia's new geopolitical realities. Dharmawara was one point of connection between Sihanouk and India at the time Sihanouk was drawn to a position of neutrality and to the Non-Aligned Movement associated with Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai, and his story illuminates some of the cultural interface underlying the politics. He would assume a profile in emerging institutions of international Buddhism, such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which in their own way related to developing geopolitics. He subsequently attracted the attention of American diplomats in Cambodia in ways that illustrate something of how the Cold War came to be negotiated on the ground. His tensions with the Cambodian monastic hierarchy help us better understand the latter's role at a historical conjuncture. I argue that Dharmawara helps us understand Sihanouk's emerging philosophy of "Buddhist socialism."

Keywords: Dharmawara Mahathera, Norodom Sihanouk, Jawaharlal Nehru, Cold War, neutrality, Cambodia-India relations, Cambodian Buddhism, Indian Buddhism

Heonik Kwon, in formulating a new way of looking at the Cold War, has advocated "turning our attention from geopolitical to social and cultural dimensions" of the period (Kwon 2010, 32) for a more nuanced, interpersonal vision of the historical transition. In this article, with a biographical focus, I offer a close reading of the role of the Cambodian Buddhist monk Dharmawara Mahathera, an often contradictory transnational figure connected to political elites in both India and Cambodia. With his movements between India and Cambodia, Bandung and Washington, Dharmawara illuminates something of the

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moment Cambodia achieved independence and its young king, Norodom Sihanouk, came to assume a stance of neutrality. Dharmawara, above and beyond his contributions as a Buddhist writer and institution builder, was a colorful figure who captured the imagination of many religious and political actors—albeit representing seemingly different things to different people. His personal drama can serve as a lens for examining how social and cultural practices formed a dimension of geopolitics at a point of historical conjuncture and the ways by which, in practice, individuals maneuvered both cultural and political aspects of an evolving geopolitical constellation. It gives a perspective on the Cambodian monastic hierarchy at the time of independence and emerging institutions of international Buddhism.

In *The Other Cold War*, Kwon (2010) formulates a major rethinking of the theory of the Cold War, addressing in particular the limitations of conceiving of it as a unitary phenomenon and calling for a "multidimensional, multifocal" theoretical approach. Such an approach would recognize the underlying ambiguities in the very definition of "Cold War" and the range of realities it represented in practice, from region to region and at different social levels: "The history of the global cold war consists of a multitude of these locally specific historical realities and variant human experiences, and this view conflicts with the dominant image of the cold war as a single, encompassing geopolitical order" (Kwon 2010, 6–7). Part of this rethinking involves a shift in focus away from the state and its actors to the social and cultural realities growing out of the era. Kwon writes: "We need to develop an alternative mode of narration, one that incorporates but does not exclusively privilege the state's perspective and agency" (Kwon 2010, 19). His work is often in dialogue with postcolonial criticism and the theory of cultural globalization; like them, he is concerned with changing discursive regimes as they relate to agency from below and above. At the same time, he calls attention to the ways in which these theoretical schools have ignored the "bipolar order" that evolved out of the end of colonialism. Kwon, an anthropologist, is ultimately concerned with the most local grassroots meaning of the Cold War, such as in his work on politics surrounding the dead in Vietnam and Korea. While also influenced by anthropology, I do not go so far; the social world represented in this study is largely that of elites, broadly defined. But I likewise take a step away from the state-centered view of the Cold War, in the belief that this provides a new vantage point to historical events that would otherwise be invisible.

The post-independence period of Cambodian history has often been framed from the perspective of realism as a school in the field of international relations—the frame, as Kwon tells us, for much of Cold War analysis. Michael Leifer's 1967 study of Cambodia, in this mode, depicted the country as an actor coming into play with a community of nations, developing its position of neutrality in the framework of geopolitical realities.

The newly independent country, in his vision, struggled to secure itself in the face of the Cold War order and the presence of the larger countries, Thailand and Vietnam, on its borders. Thus, Sihanouk, who soon abdicated to play a more active political role, understood from the beginning the need to position the country as neutral; contact with India moved him in the direction of political philosophies promoted by Jawaharlal Nehru:

> Following a visit by Indian Prime Minister Nehru in November, 1954, Sihanouk began to see that, by following the example of Nehru's neutral way, he could avoid incurring the displeasure of Communist China. . . . Sihanouk seemed particularly receptive to the notion of a league of peaceful states committed to neither bloc. . . . In March, 1955, Sihanouk visited Prime Minster Nehru in New Delhi. A joint communiqué issued on this occasion expressed Sihanouk's appreciation of India's approach to world problems and India's willingness to assist Cambodia in whatever ways it could. (Leifer 1967, 61)

Sihanouk readily affiliated himself with the Non-Aligned Movement and attended the 1955 Bandung Conference.

This overarching account is consistent with the way many historians have written about the period and Cambodia's stance of neutrality following independence (Jose 1993, 38–44; Osborne 1994, 94–95; Gunn 2018, 417–419). Sihanouk's position of neutrality figures prominently in his statements at the time and later. He would write, after he was deposed in a 1970 coup, that he had rejected membership in the US-dominated Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, "because such an arrangement was contrary to the pledge of neutrality accepted by Cambodia at the 1954 Geneva Conference, and which I was to reaffirm at the Bandung Conference in April 1955" (Sihanouk 1973, 75). Cambodia's constitution was amended in 1957 to define neutrality as "Non-commitment to a military Alliance or ideological bloc" (Leifer 1967, 83).

At the same time, Cambodia's economy was small and agriculture based, and the country remained dependent on foreign aid as it developed infrastructure and made the gesture of moving toward modernization. Neutrality can mean, in practice, a range of things; and, as Cambodia watchers have often pointed out, Sihanouk's involved not withdrawing from the theater of the Cold War but playing off different powers against one another—a tightrope act that proved, ultimately, unsustainable. All this provides an essential frame for viewing the period—something, to return to Kwon's phrase, which must be incorporated in our narrative, even as our analysis gives a less privileged role to the state. Beyond this, we are concerned with the interpersonal and cultural dimensions of how Cambodia's independence, Sihanouk's stance of neutrality, and the response of Washington were negotiated.

Pre-India

While significant gaps and ambiguities underlie much of what we know about Dharmawara, a basic narrative emerges. Dharmawara (née Ouk Bellong) was born in the late nineteenth century (variously reported as 1889 or 1895) to a family with connections to the court and French authorities. He was in one of the first cohorts of the Cambodian school of colonial administration and completed exams to enter colonial service in 1918. Bellong held a variety of provincial administrative posts in the colonial bureaucracy from January 1919, from clerk to trainee judge to class four judge in Kampong Svay District, Kampong Thom. He then worked in administrative positions in different provinces, eventually achieving the post of *balat srok* (which at the time meant assistant district governor) in Banteay Meas, Kampot, in March 1925. A few months later, in July, he was made district chief in Prey Chor District, Kampong Cham, and served there a year and a half before being removed from office. He was married in 1921 and had recently had a child when the crisis developed that would cause him to leave Cambodia.

His work was suspended on December 23, 1926, when he was arrested for financial irregularities. He escaped the Kampong Cham provincial prison on February 13, 1927. When he was tried *in absentia* the following July, he was found guilty of having diverted public money in the sum of 9,344.36 piastres for his personal use as well as having asked for money from subordinate administrators in the sums of 46.80, 81, and 135.65 piastres.[1] He was sentenced to 16 years of hard labor. By the time the trial took place he may well have already ordained as a forest monk and gone to Laos or from there to Siam.

We know little about the period from his assuming the monkhood until 1948 except from the stories he told and what we can conclude from the history of the places where he lived. A third-person account he wrote when he was at least in his eighties describes the time he spent in both Siam and Burma, re-ordaining in each instance (Dharmawara n.d.). In Siam he spent time in meditation as a forest monk but also completed monastic exams to the third level, the basis for his title "Mahavihara." In Burma he studied a form of Vipassana meditation distinct from the types of meditation he had studied in Siam. Followers from the last decades of his life recall that he had considerable command of both the Thai and Burmese languages. (His status as a senior monk was never questioned in his later association with the Maha Bodhi Society or the World Fellowship of Buddhists, or in his frequent visits to Thailand and Burma.) A 1934 document in the

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1) National Archives of Cambodia RSC #27048, RSC # 19656. David Chandler mentions that the yearly salary for a French official could be as much as 12,000 piastres (Chandler 1996, 155), so a figure of 9,344.36 piastres would have been considerable in relation to Bellong's own yearly salary. According to Margaret Slocomb (2010, 116) the piastre in 1950 had an official value of 17 francs.

possession of his family may suggest that he was part of one of the groups of monks the eccentric Italian-American Buddhist monk Lokanatha organized in the early 1930s to go to India and help revive Buddhism there (Ito 2012; Deslippe 2013).

India

In a 1987 speech referring to his 1934 arrival in India, Dharmawara stated:

> Although my purpose in coming to India was to study English, Pali, Hindi, Sanskrit, and particularly the teachings of love and compassion for one and all without discrimination as preached by the Buddha, Ghandiji's [*sic*] non-violent methods created such an irresistible interest in my mind that I felt impelled to visit his Ashrams in Ahmedabad and Wardha. In Wardha I stayed with him for a few months. (Dharmawara 1987)

Part of the standard narrative surrounding Dharmawara is that while he was wandering around India, after struggling with his own health—and a time of extreme disability when he lost his memory and the ability to walk—he suddenly discovered he had a gift for healing. He consequently began to be sought out as a healer.

In his 1987 talk, he mentioned staying for several years in Lahore, in what is now Pakistan, with Deva Raj Sawhny, an Oxford-educated barrister-at-law who had been a justice in Jammu and Kashmir since 1928. In 1938 Sawhny introduced Dharmawara to a prominent couple, Brij Lal Nehru and his wife Rameshwari Nehru (née Raina). Rameshwari was a social activist closely involved with Mahatma Gandhi and his movement. Her husband was Jawaharlal Nehru's first cousin. A few years older than Jawaharlal, Brij Lal was studying at Oxford (like Sawhny) and was close to finishing his studies when Jawaharlal went to Harrow in 1905. He was still in England preparing for the colonial service exam when Jawaharlal entered Cambridge. On returning to India, Brij Lal assumed high-ranking positions in the colonial government. He was "a Sanskrit scholar, a Yogi, and a staunch believer in natural healing" (Dharmawara 1987). Dharmawara wrote:

> Pandit Brijlal Nehru was particularly interested in my natural healing works and I in his. Therefore there was no difficulty for us to come together and share with one another what we have learned to make life grow richer, healthier and wiser. They [Brij Lal and Rameshwari Nehru] became my greatest benefactors in no time. (Dharmawara 1987)

In his 1987 talk, Dharmawara recounted how Rameshwari worked directly with Gandhi and discussed her advocacy for the rights of women and members of lower castes.

Biographical writings about Rameshwari (Nehru 1950; Paliwal 1986; Mohan 2013) also discuss her activism on behalf of women and lower castes—as well as her work for refugees at the time of partition and, later in her life, involvement in world peace movements. She led protests as early as the 1930s and was briefly imprisoned twice in 1942 following demonstrations. These biographical sources make no mention of Dharmawara, but the accounts are consistent with his 1987 talk and the description of Rameshwari's role in the creation of the Ashoka Mission given by its current abbot. To a degree, the intellectual currents Rameshwari was engaged with—naturopathy, the rights of lower-caste populations, world peace—were those that Dharmawara pursued from a more Buddhist perspective.[2]

The narrative of Dharmawara's life as told by his followers often states that his connection to the Nehru family was a result of his success in healing Jawaharlal Nehru's "uncle." According to the story told to me by Dharmawara's successor at the Ashoka Mission, the person cured was Brij Lal Nehru himself.

The overall picture evoked is intriguing and suggests something of the social possibilities in the era—a wandering Buddhist monk taken into the household of an elite Hindu judge convinced of his healing capacities and living there for several years, then taken up by a prominent couple, likewise intellectual Hindu elites of some influence, indebted to him for healing and devoted to the possibilities of naturopathic health practices.

During this period, according to the 1987 talk, Dharmawara set up a health center in Gujranwala, 70 kilometers from Lahore:

> A friend in Gujranwala placed one of his buildings at my disposal. I used it as a health home where all kind of patients came to seek health and well-being, and because hundreds of them returned home cured. The number of patients increased many fold. (Dharmawara 1987)

Like Deva Raj Sawhny, Brij Lal was an official in Jammu and Kashmir—the accountant general. The Kashmir connections of these two men may relate to a plan, referred to in a couple of sources, to include Dharmawara in a naturopathic health center project in the hill stations of Kashmir in the post-independence period. This was to be headed by a Belarussian woman who assumed the name Indra Devi and would herself achieve renown (Goldberg 2015). Dharmawara was to teach meditation. Indra Devi would claim in the

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2) There is some further documentation of the couple's interest in naturopathy and yoga, such as a mention in a tribute by a daughter-in-law in one of the biographies of Rameshwari to the fact that Brij Lal "believed in nature cure and was totally against allopathic drugs," and that Rameshwari deferred to him on these issues (Paliwal 1986, 92). There is also a September 1945 letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to his sister expressing displeasure at Brij Lal's plans to go to the United States and give lectures on yoga asanas (Sahgal 2000, 493).

1950s that the project had been approved by Jawaharlal Nehru. The project came to nothing, perhaps due to developments in the wake of independence, including increasing unrest in Kashmir. Indra Devi went instead to the United States as a pioneer teacher of yoga.

As one of his followers tells the story, Dharmawara said, metaphorically, that he meditated under a tree in Kashmir, and at the time of partition the tree that gave him shelter was divided into two. We know, in any case, that his patrons were Hindu intellectuals and that, like many Hindus and Sikhs from all walks of life, he made the move to Delhi at some point during this chaotic time. Rameshwari and Brij Lal Nehru remained in Lahore and worked with refugees for as long as they could (Paliwal 1986, 40). It was only a few months after they came to Delhi that Rameshwari came up with a plan to help Dharmawara establish a center in Mehrauli, on the outskirts of the city. The land, not far from the archeological site of the Qutub Minar, juts off from the main road into what is now the compound of the archaeological site. According to the Ashoka Mission's current abbot, the site had been used to house Muslim refugees but was then left vacant when, following partition, the refugees moved to Pakistan. The land was thus under the administration of the rehabilitation ministry, and Rameshwari worked there without compensation as the head of women's issues after arriving in Delhi. No doubt Rameshwari and Brij Lal conceived of it as operating along the lines of the center Dharmawara had directed in Gujranwala.

Mehrauli was still considered remote from the city and the land not particularly valuable. It was deeded to Dharmawara for a nominal fee (*Kampuchea*, June 14, 1956). Called the Ashoka Mission or the Ashoka Vihara, by the 1950s the center was probably functioning much in the way it did during the rest of the period Dharmawara was in charge. The mission eked out a modest subsistence from rent paid by villagers working part of the land and from a YMCA youth hostel, established in 1952, some distance from the vihara proper. The Ashoka Mission was a naturopathic health center, and Dharmawara was sought after as a healer by Indians regardless of religious affiliation. A logo from the 1950s suggests that it was marketed as a yoga center: a dharma wheel floats above a lotus flower in a bucolic scene of a lake surrounded by mountains with a deer and tiger grazing peacefully on one side and the silhouette of a figure in a yoga pose on the other. At the same time, it was a Buddhist temple and a point of reference for Buddhists.

An important element of the standard narrative surrounding Dharmawara is his connection with Jawaharlal Nehru. We should be careful about drawing any conclusions. He was never such an important part of Nehru's circle that he would be, for instance, mentioned in a biography. Because of his strong connection to Brij Lal and Rameshwari Nehru, however, he had access to and familiarity with the Nehru family as a whole.

Dharmawara's connection to Nehru is rather different from his connection to Sihanouk (at this point still king of Cambodia), which is less often mentioned but better documented. The most convincing evidence of Dharmawara's connection to Nehru is that Sihanouk later seemed to use Dharmawara as a way of linking to Nehru. Among documents held by members of Dharmawara's family are brief notes from Indira Gandhi from the 1970s. For our purposes, the degree to which Dharmawara was connected to Nehru is not so important as the fact that he had links to the higher echelons of the Indian government and sufficient understanding of the currents of Indian political philosophy that he could be a sounding board for people like Sihanouk or Western diplomats in Cambodia. Dharmawara's granddaughter recalls being taken as a child to see Jawaharlal Nehru in the early 1960s and Nehru playfully knocking together the heads of her and her brother.[3]

The Cambodia of Sihanouk and Beyond

Prior to World War II, the Maha Bodhi Society, founded by Anagarika Dharmapala and based in Calcutta, was the most prominent organization purporting to represent international Buddhism. Following the war, there was a period in which relics of two disciples of the Buddha, Sariputta and Mogallana, repatriated after decades in a London museum, became a major focus of the Maha Bodhi Society. The society organized tours to bring the relics to different places in India and elsewhere before enshrining them in a stupa in Sanchi (Rewatha 2013). An article about the society published on the occasion of the 1956 Buddha Jayanti states: "The vast sub-continent welcomed the relics as if the dearest sons of the country had come back after long years of absence" (Valisinha 1956, 472). The tours were wildly successful. Capturing the imagination of the public more than anticipated, the relics attracted huge crowds, and ceremonies with speeches by dignitaries greeted them wherever they went—helping to raise the profile of the Maha Bodhi Society, which still marks the return of the relics to India as one of its major accomplishments. The relic tours inspired religious devotion but had a political dimension as well, in the degree to which they represented repossession of cultural traditions checked by colonialism.

The last foreign tour of the Sanchi relics was to Cambodia and took place on October 5–14, 1952. Dharmawara was among the groups of monks accompanying the relics, thus returning to Cambodia—still under French control—for the first time in 26 years. The

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3) Interview with Phobol Cheng, October 21, 2015.

plane was met at the airport by King Sihanouk, all his ministers of state, the patriarchs of the two Buddhist orders, and ten thousand monks; and the relics were transported in an elaborate procession to the Silver Pagoda on the grounds of the Royal Palace. They were paraded around the city the following day, and ceremonies were attended by representatives of neighboring countries. Similar to the response to the relics in other countries, crowds of people from all parts of Cambodia thronged to see them on display. Considerable donations were collected, to be used for two other emblematic projects: a hospital for monks (Marston 2007) and a major relic stupa to be built near the railroad station (Buddhasāsna Paṇḍity 1952; Marston 2016).

We have no way of knowing to what extent Dharmawara had maintained his connections in Cambodia. His former wife had remarried, and his daughter, whom he had last seen as an infant, was now an adult. A photograph from this period shows him at the airport with the Mahanikay patriarch, Chuon Nath. He quickly reactivated his connections to the circle of elites he would have known and associated with in his youth. He probably stayed on after the rest of the delegation left, since he later made reference to having attended the groundbreaking of the hospital for monks in February 1953.

Dharmawara soon connected with the young king, Norodom Sihanouk. This was a time of heady historical change, and the next five years—the period when Dharmawara seems to have been closest to Sihanouk—was also when Sihanouk undertook some of the tasks that would most define him historically: leading Cambodia to independence, affiliating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, and abdicating in order to take on a more active political role in his vision of a popular movement giving direction to the country.

Dharmawara allied himself with Sihanouk in the latter's drive for independence. The most obvious way to see Dharmawara's connection to Sihanouk is with respect to the young ruler's push for independence and the ways in which he turned toward India and the political philosophy of Nehru. The details of Sihanouk's maneuvering to bring about Cambodia's independence are well documented. He had already disbanded the National Assembly before the October relic tour, in effect dismantling the parliamentary system the French had tried to set up and moving toward taking the reins of power more into his own hands. If Dharmawara did not leave Cambodia until after February, he would have also been in Cambodia when Sihanouk declared martial law and vowed to lead a campaign for national independence. (According to Chandler [1991], Sihanouk was responding to fears of a coup that would leave him a constitutional monarch without power.)

But Dharmawara arrived in the company of the Sanchi relics, and it is also telling that there is evidence of Sihanouk's continuing interest in relics over the next few years: on a trip to India in 1955 and on the occasion of the Buddha Jayanti celebration in 1957—

occasions when Dharmawara was present. This, in an odd way, resonates with the death by leukemia of Sihanouk's beloved daughter Kantha Bopha on December 14, 1952, not long after the relic tour, at a time when Dharmawara would have been in the country. One of Sihanouk's biographers suggests that the crisis of his daughter's death may have had some bearing on Sihanouk's more intense involvement in politics (Osborne 1994). Sihanouk would carry with him a portion of his daughter's ashes when he traveled, even after he built a stupa on the grounds of the palace for the rest of the ashes in 1960—the stupa where his own ashes would be interred after his death.[4]

Taking up his campaign for independence, Sihanouk first went to Paris, where he was rebuffed by the French. Next he went to Washington, where he felt condescended to by American officials. But he became increasingly adept at publicizing his plea. In June, while based in Siem Reap, he issued a call for the formation of a militia to resist French control. How much impact this had on the French is not clear. Historians say it was because of developments in Vietnam as much as because of Sihanouk's campaign that France did an about-face and announced it would grant Cambodia's independence. This was formally initiated on November 9, 1953. Since control to Cambodia was turned over in stages, the date of full independence is often regarded as 1954.

During Sihanouk's self-styled "Royal Crusade," in the summer of 1953, Dharmawara was apparently asked to rally support in India for Cambodian independence. Among the documents Dharmawara kept is a July 22, 1953 letter from the US embassy addressed to the Free Cambodia Committee in New Delhi, suggesting he played a major role in it.[5] A formal September 1953 letter to Dharmawara from Sihanouk in Siem Reap, once the latter had already reached an informal agreement with the French, thanks him for his help, which enabled Sihanouk and the whole nation to meet their goals; there is specific reference to Nehru. Sihanouk expresses thanks to "*all* the Cambodians in India who are faithful and love me."[6] A handwritten letter from Sihanouk the following month has a

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4) Personal communication, Julio Jeldres, March 5, 2017. See also Lancaster (1972, 54): "Sihanouk is extremely superstitious and, on travels abroad, was always accompanied by the ashes of an infant daughter, Princess Kantha Bopha, who had died in 1952. These ashes were contained in a small jewel case, which was generally entrusted to an aide-de-camp, and were deposited—beflowered— by his beside on arriving at his destination. Although he pretended to make light of such things, he was attentive to the predictions of the palace horae, and to the predictions obtained through this channel of the spirit of a young princess, devoured by a crocodile more than a century ago, whose ashes are interred in a stupa at Sambor-on-the-Mekong (this stupa was restored and regilded on the instructions and at the expense of the Head of State)."

5) The US embassy letter acknowledges receipt of a letter from Dharmawara the previous day. Collection of Konthal Cheng.

6) Letter from Norodom Sihanouk to Dharmawara Mahathera, number 350, dated August 18, 1953. Collection of Konthal Cheng.

tone of greater familiarity. It is harder to understand out of context but states:

> In the future, if matters of this nature really come up again, please provide an explanation to the country of India in such a way that they understand the difficult, painful situation of our country. We desire independence very much, and we have taken appropriate measures peacefully in order to achieve independence.[7]

According to an ex-monk who knew him since the 1950s, Dharmawara had organized demonstrations in front of the French embassy in New Delhi demanding Cambodian independence. He drew on members of the Kamboj community—a population in India whose members believe they are of Cambodian descent. He would surely have done this only with the approval of Indian officials to whom he was connected, perhaps Nehru himself. As it happened, India was at that time negotiating for the French colonial city of Pondicherry to be incorporated into the Indian union.

Dharmawara probably had nothing to do with Nehru's visit to Cambodia in 1954, when Cambodian independence was still in its infancy. (The story is that Nehru, arranging a trip to Vietnam, contacted the Cambodian government to request overflight clearance on his way to Vietnam; Sihanouk told him he would give clearance only if Nehru visited Cambodia as well [Patnaik 2012].) But Sihanouk's sense of rapport with Nehru and the attraction he had for Nehru's political philosophy may have served to bring Dharmawara, perceived as connected to India, further into his inner circle.

By 1954 Dharmawara was assuming more and more the role of representative of Cambodian Buddhism in international Buddhist events. He published a short, cogent article about Cambodian Buddhism in the magazine *Buddhist World*. In it he praised Sihanouk and the patriarch Chuon Nath and made reference to the historical role of the French scholar/colonial official Suzanne Karpeles. In January, a Burmese publication devoted to Sixth Buddhist Council activities mentioned that he had been in Burma "recently"; since it referred to him returning "home" to Cambodia, he seems to have stopped in Burma on his way back to Cambodia (*Sangāyanā* 1954). He was then back in Rangoon in May as part of the Cambodian delegation to the opening ceremonies of the Sixth Buddhist Council, a landmark event in Theravada and international Buddhism, itself representative of the possibilities of global post-independence cultural communities. (Chuon Nath, as the most senior monk in the Cambodian delegation, made his opening remarks in French before yielding the floor to Dharmawara to say something in English.) Dharmawara's knowledge of English and Burmese may have made his inclusion in the delegation seem natural. Soon after returning to Cambodia from Burma, he left for Japan;

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7) Letter from Norodom Sihanouk to Dharmawara Mahathera, Siem Reap, dated September 18, 1953. Collection of Konthal Cheng.

a magazine photograph shows him together with the second-ranking Cambodian monk, Huot Tath, leaving on Thai Airways for Japan on June 21. He spent two and a half months there, brought relics to a number of temples, and attended the World Pacifist Conference. He accompanied Sihanouk on a trip to Burma again in November 1954 (*Kambujā* 1954, 1). It was also in 1954 that Burmese Prime Minister U Nu sponsored the building of a small ordination hall at the Ashoka Mission.

The year 1955 is when Dharmawara's connection to Sihanouk is most clearly documented, just as it is when Sihanouk's stance of neutrality came into clear focus. It was an important year for Sihanouk. In February he arranged for a referendum that could be used to show overwhelming support for him among the general population. Later that month he received a visit from US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to negotiate military aid (Clymer 2004, 43–45); he resisted the latter's calls to join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Then, on March 2, in a dramatic announcement on the radio, he declared his decision to abdicate and turn the throne over to his father, Norodom Suramarit. He felt that as a political leader, rather than the king, he would have more legitimacy in organizing and leading a popular one-party movement. He would set up a political movement that he personally headed, in effect a single national political party, to be called Sangkum Reastr Niyum, usually translated as People's Socialist Movement.

Only two weeks after abdicating, Sihanouk went to India for eight days. This trip was planned before he had made the decision to abdicate, but it underlines his increasing orientation to Nehru's political philosophy. Sihanouk wrote of the trip:

> The outcome of my eight-day visit to India had been an agreement to establish diplomatic relations between our two countries at legation level and, as set forth in a joint communiqué, to base our relations on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence which had been formulated less than a year earlier during Zhou Enlai's visit to New Delhi. Nehru and I got along well together, and he influenced me in opting for neutrality. (Sihanouk 2005)

This visit to India is often described as decisive, and Sihanouk would over the years quite consistently write in glowing terms about Nehru and his influence over him. Nehru would publicly praise Sihanouk's decision to abdicate as

> a rather unique and possibly unparalleled thing. I do not know if there is a similar example anywhere else. Many kings have disappeared as kings and people have chosen their leaders in a different way. I do not know any example of a king giving up his kingship and joining with the people and functioning as the national leader of the people. That is remarkable. (Jagel 2015)[8]

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8) "Prince Sihanouk and the Khmer People," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 21(10) (September 6, 1956), p. 312. Cited in Jagel (2015, 90).

However, there is also record of Nehru in private conversation expressing wariness of Sihanouk.[9]

While in India, Sihanouk met with members of the Kamboj community. Following official business, Nehru arranged for Sihanouk to visit several Buddhist sites, including Sanchi, where relics that had toured Cambodia were now enshrined—thus making Buddhism and Sihanouk's past connection to the relics an element of the diplomatic exchange. Dharmawara no doubt accompanied him. The *Times of India* wrote: "Incense was burned and sutras were recited by Buddhist priests from Cambodia as the Prince knelt down" (*Times of India*, March 20, 1954). The article mentioned that a donation was made by Sihanouk's young daughter Suriya, who accompanied Sihanouk as his daughter Kantha Bopha once had. It was at the end of this trip, on March 22, that Sihanouk visited the Maha Bodhi Society offices in Calcutta together with Dharmawara; Sangharakshita would recall Dharmawara being referred to there as Sihanouk's adviser. In his address, Sihanouk thanked the society for sending the relics to Cambodia. Sihanouk, with Dharmawara accompanying him, then went on to Burma before participating in the Asian-African Conference in Bandung.

Sihanouk's participation in the Bandung Conference further consolidated his stance of neutrality. In a book on the 1955 Asian-African Conference, "Dhamavara" is included in the list of delegates. Titles are provided for the other members of the delegation, while Dhamavara is listed merely as "Counsellor" (Indonesia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1955). There are references to Dharmawara's participation in Asia Foundation (TAF) memos from later that year and a passing mention in a book by Robert Lawrence Balzer (1963). It is probable that Sihanouk was in active dialogue with Dharmawara and brought him along for his language skills and as someone who could help him interpret what was going on. It is also possible that at this point he simply found Dharmawara a source of comfort or spiritual empowerment. After Bandung, Dharmawara accompanied the Cambodian diplomatic team setting up formal relations with India. At about the same time, Sihanouk named a boulevard in Phnom Penh after Nehru (Bhati and Murg 2018). Dharmawara was at this time clearly identified as an adviser to Sihanouk. What should be emphasized is that Dharmawara's role, while very much that of a Buddhist monk, also had clear political overtones.

By this time Dharmawara had come to the attention of US officials in Phnom Penh, and before long an invitation was extended to him by the US Information Agency to attend a conference on education in Washington, DC. While this was in some ways a logical

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9) Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, September 25, 1956, *FRUS 1955–1957*, 1: 741. Cited in Jagel (2015, 90).

extension of his activities with Sihanouk, it also represented a shift from the role he had assumed in the Cambodia-India nexus (and Cambodia's developing policy of neutrality) to a direct connection with one of the Cold War powers—and one with thinly veiled agendas. Again, we see public recognition of his role as a monk while at the same time having political undercurrents. This was not an Asia Foundation-sponsored trip, but because TAF was to host Dharmawara in San Francisco, we learn a good bit about the visit from the TAF archives.

A letter to the Asia Foundation president from the Asia Foundation representative in Cambodia says of Dharmawara:

> Domestic politics notwithstanding, the Venerable is incontestably Cambodia's most interesting monk. Fluent in English, French, Thai and several Indian languages, his 20 years outside of Cambodia have given him a perspective far wider than that possessed by any other monk and the majority of lay leaders. He has an almost unmonkly interest in social progress and economic growth and he is able to judge his country severely and constructively. (Asia Foundation)[10]

The Americans' interest in him was no doubt because of his connection to Sihanouk and what they perceived as his ability to influence Sihanouk's thinking on the politics of neutrality espoused by Nehru and the Asian-African Conference. His categorization as "the most interesting monk" is a reflection of his charisma as well as his ability to converse in an idiom of diplomacy. (Never mind that to all appearances he had nothing to do with education—the topic of the conference he was invited to attend.)

The trip was from November 1955 to February 1956, and, at his request, the Asia Foundation paid for him to spend some time in Japan on the return leg. An August 1955 State Department telegram, in preparation for his visit, stated: "His catholicity of interests admittedly involves difficulty. Although pisitical [*sic*] factor and political interests must not (repeat not) be forgotten, stress should be laid on US educational activities, particularly primary and secondary education."[11]

The only documentation I have found of his days in Washington, DC, is a confidential memorandum of his conversation on successive days with State Department officials Kenneth T. Young and Walter S. Robertson.[12] Despite some token references to education, these conversations were concerned primarily with political issues. Dharmawara showed his continuing animus against the French: "He did blame the French for much of the trouble in Cambodia at the present time and in the recent past." He made a point

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10) The Asia Foundation, Box P-174 3A5144, "Dharmawara Venerable Vira."
11) National Archives. Incoming telegram of the Department of State. Re Department WIROM 152 leader grant Dharmawara. 511-51H3/8-1555.
12) National Archives. "Memorandum of Conversation," November 21–22, 1955. 851H.43/11-2155.

of mentioning that English rather than French was the language of the Bandung Conference. He seemed at pains to stress that neither Cambodia nor India was likely to become Communist:

> [H]e is convinced that Cambodia will never go Communist for it is against all principles that the Cambodian people know and in which they believe. There has never been native-grown Communism in Cambodia. What has existed is grown in Vietnam or in other countries.

Robertson expressed to Dharmawara his dismay at "the indifference of Nehru to the threat of international Communism." In response, "The Venerable stated his belief that India would never go Communist, citing Nehru's fight against the Communists in India." Robertson seemed to be using Dharmawara to send a message to Sihanouk when he "expressed the opinion that Sihanouk, who had fought so long and earnestly for Cambodian Independence, would not see such Independence lightly given up."

To the general public in the United States, however, Dharmawara very much maintained the role of a Theravada monk—and it is the ambiguity of his role that most interests us, in keeping with our goal, from Kwon, to explore the underlying cultural links of the era. He gave talks on Buddhism in New York City and at Kent State and Stanford Universities, and he traveled to several other cities as well. He visited the Berkeley Buddhist Center, and a reception with 26 guests was held for him by TAF in San Francisco—mostly people connected with Buddhism or religious studies.

It was on this trip that the groundbreaking yoga teacher Indra Devi introduced Dharmawara to Balzer, a journalist and one of her students. While Balzer seemingly had little to do with the kinds of diplomacy we are concerned with, his writing is a major source about Dharmawara and helps us see the public persona emerging, a charismatic Buddhist figure crossing cultural borders, often representing the religion before non-Buddhists. He reminds us that the 1955 trip was not just about politics. Balzer's account also serves to document Dharmawara's presence at key post-independence state ritual events in Cambodia.

Balzer was at the Los Angeles train station to receive Indra Devi and Dharmawara when they arrived from San Francisco. Described as the first serious American wine critic, he was at ease in the social world of the Hollywood celebrities who bought his wines. He writes of how, upon meeting Dharmawara, he was overwhelmed by the sense of his spiritual presence. He was already planning a worldwide trip that would take him to Asia following travel in Europe, and Dharmawara suggested he change his plans and accompany him to Cambodia, where he could attend Suramarit's coronation. Balzer readily agreed. During Dharmawara's visit, Balzer took him to the set of *The King and I*. A photo shows Dharmawara together with Balzer, Indra Devi (in traditional Indian garb),

and Yul Brynner (in costume as the king of Siam). On the trip back, Balzer joined Dharmawara in Japan and flew with him to Cambodia. On a stopover in Bangkok, Dharmawara took Balzer to pay respects to the Thai patriarch at Wat Benchamabophit.

In Cambodia, Balzer's first week was spent attending the ordination festivities on March 2–8, a ceremonial representation of Sihanouk's new role. He then briefly took on Buddhist robes. A tone of exoticism comes to the fore in Balzer's genial travel book, *Beyond Conflict* (1963), which describes his time in Cambodia, mixing personal anecdotes, history, and an attempt to introduce basic Buddhist concepts to a popular audience. Through Dharmawara, Balzer had access to King Suramarit and, especially, Sihanouk, on this trip and on one the following year when he attended the Buddha Jayanti celebrations. He would be a consistent defender of Sihanouk's policies of neutrality.

Buddha Jayanti Celebrations

As I have discussed elsewhere (Marston 2016), the Buddha Jayanti celebrations held in different countries in 1956 and 1957 became key events in an emerging international Buddhism—which, with the recent independence of several Buddhist countries, coalesced in new types of organization and interconnection—itself part of a Cold War cultural dynamic. The Sixth Buddhist Council in Burma concluded in 1956. While the official 1956 Buddha Jayanti celebrations of India were held later in the year, there were celebrations at the Ashoka Mission in May on Wesak, the day it was celebrated in Sri Lanka and Burma, with the participation of monks from India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (*Kampuchea*, June 14, 1956).

On this occasion a booklet authored by Dharmawara, *Through Light to Peace (Path of the Arya Dhamma)* (1956), was issued. The publication of the booklet is interesting for a number of reasons, first of all because it is the only publication purporting to present Dharmawara's vision of Buddhism. It discusses the Buddha's historical importance and stresses the degree to which Buddhism is a religion of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Published a few months before the Indian social reformer Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's public conversion to Buddhism, the booklet reflects the intellectual climate in India of the time in seeing Buddhism as representing the "equality of man"; it situates Buddhism in opposition to the caste system. It also stresses the degree to which Buddhism was historically opposed to cruelty toward animals—consistent with Dharmawara's interest in vegetarianism. It closes with a call for peace and the suggestion that a Buddhist king like Ashoka can be a model in that direction:

> Will leaders of countries give ear to the message of this great Sage and follow the example of Asoka the Great by renouncing hatred and the sword and planting the tree of love and virtue in their place and thus make their countries peaceful heaven worth living in? If they do, I have no hesitation in saying that all round peace will prevail everywhere. (Dharmawara 1956, 12)

Buddhism is described as "a message that made an empire-thirsty monarch like Asoka renounce his ambition, hatred and the sword" (Dharmawara 1956, 12).

The booklet begins with two quotations by Jawaharlal Nehru, probably made in recent speeches welcoming the Jayanti celebrations—suggesting, as with Ashoka, a call for peace. One states:

> In this world of storm and strife, hatred and violence, the message of the Buddha shines like a radiant sun. Perhaps at no time was that message more needed than in the world of the atomic and hydrogen bomb. 2500 years have only added to the validity and truth of that message. So, on this memorable occasion while we pay homage to the Buddha, let us remember that immortal message and try to fashion our thoughts and actions in the light of that teaching so we may face with equanimity even the terrors of the atomic bomb age and help a little in promoting right thinking and right action. (Dharmawara 1956, 1)

As will be discussed later, some themes of the booklet would appear in an article on Buddhist socialism written by Sihanouk a decade later, perhaps an indication—if not necessarily that Sihanouk had read and been influenced by the booklet—that these themes were prominent in the discourse of international Buddhism of the era or even played a role in Sihanouk's dialogue with Dharmawara: the association of Buddhism with peace, the criticism of "selfish craving" in modern society, and the foundational role of the emperor Ashoka.

While oral traditions in Sri Lanka never lost sight of Ashoka's importance for Buddhism, scholarly work in India on the Ashokan inscriptions, begun in the eighteenth century, did not achieve any level of completeness. The first comprehensive analysis is found in B. M. Barua's *Aśoka and His Inscriptions*, published in 1945 (Guruge 1994, 201), three years before Dharmawara named his temple the Ashoka Mission. Ananda Guruge describes how Ashoka "burst into the limelight" (Guruge 1994, 203) in the late 1940s and 1950s, with statements by Nehru and writings about Ashoka in the context of the 1956 Buddha Jayanti, as well as some mythification of the Ashoka story.

From Balzer's account, we know Dharmawara was in Cambodia at the time of the 1957 Buddha Jayanti celebrations there; and, given his complex connections with Sihanouk, Cambodian independence, King Suramarit, and Buddhist relics, we can imagine him being very much part of the festivities. I have written elsewhere how the celebrations became a kind of ritual of charter for the newly independent country, with popular prophecies interpreted to show that Sihanouk was ushering in a new era (Marston 2016).

Once again, relics come into play. Sihanouk brought a relic of the Buddha from Sri Lanka to be installed with great fanfare in a newly constructed stupa in front of the Phnom Penh railway station—projected at the time as a sort of palladium of the new nation. As in other Theravada countries, stupas and the relics they contained, in a tradition seen as dating to Ashoka, were conceived as linked to the Buddhist *dhamma*, the body of the king, and the body of the kingdom.[13] The post-World War II era, as we have seen, saw much attention to relics, with relic tours and relic donations; and, although it has not been well studied, this shared some of the momentum of the growing interest in Ashoka, as we see in the case of Dharmawara.

In a September 1957 *Times of India* photo, Sihanouk, en route to Paris, appears with Dharmawara, seated with the French consul and a government of Bombay official. He would send Dharmawara a handwritten note from Paris in November describing his activities there.

There is already some evidence that by 1957 Cambodia had construed its stance of neutrality as being related to its Buddhist culture, such as a speech at the UN by Penn Nouth, head of the Cambodian delegation, who began talking about how the Buddha opposed ambition and violence; he went on to express the country's opposition to any sort of military pact (*Cambodge d'Aujourd'hui* 1958). With reference to Kwon's analysis of the literature giving a cultural turn to Cold War Studies (2010, 139–152), it is interesting to see how at this time Cambodia's neutrality was construed not solely in diplomatic or economic terms, but as a natural outcome of its culture.

Disengaging from Cambodia

It is not clear whether Dharmawara ever seriously considered abandoning his base in India when he spent considerable time in Cambodia, although he sometimes gave that impression. As resident in India at independence, he had rights of citizenship. However, according to the ex-monks Keo Pama and Sam Be (repeating Dharmawara's anecdotes), he was given a Cambodian passport after that country became independent. As these monks tell the story, Dharmawara was later confronted by Nehru over holding two passports. He chose to keep the Cambodian one, at a period when he was being invited to

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13) Ashley Thompson writes: "A similar structure can be found in Khmer Buddhist culture where the time-bound living King *embodies* the essentially atemporal *dharma*. Here the royal body is one in a series of substitute bodies, including the Buddha and the *stūpa*, each being an image of Mount Meru, which substitute for one another in substituting for the kingdom or the universe governed by the *dharma*" (Thompson 2004, 92).

represent the country at Buddhist councils and meetings of heads of state.

The delicateness of his position in India is underlined by a time in the 1950s when Dharmawara opened the Ashoka Mission to Tibetan refugee monks—the beginning of another important chapter in international Buddhism. During one of his absences from India he put an English-born Tibetan Buddhist, Freda Bedi, in charge. Bedi would later become the first Western woman to be ordained as a Tibetan nun. She was at the Ashoka Mission when the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama visited in December 1956.

Bedi was at the Ashoka Mission following the official Indian celebrations of the Buddha Jayanti. The English monk Sangharakshita was part of a group of Buddhist specialists invited by India to tour Buddhist sites; he stayed at the Ashoka Mission in Delhi. While there, he realized that Bedi was making moves toward taking control of the mission.[14] According to Sangharakshita, a "nephew" wired Dharmawara about this and he returned immediately to deal with the situation.

The challenges to Dharmawara's position in Cambodia were more profound. Even before he traveled to the United States, there were indications of tensions between him and the Buddhist hierarchy. The August 1955 Asia Foundation letter which praised him as Cambodia's most interesting monk also stated:

> Although he occupies no active position in internal Buddhist affairs, he remains closely identified with Sihanouk in the present political campaign. By doing so there are indications that his standing with other members of the hierarchy, which is predominantly inclined toward the Democratic Party, is not particularly high.

This may or may not be an accurate description of the political dynamics of the monkhood, although it hints that they were more complicated in this period than is usually recognized. What is clear is that by the following year the monastic leadership had managed to voice its indignation over the fact that Dharmawara, essentially outside of the Cambodian monastic tradition, had been invited to the United States. Why would he be invited to a White House Conference on Education instead of the second-ranking Buddhist monk, Huot Tath, who at the time of Dharmawara's trip was probably already positioned to head the Pali school following Lvi Em's death?[15] In the end, US officials decided it was neces-

14) Sangharakshita, personal communication, October 30, 2015. Sangharakshita also refers to this incident, in very general terms, in his *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel* (1996).

15) A September 9, 1955 US State Department memo (751H.00/9-655) states that the previous day Sihanouk, in a radio broadcast, denied rumors that he intended to remove Samdech Chuon Nath as the Mahanikay patriarch. This was two weeks after the United States began proposing that Dharmawara visit as a guest of the State Department. It is perhaps too much to assume that Dharmawara was rumored to be a replacement for Chuon Nath. It may have been relevant as an indication that the Mahanikay hierarchy was insecure in its relationship with Sihanouk at that time.

sary to invite Huot Tath the following year. A letter from the Cambodian head of TAF to the head of the foundation stated:

> For the benefit of the Home Office it should be pointed out that Dharmawara is considered an outcast by the traditional members of the Cambodian hierarchy and by Huot Tath in particular. For this reason it is not recommended that allusions be made about Dharmawara during Huot Tath's visit. It was to atone for the Dharmawara visit that the Embassy has awarded a similar grant to Huot Tath.[16]

Whereas the tone of the previous year's letter in support of Dharmawara was one of unrestrained enthusiasm, the letter regarding Huot Tath's trip was cautious in its wording while making a show of respect for a monk who, in fact, would be a key partner in TAF projects to fund Cambodian monks studying abroad.

The memo indicates some apprehension about hosting Huot Tath, who, "speaking no English and very little French," would be accompanied by an interpreter and, it was feared, might be particularly strict in his adherence to monastic codes of behavior:

> The Venerable, ranking among the first five of the Cambodian hierarchy and possibly the next head of the Mahanikay Order, lives extremely strictly and will probably present a number of problems in connection with diet and housing. Compared to Huot Tath, the Venerable Dharmawara is much more liberal.[17]

The memo becomes a touch nasty in a line that is crossed out but still legible: "His automobile in Cambodia is equipped with his private cuspidor but San Francisco can probably overlook this item."

The use of the word "outcast" to refer to Dharmawara indicates quite clearly that the monastic hierarchy was by this time aware of the circumstances under which he had left Cambodia in the 1920s, as Keo Pama's recollections also confirm. But there were issues of rivalry and personal style involved as well. Eng Sokhan, a secretary to Chuon Nath and Huot Tath in the late 1960s and early 1970s who later had contact with Dharmawara in India and the United States, was also aware that Chuon Nath did not approve of him—because he believed "a monk should be a monk."

A US State Department memo from this same period is more diplomatic but goes into even more detail in comparing Dharmawara with Huot Tath:

> The Venerable Huot Tath differs considerably in a number of ways from the last Cambodian priest

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16) The Asia Foundation Memorandum, Nov. 6, 1956, from Joel Scarborough to Mr. Pierson, Mr. James, Mr. Conger. Box P. 259 3A5319, Huot Tath, Venerable.

17) The Asia Foundation Memorandum, Nov. 6, 1956, from Joel Scarborough to Mr. Pierson, Mr. James, Mr. Conger. Box P. 259 3A5319, Huot Tath, Venerable.

sent to the United States, the Venerable Vira Dharmawara. Where the Venerable Dharmawara is of political but not hierarchical importance, Huot Tath exercises great influence throughout the whole Buddhist structure of Cambodia; where Dharmawara is outgoing, speaks English easily, and evidences self-confidence, Huot Tath is retiring, quiet, speaks no English (but some French), and is extremely modest; whereas Dharmawara is liberal in his ideas and beliefs, Huot Tath is extremely orthodox. Dharmawara is widely traveled and quite unabashed about discussing politics, whereas Huot Tath keeps his opinions very much to himself (although enough is known about them to indicate he does not share all of Dharmawara's views). For these and other reasons the feelings between these two Buddhist monks is perceptibly cool and the Embassy cautions those persons who will be assisting his program and who may have met his predecessor to be particularly careful not to brim with enthusiasm when speaking of the Venerable Dharmawara, whose hierarchical rank is, in fact, much lower than that of Huot Tath. On the whole, however, the Embassy believes that those persons assisting in his program will find the Venerable Huot Tath a man of as much charm and kindness as his predecessor.[18]

Despite this evidence of growing tension with the monastic hierarchy, Dharmawara maintained a presence in Cambodia for the next two years. We do not know how often he went, how long he stayed, or what he did while there. The TAF international president, Robert Blum, met with Dharmawara on a visit to Cambodia at the end of 1958, referring to him in a memorandum as a monk "with a rather shady past" who had previously traveled to the United States with American funding, and to Dharmawara's plans to go soon to Los Angeles, "probably on the invitation of Mr. Balzer."[19] There is much less documentation of the 1959 trip than of the 1955 one, but a short May 8 *Los Angeles Times* article described him arriving from Washington and being met by Balzer and two other persons. Balzer, the article wrote, was working with him on a book on Buddhist philosophy. Dharmawara had come to attend a conference "dedicated to the religions, arts, and culture of Asia" at the UCLA Lake Arrowhead center. The article mentions Dharmawara's connections with Sihanouk, Nehru, and the Dalai Lama, whom, it intriguingly states, he had met recently. This was only five weeks after the Dalai Lama had fled to India, and Dharmawara is quoted as saying that the Chinese had "lost a great deal of their prestige in Asia through their treatment of Tibet and the Dalai Lama"[20] (*Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1959, 2)—perhaps further evidence of Dharmawara taking more

18) Foreign Service Dispatch from American Embassy, Phnom Penh, to the Department of State, Washington, October 5, 1956. RG 59 File 511.51H3-10-2356 Box 2155.

19) "Memorandum for the Record: Visit to Cambodia, Dec. 1–4, 1958." Robert Blum papers, Box 2, Folder 24, Yale University, p. 4.

20) In stating that he had met the Dalai Lama "recently," Dharmawara was most likely referring to the Dalai Lama's visit to India in 1956–57. We do not know the date on which Dharmawara traveled to the United States and whether it is possible he could have met the Dalai Lama soon after the latter arrived in India. The Dalai Lama crossed the border into India on March 30 and had reached Tezpur in Assam by April 18. Nehru met the Dalai Lama in Mussoorie on April 24.

often an explicitly anti-Communist stance.

In my interview with Keo Pama, he said that the Cambodian monkhood finally (at about this time) came to assume a unified stance against Dharmawara when he called the Mahanikay patriarch Chuon Nath a Communist. It is difficult to know how to interpret this. (Keo Pama also said that Dharmawara was not, in the long run, particularly ideologically politically.) If Dharmawara made a statement like this, it was no doubt only one of a number of political and personal factors coming into play in his growing tension with the monastic hierarchy. Queen Kossamak asked Dharmawara, "as a compromise measure," to go back to India. Some of Dharmawara's family members have suggested that another factor in his fall from favor was his friendliness with two figures, Dap Chhuon and Sam Sary,[21] who were around this time involved in plots against Sihanouk supported by the Thai and South Vietnamese governments, and probably the CIA; this could also suggest his increasing anti-Communism. But the break with Sihanouk was not permanent. Our sources here are minimal, and there is an inherent ambiguity about this moment. Personal style, questions of turf, and assumptions about proper monastic behavior doubtless factored in, as well as the combination of political and religious factors that relate to our basic theme.

Dharmawara had developed a connection with two novice monks, Por Won and Keo Pama, who were on friendly terms with him and often hung out at his *koti* (monastic residence) in the Chraoy Chongvar wat near Phnom Penh. Dharmawara arranged for them to go before him to India to help him at the Ashoka Mission. The two monks flew to Calcutta, stayed overnight at the Bengali Buddhist temple, and took the train to New Delhi. There they were met by the Cambodian ambassador and taken to the Ashoka Mission on the first day of the decade, January 1, 1960.

Dharmawara returned to Cambodia a year later, and on that occasion he took his two oldest grandchildren to India to live with him and complete their primary and secondary education. At least some of his expenses were paid by Sihanouk's secretariat as he traveled between Sihanoukville, Kep, Bokor, and Phnom Penh. He would not return to Cambodia until the 1990s.

In the early 1960s Dharmawara was largely occupied with the routine of the Ashoka Mission. With some interesting exceptions, he largely disappeared from the public record until around 1972, although we know he remained in active contact with Cambodian monks studying in India. Several people important to him died in the course of the decade. Suramarit died shortly after Dharmawara left Cambodia, on April 3, 1960. A typewritten letter from Sihanouk dated August 16 acknowledges a gift Dharmawara sent

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21) Interview with Konthal Cheng, June 11, 2018.

at the time of the cremation. Brij Lal Nehru died in 1964, the same year as Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rameshwari Nehru in 1966.

Dharmawara maintained friendly relations with Sihanouk. In 1963 Sihanouk sent Dharmawara 1,000 rupees after the latter sent him a copy of an English-language article about him. There are also photos from that year of Sihanouk coming to the Ashoka Mission while on a state visit, recalled as well by Dharmawara's grandchildren. However, Sihanouk never had the same sense of connection with Indira Gandhi as he had with Nehru, and as relations between India and China deteriorated following the 1962 war, Sihanouk showed greater allegiance to China and his connections with Zhou Enlai, dating to Bandung.

Independent Cambodia remained very much an agriculture-based country, with rice and rubber its principal exports. Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum represented modernization, not in the form of multiparty democracy but in the form of mobilization of the population under his direction. The movement rarely challenged private ownership, but it initiated large modernizing state projects to build infrastructure such as roads, schools, hydroelectric plants, hospitals, and an Olympic stadium, some with foreign funding (Slocomb 2010, 124). Culturally, it was a fertile time, and the book *Cultures of Independence* (Ly and Muan 2001) details how the country took new directions culturally in architecture, theater, cinema, and modern music and painting. Cambodia's identity as a modern, newly independent country was also exemplified in the way Sihanouk very publicly claimed its position as a nation among nations.

Sihanouk's 1965 essay article, "Notre Socialisme Buddhique," defining a political philosophy of Buddhist socialism, was published several years after Dharmawara had stopped coming to Cambodia, although many of its principles may have implicitly informed policy since the establishment of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum a decade earlier.[22] Robert Garry (1965, 5–7, 9, cited in Sam 1978) quotes Sihanouk making reference to Buddhist socialism in earlier speeches. In a 1958 commencement speech he said that socialism suited the country because it fitted the Cambodian mentality and the Buddhist ideas of charity and humanity, with tolerance, fraternity, and the pursuit of happiness. In a 1961 speech at the meetings of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Phnom Penh, he stated, "I feel this Buddhist socialism which inspires our natural effort is a straight and true path" (Garry 1965, 5–7, 9, cited in Sam 1978).

Like U Nu, who had earlier tried to formulate a conception of Burmese socialism appropriate to a Buddhist society, and like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who wrote about

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22) My ideas about Sihanouk's Buddhist socialism were further shaped, as I revised this paper, in a reading group on Buddhist socialism organized by Anne Hansen and, in particular, an August 2020 presentation by Linda Chhat and Catriona Miller.

Dhammic socialism in the 1970s, Sihanouk used the concept of Buddhist socialism to define a path that was neither capitalism nor Communism; to that extent it related to his philosophy of neutrality. The 1965 essay article, published a few months after Sihanouk had broken diplomatic relations with the United States, is particularly critical of US imperialism. Sihanouk states accurately that his conception of Buddhist socialism is different from that of U Nu. U Nu, in a country no longer a monarchy, was concerned with creating a sense of community based on Buddhist morality. Sihanouk, in contrast, conceived of Buddhist socialism as based on the compassionate generosity of the monarchy and other elites.

The connections between Sihanouk's 1965 essay article and Dharmawara's 1956 booklet *Through Light to Peace* are suggestive, and I would cautiously argue that they imply, at the least, the degree to which both men drew on ideas in currency, and possibly point to the influence of Dharmawara's ideas about Buddhism from the period when the two men were in regular contact. More than any other source, Sihanouk's 1965 essay article was composed with reference to a 1936 book on Buddhism by the French Buddhist Alexandra David-Néel, known primarily as a specialist in Tibetan Buddhism—to the extent that the article could be said to be developing Sihanouk's concept of Buddhist socialism in relation to David-Néel's writing. One should note, first of all, that in contrast, for example, with U Nu, whose vision of Buddhism in society seemed to have grown profoundly out of the Burmese tradition, Sihanouk gave no evidence of drawing on the Cambodian Theravada tradition represented, say, by monks such as Chuon Nath or Huot That. The Buddhism he invoked was an international Buddhism, more similar, perhaps, to that he would have had contact with through Dharmawara.

The most striking commonality between Sihanouk's essay article and Dharmawara's booklet may be the emphasis both place on the third-century BC Buddhist emperor Ashoka. Sihanouk cites Ashoka's inscriptions to make several points. Dharmawara, whose temple was named the Ashoka Mission, writes in the booklet, as quoted above, that countries should follow the example of Ashoka and renounce hatred and the sword, thus making their countries a "peaceful heaven worth living in." In 1965, would any Cambodian royal already be aware of the importance of Ashoka as a prototype of Buddhist kingship? The similarities here are in any case striking enough that one can easily imagine Sihanouk and Dharmawara discussing the foundational role of Ashoka at the time Cambodia achieved independence—the Ashoka who, turning from conquest and, though tolerant toward all religions, promoted Buddhism in edicts and social welfare at the same time that he collected and redistributed relics of the Buddha in multiple stupas. At the time of rethinking Cambodian polity, in the search for an alternative to Cold War polarities, the idea of Ashokan monarchy takes on salience.

With personal anecdotes of how he responded to visitors to Cambodia, Sihanouk quotes David-Néel to the effect that Buddhism is not an indolent religion but rather "a school of stoic energy training warriors to attack suffering" (Sihanouk 1965, 8). Similarly, Dharmawara writes that Buddhism "is not a religion of the weaklings" but rather a religion "for brave men and women who fear nothing in the world" (Dharmawara 1956, 9). When Dharmawara writes, "Is not this selfish craving, this greed for wealth, power and domination the root cause of all troubles and unrest in the world today" (Dharmawara 1956, 6), it is not so different from the critique of capitalism one would find in speeches of U Nu or the writings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu on Dhammic socialism. Sihanouk's criticism of the United States, while worded slightly differently, is in the same spirit:

> Le Président des USA pratique justement la 'mauvaise doctrine' de la passion, de l'orgueil, du désir et de la violence, qui caractérise se que nous apppelons l'Impérialisme Américain. Selon la loi du Karma, cet impérialisme mourra de ses propres erreurs et crimes. (Sihanouk 1965, 13)

> The president of the United States just practices the evil doctrine of passion, pride, desire, and violence, which characterizes what we call American imperialism. According to the law of Karma, this imperialism will die of its own errors and crimes.

While Sihanouk gives less emphasis than Dharmawara to Buddhism as a path toward peace, there is at least one section where he quotes the Tevijja Sutta and suggests that it is relevant to the goals of the United Nations: "Le disciple vit en concilateur de ceux qui sont divisés, unissant plus étroitement ceux que sont amis, établbissant la paix, préparant la paix, prononçant toujours des paroles de paix [The disciple lives as a conciliator of those who are divided, uniting those who are friends more closely, establishing peace, preparing peace, always speaking words of peace]" (Sihanouk 1965, 16).

While the era in which Dharmawara had significant contact with political figures had come to an end, by the late 1960s he began to attract interest and a following among backpackers and other visitors to India. He would come to have some prominence again in the 1970s, when he was discovered by J. G. Bennett, a British follower of the Caucasian mystic and teacher George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866–1949), who had set up a school in the Gurdjieff tradition in Gloucester. Once Dharmawara began traveling internationally again, a new set of followers and international connections developed. Many of his most important connections were with Western followers, but he also played a role in the development of Cambodian Buddhism in the United States.

Conclusion

All of the above can be seen as part of the cultural and social maneuvering taking place at a moment of historical conjuncture—what Kwon would call the transition from a colonial to a bipolar order. My intention is not to show politics lurking beneath the surface of cultural matters, but to show the two as often inextricably linked. Dharmawara's story, at the interstices of this process, helps shed light on the historical conjuncture.

It is not difficult to compile a list of twentieth-century Buddhist figures whose impact was significantly shaped by their having crossed borders: Westerners such as Ananda Metteya, Lokanatha, Suzanne Karpeles, Frida Bedi, and Sangharakshita; and Asian figures such as Anagarika Dharmapala, Nichitatsu Fujii, S. N. Goenka, and the Dalai Lama. Dharmawara Mahathera (who knew at least some of these other figures) was in some ways a more minor figure, but he illustrates how transnational Buddhists could figure in emerging cultural and political narratives. Although we should not reduce his charisma to the fact that in various situations he could represent a link to an "other" of significance to his interlocutor, this was doubtless part of what was going on—assuming more far-reaching implications in times of change. A Rosencrantz and Guildenstern character, not Prince Hamlet, he nevertheless helps throw into relief the arc of the drama as a whole.

Thus, he helps us see that Chuon Nath and Huot Tath, so often depicted as timeless icons of Cambodian Buddhism, were to a degree still vulnerable in the 1950s, and defensive in maneuvering toward their position of prominence in the Sihanouk era. More at the heart of this article, Dharmawara helps us see the degree to which Sihanouk's neutrality, while surely motivated by Cold War geopolitical rationality, was also being negotiated with cultural and interpersonal reference; Sihanouk sought not only a political and economic but also a cultural basis for sovereignty.

The constellation of Dharmawara's connections reminds us of some of the odd juxtapositions of what occurred simultaneously in the period: how the heyday of Chuon Nath and Huot Tath was the same period in which Ambedkar converted to Buddhism and the Dalai Lama fled to India, how Buddha Jayanti celebrations occurred in the same epoch as the Bandung Conference—and the question of the degree to which there was an underlying logic to the ways post-independence national identities were crystallizing. Dharmawara's 1956 booklet and Sihanouk's 1965 essay article on Buddhist socialism were both products of this epoch, and both, perhaps, illustrate how societies were groping toward a new relationship between religion and the state. Monastic bureaucracies, like those of Cambodia, were in fact changing in relation to independence and bureaucratic modernity. This study shows that the relationship between religion and the state is also illustrated through the ways in which individual actors, like Dharmawara, would in prac-

tice negotiate their way through things like relic tours, invitations to conferences on education, and millennial Buddhist celebrations, which had their own relation to political realities. This gives us a glimpse of what the Cold War could mean on the ground.

Acknowledgments

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Two Dark Stories from Rural Indonesia:
Comparing the Poverty in *Turah* (2016) and *Siti* (2014)

Muhammad Taufiqurrohman* and Aidatul Chusna**

This paper examines the unsettling stories of poverty from rural Indonesia in two films, *Siti* (2014) and *Turah* (2016). The concept of structural poverty enables a thorough analysis of these films' depictions of poverty and the main characters' reactions to the poverty they experience. This paper also employs the concept of gendered poverty to highlight how gender injustice perpetuates the poverty of women, as depicted in the films. Both structural and gendered poverty are propagated by the interpellation of ideological state apparatuses. This paper argues that the poverty of the rural people depicted in both films results from structural engineering by the elite, not from natural or inevitable conditions. This poverty is further intensified by the patriarchal culture of rural communities, which perpetuates gender inequality and results in deeper poverty for women. Every woman in these two films seems to have accepted, or at least resigned herself to, the patriarchal system and the gendered poverty it produces. The sole exception is Siti, who struggles against the double burden of being both housewife and breadwinner, resisting the naturalization of poverty and thereby revealing the role that ideological state apparatuses play in perpetuating oppression in society writ large as well as in individuals' minds and souls.

Keywords: gendered poverty, Indonesian film, ISA, rural people, structural poverty

Introduction

Since the New Order's political exit, Indonesia has faced many rapid transformations, including in the world of national cinema. Filmmakers today have more freedom to voice their aspirations and articulate social criticism. Many issues considered taboo under the

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New Order, such as lesbianism, poverty, and religious and social injustices, can now be explored in film. The medium has also yielded controversial biopics and polemical histories. This expansion of content has occurred alongside a diversification of genres, styles, and formats. In addition to films produced by the traditional industry, there are now many independent films that seriously challenge the film industry's accepted conventions. Katinka van Heeren (2012, 52) states that post-Suharto Indonesian cinema has gained visibility in the larger public sphere, with discourses on representation and Indonesia's public imaginations transformed by the birth of alternative genres, channels of distribution, and contexts of exhibition. Heeren further writes that the themes of domination and resistance have emerged in post-Suharto cinema. This transformation is consistent with broader trends identified by Third Cinema theories, which address global distributions of power and the political and economic domination of Third World countries by neocolonial interests. In the current discourse on redistribution of power, poverty has become a global issue and is starting to be taken seriously.

Throughout the Third World, and in post-New Order Indonesia specifically, poverty remains a serious problem. From Habibie to today's Jokowi, Indonesian administrations have routinely attempted to eradicate poverty. Likewise, this problem has become a central concern of many major civil society movements spearheaded by intellectuals, activists, NGOs, and journalists. Social disparities in Indonesia are still deep and wide. Statistics Indonesia (2020) indicates that the poverty rate decreased from 23.43 percent (47.97 million) in 1999 to 9.22 percent (24.79 million) in 2019. However, disparities between urban and rural poverty remain high. Until September 2019 the urban poverty rate was approximately 6.56 percent, while among the rural poor poverty was 12.6 percent. Meanwhile, the disparity between the rich and the poor also remains high, with the Gini ratio reaching 0.38 by the end of 2019.

The figures above do not reflect positively on government policies. Many government policies and laws tend to favor markets and industries over the poor, prioritizing profits for entrepreneurs and investors. Investors have dominated the majority of state apparatuses since the end of the New Order, with many senior positions in the major political parties occupied by business elites. The same trend recurs among ministers and senators. Defbry Margiansyah, a researcher from the Indonesian Institute of Science, reports that businessmen-senators make up 55 percent of the senate. This strengthens the concentration of oligarchic power in policy making, which in turn makes substantial democratic reforms increasingly difficult to achieve. Indonesia's supposedly representational bodies tend to cater to the economic interests of business while ignoring social justice, environmental sustainability, and public participation (Athika 2020).

Increasing public awareness of structural poverty has not had much discernible

impact on post-New Order films. From 1998, only a few Indonesian films addressed the issue of poverty and the lives of the poor, either as the main theme or as backdrop. Indonesian films are still dominated by stories from the middle and elite classes and usually situated in urban settings. Notable exceptions include *Bunga (Jangan Ada Dusta)* (No lies) (2000), *Joshua oh Joshua* (2000), *Marsinah* (Cry justice) (2000), *Pasir Berbisik* (Whispering sand) (2001), *Rindu Kami Padamu* (Of love and eggs) (2004), *Impian Kemarau* (The rainmaker) (2004), *Laskar Pelangi* (Rainbow troops) (2008), and *Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi* (No singing in the bathroom) (2019), though even their depictions of poverty are mostly concentrated in urban settings. The voices of the rural poor remain profoundly underrepresented in Indonesian films.

One factor contributing to this dynamic is that most film production centers are located in Jakarta and other big cities. The emergence of independent, or indie, film productions throughout urban and rural regions has begun to shift the overall thematic content of Indonesian films (Heeren 2012, 56). Local issues in rural communities, including poverty, have begun to gain ground. Initially, local filmmakers addressed these themes primarily in short films. More recently, they have begun to depict rural poverty in feature films. Both short films and feature films are distributed through film festivals and roadshows, making them more accessible to rural communities without movie theaters. One production house that has consistently raised the issue of rural poverty in feature films is Fourcolours Films, based in Yogyakarta. Its two most successful films, *Siti* (2014) and *Turah* (2016), both deal explicitly with rural poverty.[1]

Siti is directed by Eddie Cahyono, an alumnus of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia) in Yogyakarta. A theater activist turned indie filmmaker, he founded Fourcolours along with Ifa Isfansyah and two other friends. Though preceded by several short films, *Siti* was his feature film debut. It won many awards, including Best Film in the 2015 Indonesian Film Festival; it even garnered some attention at international festivals. This film tells the story of Siti (Sekar Sari), a 24-year-old mother forced to become the breadwinner for her family after her husband, a former fisherman named Bagus (Ibnu Widodo), suffers an accident and becomes paralyzed. The rented ship that Bagus used, no longer an asset, becomes a liability, representing a mountain of debt that

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1) This reflects not only the quality of these individual films but also the shifting landscape of Indonesian cinema. The diversification of content, genres, and formats and the emergence of online artistic communities have helped raise the global profile of Indonesian films and created more professional opportunities for filmmakers. In recent years, Indonesian filmmakers have won acclaim at several reputable international film festivals, including the Toronto Asian Reel Film Festival, Singapore International Film Festival, Shanghai Film Festival, Five Flavours Poland Film Festival, and even Cannes Film Festival. The latest and greatest achievement was the 2016 Best Short Movie award, which went to *Prenjak* (dir. Wregas Bhanutedja) (Agnes 2016).

Siti must repay. Since her husband can no longer work, Siti struggles to make a living for them, her young son, and her elderly in-laws. She sells *peyek jingking* (a fried seafood snack) on Parangtritis Beach during the day, and at night she works as a "lady companion" (escort) at an illegal nightclub.

Wicaksono Wisnu Legowo, the director of *Turah*, graduated from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts and worked as a crewmember at Fourcolours before striking out on his own. Like *Siti*, *Turah* was its director's first feature-length film; and like *Siti*, it won acclaim at several international film festivals. It was also selected to represent Indonesian film in the 2017 Oscars, or Academy Awards. *Turah* is set in Tirang village, where most people are very poor and lack access to clean water and electricity. Jadag (Slamet Ambari), one of the villagers, is known for his drinking. However, he begins to develop a political conscience after witnessing injustice in his village. He dares to fight Darso (Yon Daryono), the landlord who claims Kampung Tirang—which is actually a state-owned mound—as his family's property. Darso uses Turah (Ubaidillah) and other villagers as slaves, paying little to nothing in wages. One of the slaves, a scholar named Pakel (Rudi Iteng), has recently become Darso's accomplice, acquiring land and property in just three years, while his fellow slaves remain in a cycle of poverty. Pakel's betrayal has drained the community's energy, and only Jadag still retains the spirit to resist Pakel and Darso's oppression.

Previous studies of these two films have not addressed the issue of rural poverty. Published analyses of *Siti* deal with the film's distribution (Arinta 2017), treatment of gender inequality (Deuis 2018), and women's more general representation in the film (Ganjar 2019). Previous research on *Turah*, meanwhile, has focused on its portrayal of Generation X (Muhammad Yunus Patawari 2018). The issue of poverty, though represented in both films, has not received the attention it deserves. This article therefore centers the representation of rural poverty in these films, exploring the distinct angles from which the films depict the issue and how the films are informed by local realities in two different post-New Order Indonesian villages. This article seeks to extend the discussion of rural poverty under the New Order initiated by Krishna Sen. In her classic work, Sen (2009, 238) highlights the absence of the middle class in the New Order's national films. The New Order's developmentalist films focused mainly on the urban elite, with the rural poor completely absent from the screen. This tendency persists in contemporary Indonesian films, which tend to either ignore poverty altogether or to present it as a personal problem to be overcome by individuals' hard work, for example, attending university and earning a master's degree (Ekky 2019).

With the above issues in mind, this paper seeks to investigate social class, especially as it manifests in the lives of the rural poor—the lowest class in society—and analyze

how it is depicted in *Siti* and *Turah*, two contemporary independent Indonesian films.

Theoretical Framework

Analysis of Social Class in Indonesian Film
The discussion of social class in Indonesian film must be placed in the context of the development of social class analysis in social studies and the humanities in Indonesia. Class analysis in general has been lost among the social sciences in Indonesia, mainly due to the New Order's policies, which explicitly restricted the use of class as an analytical lens (Hilmar 2006, 211–212). The result was the emergence and eventual hegemony of neoliberal-style social science under the New Order, which not only legitimized government policies but also became an integral part of those policies.

After the fall of the New Order, more opportunities to develop class analysis emerged, especially regarding poverty and the lives of the poor. Poverty is still a major issue in the context of "low-intensity democracy" (Amin 2004).[2] Although it looks different on the surface, from a political economy perspective the material problems faced by the authoritarian New Order regime and by today's democratic administrations are both rooted in the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. The only distinction is the nature of the prevailing political regime, which in the 1980s displayed a militaristic, authoritarian character and today has a civilian, democratic character. In response to the decadence of democracy, the study of class analysis—which investigates the dynamics of relations between the lower, middle, and elite classes—must be revived in order to supplant superficial discussions of identity and lifestyle with more substantive issues.

In the field of Indonesian film studies, Sen (2009, 219–220) initiated an analysis of social class as portrayed in Indonesian films produced during the New Order era. She analyzed the lives of the poor, the middle class, and especially the elite class as depicted in New Order films. She also discussed the dynamics of rural and urban life in these films, pointing out that they reflected the New Order's developmentalist ideology, which centered on urban progress and modernity while marginalizing important issues in rural areas, especially in regard to poverty.

Sen further argued that the poverty depicted in the first wave of Indonesian "poverty"

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2) When democracy has been hijacked by the market, it loses its *élan vital*. As a result, social criticism of the dominant ideology (the market) becomes fragmented and weakened. In Samir Amin's words, "you are free to vote as you choose: white, blue, green, pink, or red. In any case, it will have no effect; your fate is decided elsewhere, outside the precincts of Parliament, in the market" (Amin 2004, 46).

films was naturalized as a matter of fortune, discouraging viewers from interrogating its structural origins. If one embraced poverty, these films suggested, one would find happiness and one's life would be full of good fortune. Often, good fortune came in the form of generosity from members of the elite and middle classes. In effect, these films were propaganda tools, at once showcasing the largesse of the ruling classes and framing poverty as the product of God's will, not the result of a particular political economy, much less policies engineered to distribute the national wealth. For Sen, these films embodied the developmentalist ideology of the New Order.

Sen also pointed out that under the New Order, Indonesian films tended to highlight success stories among the urban elites and middle classes rather than the happy lives of rural people. Unlike urban life, which was portrayed as rational and modern, rural life was associated with anarchy and mysticism. Only one film from that era portrays rural people in a positive light: *Rembulan dan Matahari* (Moon and sun) (1980), directed by Slamet Rahardjo. This film centers rural people as protagonists and shows them successfully managing their communities and lives without the intervention of the urban upper classes. Members of the urban middle class are allowed to live and earn money in the village as equal members of society but not as superiors.

It can be concluded that there is a contestation of discourse on the origin of poverty and its relation to the dynamics of rural-urban life. The dominant narrative insists that poverty is destiny and must be accepted, not a result of policies or structural inequalities. To sustain this dominant discourse, poverty is often associated with the irrationality and mysticism of rural life, while rationality and modernity are ascribed exclusively to urban settings. This results in the systemic marginalization of rural issues, especially rural poverty. Even though post-New Order social studies have emerged, class analysis has not yet received much attention in contemporary Indonesian film studies. This study begins to fill that gap.

Structural Poverty

This paper assumes that poverty is a structural problem, not a natural one, that results from an imbalance in the distribution of wealth or national resources by the state. The unequal distribution of wealth produces extremes of wealth and poverty. The phenomenon of material inequality is referred to as social injustice and persists in Indonesia. As stated earlier, according to Statistics Indonesia (2020), the disparity between the rich and the poor remains high, with the Gini ratio reaching 0.38 by the end of 2019. This means that the fifth precept of Pancasila—social justice for all Indonesian people—has not been fully realized. Democracy apparently cannot guarantee an equitable distribution of wealth. Democracy opens the field of political contestation to anyone interested in competing,

but this includes the oligarchy and large corporations, which wield disproportionate power and use it to protect their own wealth and resources. Jeffrey Winters (2011, 11–18) identifies five kinds of power resources: political rights, official positions, coercive power, mobilizational power, and material power. The oligarchy has a stranglehold on all of these and has thus effectively hijacked electoral democracy and converted it to "low-intensity democracy," "criminal democracy" (Winters 2011), or "dysfunctional democracy (Fukuoka and Djani 2016).

This "criminal" or "dysfunctional" democracy is nurtured by a global context defined by the dominance of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism positions the nation-state as a field of contestation to realize free market agendas. Thus, the state apparatus must be controlled by free market agencies so that market interests continue to operate. Under neoliberalism, market agendas often contradict the agendas set by the state constitution. This has happened in Indonesia and throughout much of the Third World. Commercialization and privatization of public goods have occurred in almost every sector. Natural resources that should be available to the public have become private commercial commodities. In practice, neoliberalism benefits only conglomerates that have succeeded in employing political power to continuously increase their wealth. This has burdened Indonesia with one of the highest levels of economic inequality in the world, behind Russia, India, and Thailand. A survey conducted by Credit Suisse shows that 1 percent of the population of Indonesia controls 49.3 percent of the national wealth (Withnall 2016). As a result, the ranks of the poor and "precariously" lower middle class continue to grow.

Gendered Poverty

The problem of poverty cannot be separated from the problem of gender injustice. Patriarchy marginalizes women not only socially but also economically. Women constitute 70 percent of the world's poor, and research suggests that this percentage will continue to rise (Chant 2010). Efforts to eradicate poverty therefore cannot be separated from efforts to address the problem of gender injustice. Further studies on poverty and gender will be integral to any movement aimed at achieving a fair and equal redistribution of global wealth for both men and women.

One of the important books on gender and poverty is *The International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy* (Chant 2010). It contains 104 articles discussing issues of gender and poverty in countries around the world, from the Global North to the Global South. Although the volume does not include Indonesia, some theoretical reflections, especially from the countries of the Global South, can help establish a foundation for analyzing gendered poverty in Indonesia. The most relevant articles are those that discuss gendered poverty in the context of dysfunctional democracy, neo-

liberalism, and oligarchy. These studies reveal that gender issues are not only about women and that poverty issues are not only about income.

One of the articles discusses gendered poverty, feminization of poverty, and labor justice for women in the context of neoliberal developmentalism in the Global South (Lind 2010). In this, Amy Lind argues that there are at least three main areas of concern to research on gender and neoliberalism:

> first, the effects of neoliberal reforms on women's work and daily lives, including their volunteer labor; second, the "engendering" of macroeconomic development models; and third, the political and material consequences of women's participation in processes of neoliberal development. The large bulk of the literature focuses on linking macrolevel analyses of global economic restructuring with the microlevel and mesolevel effects on households and communities or nations, respectively. (Lind 2010, 649)

Many studies on poverty and gender have highlighted the failure of "empowerment" programs promoted by advocates of neoliberal developmentalism. Instead of reducing women's burden, these programs actually tend to increase women's workload so that they fail to lift themselves out of poverty. In practice, "empowerment" programs only perpetuate heteronormativity and compound women's domestic workloads with mandates to perform additional industrial labor.

In the Indonesian context, Angelina Ika Rahutami and Shandy J. Matitaputty (2017) point out that women suffer a systemic lack of access to work, education, and health care. Poor women in particular tend to bear much heavier burdens. In poor families, girls are usually considered the lowest priority for educational opportunities. Women often are not allowed to work outside their homes. Even those who are allowed to do so tend to remain confined to low-paying domestic labor in other families' homes. As a result, poor women are less likely to escape vicious cycles of poverty. This is known as the feminization of poverty. Even though poverty alleviation policies are often hampered by persistent patriarchal structures, gendered poverty has, to date, received little serious attention from the architects of these programs. Policy makers must increase their collaboration across specializations and coordinate poverty alleviation efforts with those aimed at tackling gendered injustices. Only with an active orientation toward gender justice can the fight against poverty and social inequality be effectively waged.

The Interpellation of Ideological State Apparatuses

The persistence of structural and gendered poverty reveals a fundamental irony of democracy. In the name of equality and justice, Indonesia's oligarchic hegemony has been perpetuating injustice for two decades since the Reformation. Even with the open flow of information, people remain powerless to address the structural inequalities occur-

ring before their eyes. According to Louis Althusser (1971, 174–175), "interpellation" is the process by which ideologies become embodied by ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and repressive state apparatuses (RSAs). ISAs and RSAs, in turn, produce individual subjects' identities through the relational process of "hailing" them in social interactions. Althusser identifies the following RSAs: the government, administration, army, police, courts, and prisons. These institutions use violence, enacted or merely threatened, to shape the behavior of the citizenry. For instance, Indonesians have been systematically discouraged from expressing criticism of ruling institutions in the public sphere, including social media, by laws such as the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, under which critics of the status quo can face imprisonment. Althusser also identifies several ISAs, including the religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade unions, communications, and cultural. Through these ideological apparatuses, Indonesians are interpellated, or hailed, to participate in discourses that situate social inequality as normal and natural, even inevitable—not an arbitrary product of neoliberalism. Thus, the persistence of poverty must be accepted as destiny or the will of God. Most Indonesians develop little political awareness because, from an early age, they are hailed to accept poverty and the discourses that naturalize it. Thinking critically about structural poverty, moreover, tends to be considered a waste of time.

This theory of interpellation was developed by Althusser because with the advent of the Internet and neoliberal globalization, the RSAs lost much of the efficacy they once had to control the thoughts and actions of the masses. The use of force, too, is increasingly receding from the modern public sphere, while methods of controlling the masses through ideological infiltration are widely considered more strategic and effective. As a result, the oligarchy and their corporate backers have focused on controlling the major state apparatuses, particularly the ideological apparatuses, so that the problem of poverty receives little attention.

Methodology

This article employs descriptive-qualitative research and applies a textual approach by analyzing the films *Turah* and *Siti* as texts, focusing on visual, auditory, and narrative elements such as characters, physical settings, scenes, plots, and sounds in order to examine their discursive treatment of rural poverty. The dialogue (sentences) and actions of the characters in the films serve as the data, while *Turah* and *Siti* are treated as case studies. This method requires the researcher to focus on selected aspects of meaning in relation to a larger research question. In this study, the data analysis is

focused on the depiction of structural and gendered poverty in the two films, and the results of this analysis are correlated with secondary data on rural poverty in Indonesia.

Discussion

Both *Turah* and *Siti* are set in rural Indonesia after the New Order. *Turah* is set in a poor kampung in Tegal, while *Siti* is set in a poor fishing village in Parangtritis, Yogyakarta. Tegal is part of Central Java Province, which has the highest rate of poverty on Java island (Dicky and Tri 2013), while Parangtritis is part of Yogyakarta Province, another area with high rural poverty. These two settings provide distinct social contexts in which to analyze the common issue of rural poverty.[3)]

Situating Poverty as a Public Issue
From the outset, *Turah* situates poverty as a public issue. This sets it apart from most Indonesian films, which tend to portray poverty as a matter of personal misfortune (Ekky 2019, xxviii). *Turah* opens with the announcement of the death of a citizen in Tirang village, a community living on public land that should be under the government's stewardship but instead is controlled by the oligarch Darso family. Through his "kindness," Darso allows people to live in the kampung, but only if they work in one of the businesses owned by his family. As a result, poor citizens are reduced to cash cows, bolstering Darso's personal wealth and often dying young from overwork and inadequate access to health care and other public services. Under this oligarchic regime, the cycle of poverty in Kampung Tirang cannot end.

　　Early in the film, dialogue highlights the issue of structural poverty. Turah and his wife, Kanti, discuss a boy, Slamet, who has just died and been buried that afternoon. While they are making love, Turah finds himself plagued by thoughts of the deceased boy and initiates the following exchange:

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3) It is also worth noting that both films use the characters' mother tongues as the primary language of conversation. *Turah* uses Tegal-Javanese, and *Siti* uses Yogya-Javanese. Indonesian, the national language, is rarely heard in conversation. This is typical of post-New Order films and distinguishes them from the cinema of the New Order. New Order films were usually produced in Jakarta, though they might be set in other parts of Indonesia. Post-New Order cinema is decentralized, with local languages becoming the dominant media of film production as production houses have been founded in various outlying regions. This in turn helps make these films accessible to audiences outside Jakarta, including those directly impacted by the issues depicted onscreen. That said, only two industrial studios exist outside of Jakarta: in Yogyakarta and Makassar. Smaller cities such as Purbalingga, Tegal, Solo, Cilacap, Kebumen, etc., host only independent production houses.

> Turah: Slamet . . .
>
> Kanti: Yes. . . . This morning the pain was getting worse, the fever was getting higher. Not going down. Then this afternoon his mother just wanted to cross [the river] to take him to the doctor, but it was too late.

Slamet died only because his parents did not have enough money to take him to a doctor. Turah then recalls Slamet being scolded by his father for asking him to buy a kite. His father did not want to buy the kite because their family had no money.

The second exchange between Turah and Kanti centers on his desire for children and her refusal to have them:

> Turah: Soon we will grow old, then die. No one knows if it will be me or you who dies first. If there are no children, one of us will be alone with no offspring to be proud of. If I die first, do you want to remarry, Ti?
>
> Kanti: Mas . . . You always ask me questions that I do not need to answer. But yes, Mas, I understand what you mean. . . . You also understand, I do not want to have children who live like we do now. Do you want to bury your own child, Mas?

For Kanti, growing old without children seems preferable to having children who, due to their socioeconomic circumstances, will either die young or grow up and live out their lives in miserable conditions.

The third dialogue takes place between Jadag and his wife, Rum, and illustrates how poverty is experienced by their family. Jadag and his wife are in the midst of a very serious conflict, caused mainly by their economic problems. Jadag attributes their poverty to Darso and Pakel, Darso's assistant, whom he envies. This makes him irritable, and he takes out his anger on his wife:

> Jadag: You just need to cook, clean the house, take care of the kids, accept money, and have sex. That is all, no need to take care of my work!
>
> Rum: Are you "Mardiyah's grandson"?!⁴⁾ Why don't you have so much wealth?! What do you want to cook if you do not have money to buy food? Hah? Every day you get drunk and gamble; someone has reported you play with women! Your child is still young. Are you not ashamed? Where is your sense of responsibility?

The dialogue above highlights two things. First, Jadag is a traditional, patriarchal Javanese man. He considers his wife a *konco wingking* (domestic householder) woman whose only duty is to take care of domestic chores and who must not interfere in her husband's affairs.

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  4) Mardiyah is a cultural figure in Tegal, an extremely wealthy woman with unlimited resources. When someone is called "grandson of Mardiyah" or "son of Mardiyah," it suggests that person has inherited wealth.

Rum does not explicitly object to being relegated to the status of *konco wingking*. However, she cannot tolerate Jadag's irresponsible behavior, especially with their first child, Roji, about to enter elementary school and their second soon to be born. She criticizes the symptom—her husband's poor behavior—but fails to identify the disease—the convergence of structural poverty and patriarchal norms. Meanwhile, although Jadag's bad behavior cannot be justified, his criticism of Darso and Pakel's oligarchic power is still worth considering, for the latter two are the oligarchs who have engineered the villagers' poverty. These frustrations, initially articulated in only the private, domestic realm, eventually lead to rebellion against Darso's power in the public sphere.

The above exchanges situate structural poverty as a problem that may manifest and be articulated mainly in domestic spaces but whose solutions can be found only in the public sphere. At home, Turah cannot even focus on making love to his wife, instead obsessing over the negative effects that poverty is having on their community. Jadag, meanwhile, initially uses his poverty as an excuse to treat his family poorly; but as the film goes on he eventually channels his suffering into more critical behavior, bringing together the people of Kampung Tirang and launching a rebellion.

Questioning Structural Poverty

Poverty produces a state of learned helplessness in most of the residents of Kampung Tirang. Lacking autonomy, the villagers depend on Darso's goodwill and follow all the rules that he establishes to govern their lives. On the other hand, the government (both executive and legislative) is depicted as completely absent from their social lives, except in the form of census officers who only carry out routine data collection. Besides these officers, no other representatives of the middle class appear in the film except for Pakel, who holds a bachelor's degree and becomes one of Darso's cronies and contributes to making the villagers' lives miserable. In the absence of an activist government or compassionate middle class, most citizens of Kampung Tirang come to see poverty as God's will—a condition that must be accepted, not one that has been engineered by humans and can therefore be challenged or changed.

As mentioned earlier, Winters (2011, 11–18) identifies five types of power resources: political rights, official positions, coercive power, mobilizational power, and material power. Darso has monopolized at least three of these—material power, coercive power, and mobilizational power—and uses them to increase his wealth and fashion himself as a hero, a savior of the poor, allowing them to live on his family's land as long as they work in his businesses for very low wages. Most of the villagers, including the protagonists Turah and Kandar, accept Darso's rule as well as his heroic self-representation. Jadag is the only figure who dares to oppose him. The following dialogue between Turah and

Jadag illustrates the beginning of Jadag's rebellion:

> Jadag: Do you get a big reward for your new position, Tur?
> Turah: Enough, Dag.
> Jadag: Enough to support two people?
> Turah: I've spent very little of that money, Dag.
> Jadag: I am stressed, Tur. Doing a lot of work with Darso is just like that, forever coolie. In fact, Pakel, who has only been working for three years, has become a person Darso trusts. He already has a house in the housing complex. People say it is because of his undergraduate degree.

This exchange is intriguing because when Turah says his wages are enough to support his family, what he means by "enough" remains open to interpretation. Is "enough" just enough to eat, drink, and fulfill his and his wife's most basic material needs? What about the need to buy land and build a house, prerequisites for self-sufficiency and most forms of public participation? Are Turah's wages enough to encourage him and Kanti to bring a child into the world, even with a life that is not messy? It seems that "enough," for a poor man like Turah, means enough only to eat and survive with his wife, without children. The concept of enough, in this instance, reflects the larger culture of the Javanese poor, who are resigned and accept the destiny that has been given by God without critically questioning the root of their poverty. Religion plays a role as an ideological state apparatus, shaping people's attitude toward poverty and conditioning them to accept the oligarch Darso's rule.

Meanwhile, Jadag begins to express an interest in rebellion. Unlike Turah, Jadag immediately challenges the accepted definition of "enough." Having worked for a dozen years without a raise or a promotion from the status of coolie, Jadag begins to compare himself to Pakel, who has become Darso's right-hand man after only three years of service. In this short time, Pakel has been able to buy a proper house in a housing complex, something inconceivable for Jadag and the other people of Kampung Tirang. Here, the issue of class conflict comes to the fore. The landless proletariat of Kampung Tirang grows ever more helpless, deprived of decent wages and bargaining power. Meanwhile, Pakel, who was originally landless but has a bachelor's degree, is able to leverage his social bargaining power and increase his wages. Pakel is the perfect portrait of the decadent middle class, using his scholarship to achieve upward mobility from landless and poor to a landed homeowner. His admission into the elite structure does nothing for the majority of the proletariat. On the contrary, he becomes an agent further propagating injustice and oppression. This reflects the acute problem of the decadence of the Indonesian middle class. Historically, this can be traced to the birth of the New Order, when all forms of social class-based politics were effectively eliminated. As we can see,

after the decline of the New Order, the discourse of the Reformation era failed to reactivate class politics or revitalize the Indonesian middle class as a coherent, cohesive political subject. In fact, today's Indonesian middle class may best be understood as passive, fragmented masses controlled by, and fundamentally supportive of, the corporate oligarchy.

The issue of social injustice is reflected eloquently in Jadag's expressions of frustration toward Darso and his efforts to discuss social problems with his neighbors. From the perspective of power resources theory (Winters 2011), Jadag is attempting to obtain the only power resource that remains available to exploit, namely, mobilizational power. The other four types of power resources—political rights, official positions, coercive power, and material power—remain out of reach, beyond his worldly vision. By trying to influence his neighbors to think more critically of Darso and cultivate their courage, Jadag seeks to mobilize them in order to achieve bargaining power or even overthrow the oligarch. This represents an attempted clash of social classes rooted in the resource struggle between the proletariat, championed by Jadag, and the capitalist Darso.

This attempted mass mobilization effort begins with Jadag talking to Turah, continues with him talking to Kandar, and peaks when he addresses the wider public, the people of Kampung Tirang. The issues raised by Jadag include the following: (1) unfair distribution of wages, (2) Darso's use of charity as an ideological apparatus to control the masses, and (3) the possible illegitimacy of Darso's claim to landownership. The first issue encompasses not only the unfair discrepancy in wages between Jadag and Pakel, discussed above, but also the unfair distribution of profits between the workers and Darso. Jadag cites as an example Kandar, who works raising Darso's goats. According to Jadag, the profit distribution from selling goats should be equal, since Darso contributes material capital and Kandar labor capital. Instead, Darso pockets the majority of the profits, while Kandar, who is also landless, gets only a small portion. Jadag urges Kandar to be more critical so that he has the courage to negotiate profits. This would elevate his bargaining power in front of Darso. Kandar counters by asking Jadag to accept what Darso has given him. For Kandar, it is natural and rational that the owner of capital should get a bigger share. From this, we know that people like Kandar consider capital to be limited to commodities and do not consider their labor a form of capital without which production would not have been possible.

> Jadag: Kandar! Try to think now. Every day you work, feed the goats, bathe them, throw away the waste, but for every sale how much do you get? How much is the goat? And how much does Darso get? Yes, even though he did not do anything!
> Kandar: Yes, it is reasonable, Dag. It is right. Darso is the one who gives the capital.
> Jadag: What do you think is reasonable? You are the one who is wasting energy and time manag-

ing the goats. Why is Darso getting more money? . . . You should be aware, Ndar, be more critical! Do not be fooled by cunning people like Darso and Pakel!

After raising the issue of unfair wage distribution, Jadag continues his efforts to mobilize the masses by addressing more of his neighbors in public spaces. In this setting, he frames Darso's charity as the oligarch's ideological attempt to deceive and control the people of Kampung Tirang. Capitalists, as the dominant class, strive to control the worldview of the people by many means, both repressive and ideological. One of the ideological means is charity. As mentioned above, the process of taking control of these ideological tools is called interpellation (Althusser 1971). It is the embodiment process of ideology by which ISAs and RSAs come to constitute the very nature of individual subjects' identities through hailing them in social interactions. Through the ideological apparatus, the marginalized class is interpellated, or hailed, to participate in a particular discourse: in this case, that poverty is a normal manifestation of God's will. Such inter-pellation deactivates the public's political awareness by hailing them, from an early age, to accept all forms of poverty they encounter, and dismissing critical inquiries into struc-tural poverty as a waste of time.

Before his neighbors, Jadag gives a speech about the deceitful nature of Darso's charity—but he receives only blank stares in return:

> Brothers and sisters. Come out. Come closer. Jadag wants to talk. The money we all receive from Darso is not free money. No. Not even charity money. The money is your right, because you are already working. So it is a reward. Understood? But Pakel sold out. As if we are all begging for Darso. Fucker. That bastard Pakel. Who is Pakel? Who is he?

Instead of responding as Jadag hopes, his neighbors seem to infer that he is jealous and crazy because of his own poverty. Jadag's harsh words reveal how brutal life is for members of the lowest class, but they also echo serious criticisms of capitalism, though he does not speak in academic language:

> I've worked for you a dozen years, but what are the results? Almost nothing. I do not even have a house. I am still renting. I cannot have my own house like Pakel! Even though Pakel was a newcomer, you gave him everything he wanted! And you know, everything Pakel has is what I want! Let my family live well! I should have more than Pakel!

As working-class laborers, Jadag and his fellow villagers have no other option but to play the game established and rigged by Darso. The capitalist maintains his wealth and power by establishing an economic system in which workers like Jadag, Turah, and Kandar have no opportunities to exit from their never-ending cycle of poverty. Darso accomplishes this by using several types of ideological apparatuses, such as the trade union, which

enforces a goat farming contract with Kandar that benefits Darso. He also uses the family and cultural apparatuses by distributing money, i.e., charity, to families throughout Kampung Tirang. In fact, this money is their own money, for they should have earned it working for Darso. Jadag argues that this money should be viewed as a form of wages strategically withheld, not kindness or charity.

Next, Jadag moves to attack something more fundamental, namely, the status of Kampung Tirang's land, which supposedly belongs to the Darso family. This time, he goes even further by delivering his criticism not only in front of the neighbors but also before Darso himself. He argues that the land in Kampung Tirang has never belonged to the Darso family and is instead supposed to be state property to be used for the benefit of the people, not privately owned by an individual enterprise. He articulates this view in the following excerpt: "Darso! This is not your family's land! And we are not your maids! Do not act like a hero, as if we cannot live without your help!"

Unlike Turah, who talks about this matter only in his home—or, more precisely, in his bedroom with his wife—Jadag, motivated by jealousy for Pakel, dares to bring up the issue in public, in front of the whole village. Jadag's oration identifies the root of the poverty that plagues him and his neighbors, namely, landlessness, homelessness, and dependence on the oligarch for employment and shelter. The dual problems of landlessness and homelessness cannot be separated from state policies related to the redistribution of state land first implemented during the Sukarno regime in the form of the 1960 Agrarian Reform Law. Dianto Bachriadi (2000) states that the law mandates four types of land can be redistributed to people who have none: (1) land that exceeds a certain maximum area, (2) land held by absentee landlords, (3) land (formerly) owned by traditional ruling families or courts (*swapraja*), and (4) state-controlled land. All land subject to reform is, in practice, first declared to be state-owned land before being redistributed. From this perspective, if Kampung Tirang's land can be categorized as state-owned land, then Jadag is on the right track in questioning Darso's claim to ownership. His claims echo thousands of land conflicts that have occurred throughout Indonesia. As noted by the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency (ATR/BPN), by October 2020 nine thousand cases of land conflict had occurred in Indonesia (Ardiansyah 2020).

Jadag's public criticism of Darso disturbs the status quo and threatens the stability of Darso's businesses. The oligarch inflicts punishment not only on Jadag but also on all of the villagers: the electricity is cut off, and the water supply is stopped. Thus, Darso demonstrates his power using a repressive apparatus in the form of control over natural resources. Power over clean water and electricity can be categorized as belonging to the government and the administration because it is integral to the public interest.

As a result of his resistance, Jadag is ostracized by his neighbors and blamed for the absence of electricity and clean water. Nobody supports him or his criticism of Darso, and his social status rapidly deteriorates. He tries to escape by dreaming of winning the lottery. The climax occurs when his affair with Darso's wife, Ilah, receives news coverage and public attention. This threatens not only Darso's business but also the stability of his family. However, it is Jadag's wife and child who end up leaving him. Soon thereafter, a group of people enter Jadag's house at night, after which Jadag is found lifeless, hanging from a tree. Even though the film does not explicitly identify the killer, it can be inferred that Darso has once again deployed a repressive apparatus: violent means in the form of thugs or gangsters, which in Althusser's categorization are included under the army or police—the guardians of security and order established by the power of the capitalist. Darso's power and wealth, initially built on a foundation of ignorance among the residents of Kampung Tirang, persist even after that ignorance has been publicly challenged. Indeed, the challenger's execution is even tacitly sanctioned by his neighbors, demonstrating the power of ideology and the apparatuses that enforce it to sustain even miserable status quos.

Turah, with its dark story about rural poverty, breaks the myth of the harmonious Indonesian village. Ben White (2017), a rural sociologist, argues that this myth is not only demonstrably inaccurate but also harmful and dangerous, because it covers up the common practice of democracy being hijacked in the village by powerful local elites. This myth, which can be traced to the New Order, ascribes the Indonesian village attributes such as homogeneity and classlessness. Villagers are assumed to work together without conflict, guided by shared romantic values such as *gotong royong* (working together), *kekeluargaan* (family spirit), and *rukun* (harmony). However, many researchers have exposed counternarratives that tell of the importance of social and political divisions, hierarchies, tensions, and social conflicts within village communities.

This gloomy portrait of Indonesian rural poverty confirms the findings of previous research indicating that in the process of transition from authoritarianism to democratization, 1998 to the present, democracy has been hijacked by oligarchic interests (Robison and Hadiz 2004; Winters 2011; Fukuoka and Djani 2016). Public awareness is starting to increase, with popular discourses beginning to reframe poverty and social inequality as products of structural policies made by elites in the context of dysfunctional democracy and oligarchic capture of resources, not destiny. The growth of social media and independent films as alternative media plays a very important role in shaping public awareness of these issues, especially in a context where Indonesia's mainstream media has effectively been captured and repurposed by the oligarchs (Tapsell 2018). *Turah* represents part of a larger alternative media movement aimed at articulating the relationships

between rural poverty, structural poverty, and state policy in a space where the oligarchs do not have control.

Against the Godliness of Poverty

Turah treats the gendered aspects of structural poverty very differently from *Siti*. All the women in *Turah*—including Kanti (Turah's wife), Rum (Jadag's wife), and Ilah (Darso's wife)—are depicted as traditional housewives who take care of the household and remain financially and socially dependent on men. They are described as *konco wingking*, women whose only work is cooking and taking care of the home. They are also portrayed as completely submitting to their husbands. Unlike Kanti and Ilah, though, Rum eventually rebels against Jadag's patriarchal power by leaving him alone and taking their two children. However, it remains unclear whether the filmmaker intends this to be interpreted as a righteous rejection of abusive gender norms on the one hand, or as simply one more aspect of Jadag's unjust victimization on the other. Unlike *Turah*, *Siti* centers a woman who clearly realizes her agency over her own body and strives not only to survive but also to achieve more autonomy over her own life.

Siti opens in an illegal karaoke house, with a lady companion (LC) suddenly collapsing in the midst of a raid conducted by a police team. This woman is Siti, a 24-year-old mother of one son, whose fisherman husband suffered a stroke. Before his stroke, her husband took a debt of IDR 5 million to buy a boat. Because of their economic situation, Siti works as an LC and a karaoke guide. She is a typical poor Indonesian woman in a rural community: she has not graduated from high school; she got married and had children young, lives in a shack, has no regular income, and is burdened with debt. Unlike the poverty in *Turah*, which is represented as a public issue, the poverty in *Siti* is never discussed openly. In public spaces, the problem of structural poverty is never discussed at all.

The characters in *Siti* consider poverty to be God's will and see no point in discussing its worldly causes. This surrender to poverty is clearly articulated in a dialogue between Siti and her mother-in-law, Darmi, when they talk about their lives. When Darmi entreats Siti to "Be patient, Ti . . . God never sleeps," Siti responds with, "Yes Mom [in-law]. Maybe [God] is just having a picnic." Darmi explicitly attributes their material circumstances to God, and although Siti responds satirically, she does not challenge the premise directly. This dialogue shows how family and religion function as ISAs, playing a crucial role in interpellating the ideological discourse that frames poverty as God's prerogative. Darmi, a senior member of the family, cites God as their savior whose will should not be questioned, and thus imbues this perspective with her authority as an elder.

Unlike Darmi, Siti opposes this regime of knowledge. Because poverty is a human

problem, she believes, the solution to poverty must be achieved by humans themselves. She works hard as an LC to earn a living and repay her family's debts, suggesting that she sees only one way out of the cycle of poverty: individual effort and commodification of her voice and body. In the course of the film, she receives IDR 750,000 from Gatot, a policeman and customer with whom she is later obliged to carry on an affair, and IDR 250,000 from the karaoke boss, Sarko. The film thus endorses Siti's conception of poverty as a worldly problem with worldly solutions. Unfortunately, however, the solutions represented in this film do not involve addressing structural poverty through policy changes but instead come in the form of generosity, or charity, from other, wealthier parties.

Against Gendered Poverty

References to structural poverty remain wholly absent from *Siti*, and in this context it makes sense for Siti to sell her body and voice at night and snacks during the day to increase her family's income. However, other structural problems interfere with her ability to implement this survival strategy. Her husband does not like her working as an LC and refuses to talk to her at all, adding to Siti's burden. In fact, Siti does not only work to earn a living but also works to take care of all the household needs, including cooking, washing, helping her children do their homework, and taking care of her disabled husband. In a conversation with her friend, Siti expresses anger toward her husband's attitude:

> Siti's friend: And your husband? Is he still not talking to you?
> Siti: Not a word since I've been working at the karaoke bar! He stopped talking. He is pissed. Whatever, it is just confusing. Actually, I am the one who should be angry, right?
> Siti's friend: Then be angry! I'll pretend to be your husband, and you be mad at me, OK? Come on, spill it out!
> Siti: Honey, why are you not talking to me? I am tired of being ignored! What do you think of me? It should be me who ignores you! You asshole!

From this exchange, we learn that although Siti cannot confront her husband directly, deep in her heart she realizes that she has more right to be angry than he does. It remains nearly impossible for her to speak openly in front of her patriarchal Javanese husband. However, even though her husband does not approve of her profession as an LC, she still takes this job because it is the only employment available that lets her earn money quickly. When faced with her husband's anger, she does not verbally challenge him but continues working as an LC.

This case study of poverty is consistent with research findings about gendered poverty in Indonesia, showing that Indonesian women tend to bear heavier burdens than

men (Angelina and Matitaputty 2017). According to Angelina and Matitaputty, Indonesian women spend 66 percent of their time working but receive only 10 percent of the income they should earn (Tjokrowinoto 1996, cited in Angelina and Matitaputty 2017). They also work 30 percent to 50 percent longer hours than men, even when controlling for age and forms of labor, both paid and unpaid (Cahyono 2005, cited in Angelina and Matitaputty 2017). On the other hand, Siti's affair with Gatot may be seen as her way of breaking free from patriarchal family ties and resisting her husband's power. Patriarchal marriage institutions are structured to fulfill the needs of men, often at the expense of women. For instance, if a wife suffers a stroke that results in an inability to fulfill her husband's sexual needs, the norms of patriarchal society tend to allow the husband to remarry in order to fulfill his needs. This is not the case when it is the husband who suffers a stroke. As a young woman, Siti certainly has her own sexual needs, but her husband cannot fulfill them because of his condition, and social norms do not permit her to seek fulfillment elsewhere. Nevertheless, she finds sexual fulfillment as well as financial support from Gatot in spite of the social and cultural norms that stigmatize her decision to do so.

One night, after finally getting the money to repay her husband's loan, she comes home drunk. Embracing her husband, the drunken Siti announces that she has got the money (IDR 5 million) and that she wants to separate from him. She also says that she has met another man, Gatot the policeman, who has asked her to marry him. Sarcastically, she asks her husband for permission. Surprisingly, her husband manages to speak, saying, "Just go, Siti!" Siti is shocked with the answer and shouts loudly, "You asshole!" She leaves her husband, gives the money to her mother-in-law, and departs to seek her freedom. Her actions resonate with the values of second-wave feminism, which demands women's freedom not only in domestic and professional contexts but also in regard to sexuality. All in all, the case study of Siti's life reveals that addressing the problem of poverty cannot, in practice, be separated from discussions of patriarchy, sexuality, and labor.

Unlike *Turah*, *Siti* does not attempt to situate poverty as a public issue. Although Siti objects to the idea of poverty as destiny, she seems to share a perspective with Turah and Kandar that poverty and the accompanying humiliation and stigma should be considered private issues to be resolved through individual action. *Siti* also lacks a public villain, like the oligarchs Darso and Pakel in *Turah*, who embodies the societal origins of the status quo. The appropriate response to poverty, it seems, according to *Siti*, is not to challenge its structural origins in public spaces or institutions, but rather to discuss and find solutions for the problems that poverty causes in private domestic spaces, particularly the bedroom. In Siti's case, the problem of poverty is compounded by her patriarchal husband's attitude. The shame and stigma that she, a woman working to alleviate her

poverty through sex work and other demeaning forms of labor, must bear—both in public and in the home—incentivize her to keep these efforts private; but this privacy, in turn, obscures the structural causes of her poverty and undermines the possibility of collective action. Here, we see how gendered poverty along with unacknowledged structural poverty doubles her burdens as a housewife and a working woman.

Conclusion

Turah and *Siti* both portray rural Indonesian poverty, but each emphasizes a discrete aspect of the problem and each has its own blind spot. Using the character of Jadag as a discursive vehicle, *Turah* situates structural poverty as a public issue, identifies the mechanisms that produce and propagate it, and ascribes responsibility to the ruling class. While most characters, including Turah and Kandar, only discuss their poverty privately, Jadag calls a public forum, seeks to mobilize his neighbors, and even blames Darso and Pakel to their faces. Through Jadag, the film argues that poverty should be understood as a public issue because it derives not from God's immutable will but rather from socio-economic systems engineered by human beings. Effective resistance against such unjust systems requires mass mobilization. Although Jadag fails to effect such mobilization, and in fact gets murdered because of his efforts, this only underscores that resistance requires more than one committed opponent of a deeply rooted system, and any oligarch who inspires credible fear and ostracizes his outspoken critics has already won. *Turah* reflects the reality of daily life, where any sporadic resistance against the oligarchy will end in death or absolute defeat, making it less a Marxist call to arms and more a cautionary tale.

Unlike *Turah*, *Siti* does not present a character who brings the issue of poverty into the public sphere. Siti and Darmi seem to take their poverty for granted and do not consider it a topic worth discussing, let alone publicizing. This, in turn, explains why *Siti* does not face a public enemy, such as an oligarch, a corrupt politician, or a corporate overlord, as Jadag does in *Turah*. Siti and her mother are pragmatic enough to keep their heads down and avoid confrontation with such figures, even if this means forgoing any possibility of collective action. In this regard, Siti and Darmi, like Turah and Kandar, seem to represent the majority opinion on poverty. However, Siti breaks from the "commonsense" perspective, too, by rejecting divine explanations for poverty, treating it instead as a material problem with material solutions, albeit ones that she as an individual must pursue alone.

With no explicit mention of structural poverty, *Siti* focuses instead on the gendered aspects of poverty, in particular Siti's double burden of being her family's breadwinner

and, at the same time, a housewife socially confined to domestic spaces. Eventually, she decides to separate from her patriarchal husband and take another man as her partner. Her decision to leave her family in order to escape the cycle of poverty can be seen as an effective method of resistance for her as an individual, though it comes with high social costs and may not be easily scaled up and implemented at the societal level. From this analysis, we can conclude that both the problems of structural poverty and gendered poverty are interpellated continually by the family and the religious as part of ideological state apparatuses. Often they even reinforce each other, for attending to one may mean neglecting the other, allowing certain modes of poverty and oppression to persist even as others are resolved. Siti's pragmatism and Jadag's idealism may be difficult to reconcile in practice, and yet reconciling them seems necessary in order to tackle systemic poverty effectively and at the societal scale.

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Sustainability of *Acacia catechu* Forest Management for Cutch Production in Magway Region, Myanmar

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Acacia catechu (Sha)-bearing forests are the primary sources of cutch, a tannin extract from the heartwood of Sha trees. Sha forests in Myanmar are managed for cutch production, and tree harvesting for cutch is regulated by an official diameter limit (ODL, 30 cm DBH [diameter at breast height]). We explored sustainable Sha forest management for cutch production through stand inventory surveys and informal interviews with locals and forest managers. We compared Sha forests with six different official harvest histories and assessed seedlings and saplings as well as the size and species of harvested stumps and remaining trees. We found that the forest understory was disturbed by surface fire, and all Sha seedlings and saplings < 1.7 m in height showed post-fire marks. We observed a regeneration gap between 1.7 m and 2.7 m, which might indicate the flame height of the surface fire. The "illegal" harvest exceeded the official harvest; only 5% of the harvested stumps were found to be larger than the ODL. Local harvesting of cutch appeared to be limited by the stem diameter required for heartwood formation (15 cm DBH). Stump data revealed that the forests were utilized not only for cutch but also for other purposes, including fuel and timber. Despite fire and local harvesting, local forest utilization patterns appear to be reasonable, although they are illegal. Implementing fire control and community management of forests along with clear definition of property rights could help in sustainably managing Sha forests for cutch production.

Keywords: NTFPs, local diameter limit, heartwood formation, surface fire, dieback, natural regeneration, community-based management

Introduction

Understanding current forest conditions and predicting the future forest structure and

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growing stock are fundamental steps in sustainable forest management. However, the stand structure of selectively logged forests is relatively poorly known, especially in seasonally dry tropical forests (Becknell *et al.* 2012, 88), although many studies have been conducted in intact, old-growth, closed-canopy tropical forests (Houghton 2005, 947).

In managing tropical forests, selective logging is based on one universal criterion: a minimum diameter cutting limit for all commercial timber species (Sist *et al.* 2003). This is true in Myanmar also, where commercially valuable trees are selectively extracted (Hla Maung Thein *et al.* 2007; Myat Su Mon *et al.* 2012; Tual Cin Khai *et al.* 2016; Zar Chi Win *et al.* 2018; Tual Cin Khai *et al.* 2020). Timber and non-timber extraction in Myanmar is carried out mainly in production forests, an administrative category that includes reserved forests (RFs) and protected public forests (PPFs). RFs are legally protected forests; they are the best-quality and higher-commercial-value forests, in which production activities can be performed only with legal permission. PPFs are also legally protected forests, but they are of lower commercial value and more accessible, with the public having some harvesting rights (Myanmar, Forest Department 2018, 2–3; 2020, 13–14).

Besides wood and timber, Myanmar is well endowed with other forest resources, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs). NTFPs are an important income source—especially for poor households (Neumann and Hirsch 2000, 33–42; Sunderlin *et al.* 2005, 1387; Fukushima *et al.* 2011, 87–88; Ei *et al.* 2017, 331), but also for non-poor households (Stoian 2005). About 70% of the total population in Myanmar lives in rural areas and depends on the surrounding forests for NTFPs. The Forest Department classifies legally produced NTFPs into six major groups: (1) fiber materials, (2) edible products, (3) herbal and cosmetic materials, (4) extractive resin and oleoresin, (5) non-food animal products, and (6) other miscellaneous products. Cutch is a unique NTFP extracted from the heartwood of *Acacia catechu* trees belonging to the extractive resin and oleoresin group (Khin Htun 2009, 18).

A. catechu (locally called Sha) is a small to medium-sized thorny tree, up to 15 m tall and 38 cm in DBH. The sapwood, which is yellowish white to yellow, is sharply distinct from the heartwood. The heartwood is light red to reddish brown, darkening on exposure to air; it is very strong and hard (Wulijarni-Soetjipto and Siemonsma 1991, 37–41). Sha is a versatile tree. The wood makes good timber and is used for house posts, agricultural implements, wheels, etc. It is very durable and resistant to attack by termites. The wood also makes excellent firewood and is one of the best woods for charcoal. Fresh leaves and small lower branches are eaten by cattle. Sha is widely distributed in the southern Himalayas of Pakistan, northern India, and Nepal, south to Andhra Pradesh in India, and east to Myanmar and Thailand (Wulijarni-Soetjipto and Siemonsma 1991, 37–41). It is

distributed throughout Myanmar, except in the most humid regions (Thein Win and Ba Kaung 2005, 285). The dry and dryish districts of Myanmar are home to Sha forests that supported a thriving cutch production industry (White 1923, 80; Thein Win and Ba Kaung 2005, 285).

Cutch is produced in India, Myanmar (Dautremer 1913, 248; Wulijarni-Soetjipto and Siemonsma 1991, 37), northern Thailand (Takeda 1990), and Bangladesh (Kabir *et al.* 2016). Nowadays it is used mainly for dyeing and for chewing (paan). In the past, it was also used for tanning leather and as a viscosity modifier in oil well drilling. Both crude and refined cutch and bark extracts are traditionally used in medicine, usually as an astringent for the treatment of sore throat and diarrhea (Green 1995, 37–44). Cutch has been produced in Myanmar and has been the focus of a cottage industry since before colonial rule (1824) (Nisbet 1901, 439; Bryant 1997, 92). During the colonial era (1824–1948) in Myanmar, forests were territorialized as RFs by the British government. Restricted access to RFs led to a series of conflicts between cutch producers and forest officials (Bryant 1997, 92–95). Following the British annexation of upper Myanmar in 1886, conflict spread as peasants and even swiddeners became implicated in the issue. Conflict between swiddeners and the colonial state was a by-product of the tougher rules introduced after 1889 (Bryant 1997, 92–95). The rules were strictly enforced, and many individuals were prosecuted for illegal felling of Sha. At a conference of civil and forest officials held in Pyay Township, Bago Region, in March 1896, it was agreed that the Forest Department would create RFs in the best remaining cutch tracts, village reserves would be abolished, and the remaining areas would be left to swiddeners (Bryant 1997, 92–95). Afterward, the conflict between cutch traders and workers, and the colonial state continued. As the cutch price increased and the supply dwindled, cutch traders and workers ignored the rules, and theft of trees became common (Bryant 1997, 92–95). R. L. Bryant's (1997) investigation of the history of cutch production and regulatory issues covered only the colonial era (1824–1948) and the lower Magway Region of Myanmar. However, little is known about cutch regulation and production during the postcolonial era.

Production of a wide variety of NTFPs need not involve logging (Tani 2012, 137). However, although cutch is an NTFP, production necessarily involves logging, because trees need to be cut down to extract tannin from the heartwood. After trees are cut, the bark and sapwood are removed; the heartwood is chipped into small pieces and boiled in earthen pots to extract tannin juice. The juice is collected and further reduced by boiling in a cauldron until it reaches a jelly-like consistency. After cooling, it hardens into solid cubes or biscuit-like formations. Sha forests, logging, cutch production, and NTFPs in the Magway Region are intertwined. Although a number of case studies of NTFPs have

been published, few are from Myanmar (Tani 2012, 138; Ei *et al.* 2017, 331). In addition, the forestry sector in Myanmar is more or less focused on teak, given its commercial importance and timber quality. Many studies conducted during the last few decades have focused on the structural and compositional aspects of teak-bearing forests (Hla Maung Thein *et al.* 2007; Tual Cin Khai *et al.* 2016), and little is known about Sha-bearing forests and their utilization. Accordingly, Sha forests should be given priority for management, utilization, and conservation initiatives. Understanding stand structure and species composition is fundamental to sustainable Sha forest management and the security of local people's livelihoods. Therefore, we conducted stand inventory surveys with the main objective of determining the sustainability of Sha forest management for cutch production. We examined (a) the structure and regeneration of officially and locally extracted Sha forests, (b) local utilization patterns, and (c) possible implications for forest management.

Materials and Methods

Study Site

The study was conducted mainly in Saw Township, in the western part of Magway Region, central Myanmar (formerly called Burma), at 20°48′–21°20′ N, 94°00′–94°20′ E (Fig. 1). The township measures 31 km from east to west and 87 km from south to north, and has a total area of 1,779 km². Its eastern and western parts are mostly hilly. The elevation ranges from 325 to 1,168 m a.s.l., with an average of 381 m a.s.l. The township is surrounded by six administrative townships where cutch production also occurs. Although the township lacks a major river, there are many streams and streamlets that are important freshwater sources for agriculture, cutch production, and daily use (Myanmar, General Administration Department 2017, 1–13). The climate is governed by tropical monsoon circulation. From 1999 to 2019, the mean temperature was 22.9°C and the mean annual rainfall 2,595.5 mm (Zepner *et al.* 2020). The major forest types are mixed deciduous (76.35%), followed by deciduous dipterocarp (17.2%), dry (4.26%), and hill evergreen forests (2.17%) (Myanmar, Forest Department 2016, 35). Hill evergreen and deciduous dipterocarp forests occupy the higher elevations, mixed deciduous forests grow at moderate elevations, and dry forests grow at lower elevations. Sha trees are found in mixed deciduous and dry forests (Thein Win and Ba Kaung 2005, 285). Saw Township contains 14 RFs and one PPF. The RFs are subdivided into compartments according to drainage and geographical situation. Those in Saw Township used to be among the best cutch-bearing production forests in Myanmar; however, since 2013 cutch production has been prohibited in Saw Township by the local government, although it is
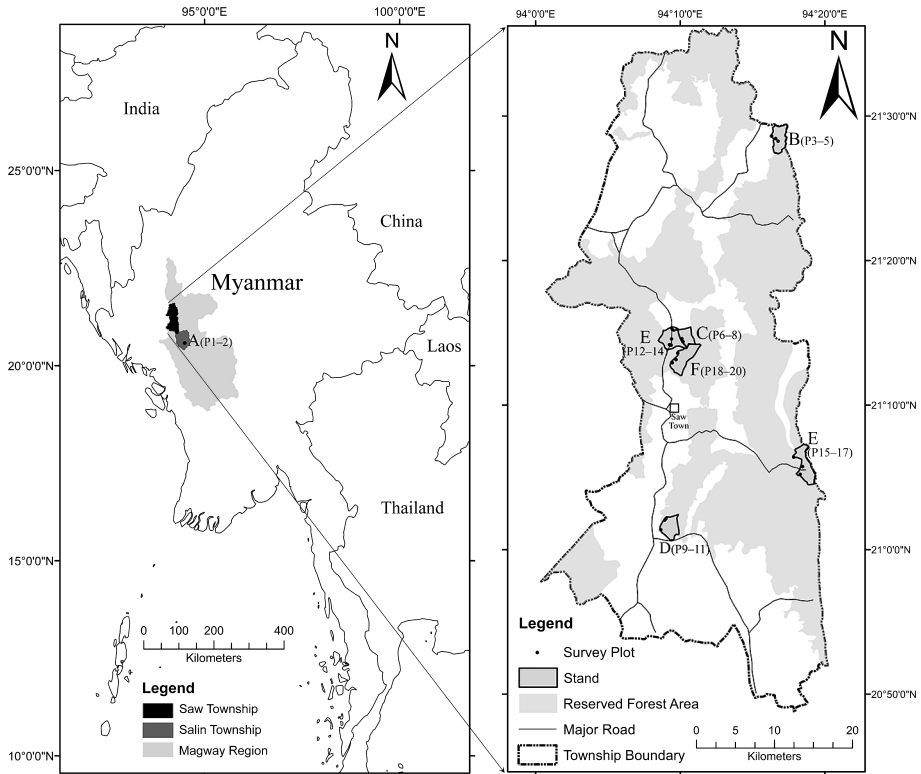
Fig. 1 Map of Study Area and Selected Stands (A–F)

A–F indicates the stands with six official harvest histories; A = 1 year ago, B = 7 years ago, C = 9 years ago, D = 15 years ago, E = 18 years ago, and F = no official harvest since 1999. P denotes plot.

allowed in some neighboring townships. In 2018 production was permitted in neighboring Salin Township, at 20°21′–20°55′ N, 94°15′–94°50′ E.

Data Collection

We made a preliminary visit to the study area in August–September 2018 and analyzed the township administration map and the cutch production history records from the local forest office. We obtained data on government regulations, local harvesting practices, and the history of each site through informal interviews with 12 individuals (one senior forest official and two forest rangers at the local office, and three cutch producers and six local harvesters in their villages). We selected Sha forest stands with six different official harvest histories (A–F) (Table 1). The time from the last official harvest of *A. catechu* from the forest stands varied from one year (stand A) to 18 years (stand E), while stand F had no official harvest record after 1999. Stands B–F belonged to RFs located in Saw

Table 1 General Characteristics of Selected Stands

Stand	Time since Last Official Harvest (Year)	No. of Sample Plots	Average Elevation (m a.s.l)	Average Distance (km) from the Nearest Village	Manage-ment Status	Total Sample Area (ha)		Species Richness (Count)	Bamboo Density (Clump ha⁻¹)
						Non-Sha*	Sha		
A	1 year (2018)	2 (P1–P2)	167 ± 26	1.96 ± 0.02	PPF	0.063	0.393	9	0
B	7 years (2012)	3 (P3–P5)	413 ± 16	4.91 ± 0.72	RF	0.094	0.589	26	42
C	9 years (2010)	3 (P6–P8)	416 ± 8	0.99 ± 0.43	RF	0.094	0.589	21	138
D	15 years (2004)	3 (P9–P11)	455 ± 12	1.05 ± 0.55	RF	0.094	0.589	33	149
E	18 years (2001)	6 (P12–P17)	485 ± 88	2.73 ± 1.94	RF	0.188	1.178	44	1,024
F	No official harvest (1999–2019)	3 (P18–P20)	450 ± 27	2.87 ± 0.54	RF	0.094	0.589	32	393

Source of official harvest years: Forest Department, Saw Township, Gangaw District, Magway Region, Myanmar.
Abbreviations: RF, Reserved Forest or State Forest; PPF, Protected Public Forest; m a.s.l., meters above sea level.
According to Myanmar Forest Law (2018), RFs and PPFs are legally protected forests where timber- and non-timber-related actions can be performed only with legal permission.
* Non-Sha includes all tree species except Sha (*Acacia catechu*). Bamboo clumps of ≥ 5 culms were counted as one individual clump.

Township and stand A to a PPF located in Salin Township (Fig. 1; Table 1). We conducted a stand inventory survey in August–September 2019 within the selected stands. We arbitrarily laid out twenty sample plots in total (two to six per stand). A concentric circular plot design with three different radii from the same center was used (3 m innermost subplot for all seedlings and saplings; 10 m middle subplot for all tree species, bamboo, and stumps; and 25 m outermost plot only for Sha trees and stumps). In the 3 m subplot, all seedlings (height ≤ 100 cm) and all saplings (height > 100 cm but DBH < 6 cm) were identified and counted. We measured the collar diameter (D_0) and height of all Sha seedlings and saplings. To identify post-fire signs (burn scars, dieback) on regenerating trees, we examined the root bases of Sha seedlings and saplings ≤ 2 m height. In the 10 m plots, all tree species ≥ 6 cm DBH were tagged and identified and their DBHs and heights were recorded. Tree specimens were collected with their local names. Taxonomic identification was later confirmed against the checklist of the trees, shrubs, herbs, and climbers of Myanmar (Kress *et al.* 2003). All stumps of all species were tagged and measured. In the case of older stumps that were difficult to identify, we collected wood samples and identified them by examining their physical properties (color, texture, odor, and hardness). Identification was assisted by local knowledge provided by four informants (one plantation owner, one forest ranger, and two local harvesters). Bamboo species were

identified, and bamboo clumps and culms were counted. A clump of ≥ 5 culms was counted as one individual clump. In the 25 m plots, only Sha trees and stumps were measured. DBH was measured at 1.3 m above ground level with a tape measure. Stump diameter and D_0 were measured at ground level (zero height). To measure tree height, the distance from base to tip was measured with a pole (10 or 15 m). Trees taller than the poles were measured with a Vertex IV hypsometer (Haglöf Sweden AB).

Data Analysis

Sha seedlings and saplings were classified into two kinds: "with post-fire marks" and "not available (N.A.)." For all tree species surveyed, we determined the relative density [(the density of individual species/total density of all species) × 100], relative dominance [(the dominance of a species/dominance of all species) × 100], and relative frequency [(the absolute frequency of a species/total absolute frequency of the stand)]. Importance value (IV) for each tree species with ≥ 6 cm DBH was calculated as the sum of relative density, relative frequency, and relative dominance (McCune and Grace 2002, 13–23). For the vegetation structural analysis of standing trees and harvested stumps, we described, plotted, and analyzed tree and stump size data with reference to the diameter and height limits obtained in individual interviews and informal talks with the local forest office, cutch producers, and local harvesters. We did not consider dead trees or decomposed unidentified stumps. Diameters of Sha stumps were later converted into DBH using a simple linear regression model (Corral-Rivas *et al.* 2007, 29) based on measurements of DBH and basal diameter of ten standing Sha trees:

$$\text{DBH} = 0.8501 \cdot D - 0.6983,$$

where DBH = diameter at breast height and D = basal diameter. Data normality was tested by the Shapiro-Wilk test and homogeneity of variance by Levene's test. We applied the Kruskal-Wallis test to determine the effects of time since the last official harvest (categorical variable), especially on DBH and the height of Sha trees (quantitative variable) among selected stands. Additionally, we applied the Kruskal-Wallis test for diameter and height of stumps and non-Sha trees. When the results were significant, the pairwise Wilcoxon rank sum test was applied to determine which stands statistically differed from others, and P values were adjusted using the Benjamini-Hochberg method. Analyses were performed using R v. 3.6.1 (R Core Team 2019).

Results

General Forest Characteristics

The elevation of the survey plots ranged from 149 to 620 m a.s.l. The survey plots were 0.4–5.7 km from the nearest village. Stands with earlier official harvests (F, E, and D) had higher species richness. Stand A, located in the PPF, had the lowest species richness and had been harvested most recently, in 2018 (Table 1).

Across all stands, we identified a total of seventy species (68 tree species and two bamboo species) in 55 genera and 28 families (Appendix). The overall tree density was 496 trees ha^{-1}. The dominant tree species included Sha (106 ha^{-1}), *Tectona grandis* (49 ha^{-1}), *Xylia xylocarpa* (37 ha^{-1}), *Harrisonia perforata* (24 ha^{-1}), and *Anogeissus acuminata* (22 ha^{-1}). Sha trees accounted for 21% of the overall tree density. The overall bamboo density was 377 clumps ha^{-1}. *Bambusa tulda* was found only in stand B; *Dendrocalamus strictus* was found in every stand except A (Appendix). The regeneration density, including bamboo seedlings, was 11,141 ha^{-1} (1,592 saplings ha^{-1} and 9,549 seedlings ha^{-1}). Seedlings and saplings were dominated by Sha (1,556 ha^{-1}), *D. strictus* (1,450 ha^{-1}), *H. perforata* (778 ha^{-1}), *A. acuminata* (619 ha^{-1}), and *Eranthemum splendens* (513 ha^{-1}). The overall tree basal area of the forest was 8.245 m^2 ha^{-1}. The basal area of Sha was 1.573 m^2 ha^{-1}, and other tree species accounted for 6.672 m^2 ha^{-1}. Sha had the highest importance value (IV = 64), followed by *T. grandis* (IV = 27) and *X. xylocarpa* (IV = 18) (Appendix). As evidence of logging, we identified harvested stumps belonging to 19 species, at a stump density of 119 stumps ha^{-1}. The most harvested species were Sha (43 ha^{-1}), *T. grandis* (11 ha^{-1}), *Lagerstroemia villosa* (11 ha^{-1}), and *X. xylocarpa* (6 ha^{-1}). We also found harvested stumps of *Terminalia* species, used in the adulteration of cutch. The majority of stumps (43%) were Sha, followed by *T. grandis* (teak) and other valuable species (Appendix).

Seedlings and Saplings

In the twenty forest understory subplots (565 m^2), we recorded a total of 630 seedlings and saplings (88 Sha and 542 other species), belonging to 63 species. The regeneration density of Sha was 1,556 ha^{-1} (1,079 seedlings ha^{-1} and 477 saplings ha^{-1}). Examining the bases of all Sha trees ≤ 2 m in height showed that all < 1.7 m in height had post-fire marks. We found a Sha regeneration gap within the height range 1.7–2.7 m (Fig. 2). In informal interviews, local people said that the forests were annually affected by surface fires in the dry season, usually from late February to April. The fires were mostly caused by anthropogenic factors—hunters, swiddeners, and honey producers—and they only burned the surface litter and undergrowth.
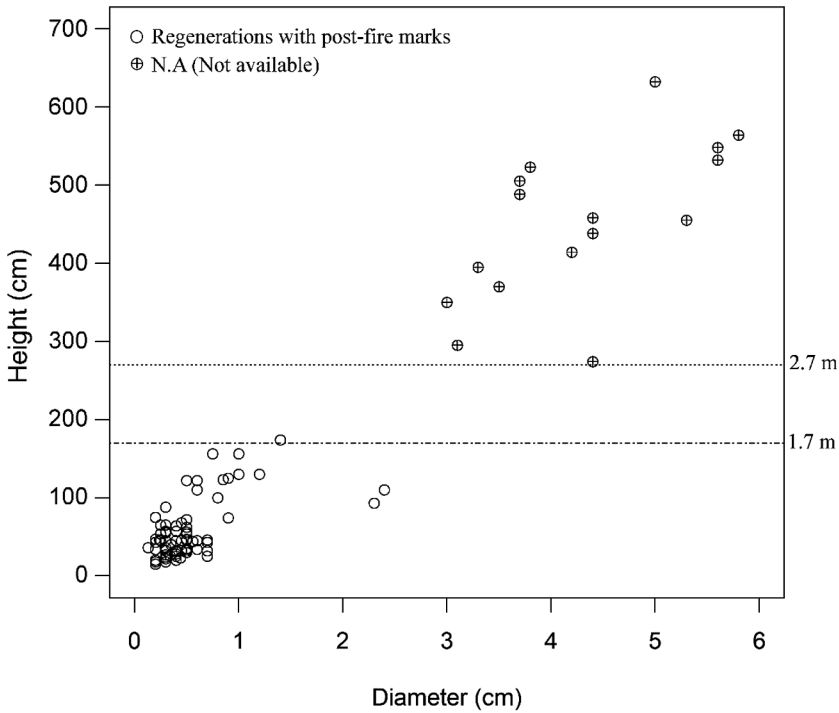
Fig. 2   Sha Seedlings and Saplings (*n* = 88) with Post-fire Marks (burn scars or bark injuries)
All seedlings and only saplings ≤ 2 m in height were examined for post-fire marks.
Diameter (cm) represents DBH for trees > 2 m and D_0 for trees ≤ 2 m height.

Harvesting of Sha Trees

In the harvesting of Sha trees, we found two different diameter criteria and one cutting height criterion (Fig. 3). One diameter criterion was the ODL, 30 cm DBH, set by the local government to regulate cutch production. The local diameter limit (LDL) was 15 cm DBH, used by the local cutch laborers and producers, who claimed that trees of this size were harvestable as their heartwood was then well formed. As the cutting height criterion, cutch producers usually cut trees as close to the ground as possible (≤ 50 cm height) to maximize cutch yield. Thus, stumps ≤ 50 cm in height were inferred to have been harvested for cutch production.

A total of 168 Sha stumps were recorded in the 3.927 ha surveyed. Of these, five were too decomposed to determine whether or not they had been harvested. The other 163 stumps were partitioned into five categories (I, II, III, IV, and V) based on LDL, ODL, and cutting height (Fig. 3). A total of 5% of the stumps (eight stumps, basal area = 0.99 m²) were larger than ODL (categories I and II). The other 95% (155 stumps, basal
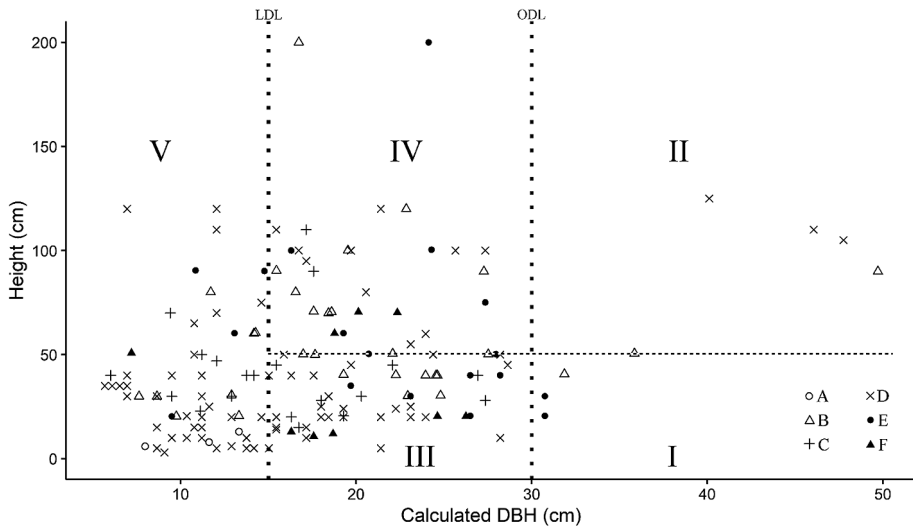
Fig. 3 Analysis of Harvested Sha Stumps ($n = 163$)

Diameter criteria (LDL and ODL) are indicated by the two vertical dotted lines and the height criterion (50 cm) by the horizontal dotted line.

Stump diameter (D_0) was converted to DBH. ODL, official diameter limit (30 cm DBH); LDL, local diameter limit (15 cm DBH).

Based on ODL, I + II = official harvest, III + IV + V = illegal harvest.

Based on LDL, I + II + III + IV = after heartwood well formed, V = before heartwood well formed.

Based on LDL and 50 cm height, I + III = cutch harvest, II + IV = harvest for timber, poles and agricultural tools, V = harvest for wood fuel.

area = 3.79 m²) were smaller than ODL (categories III, IV, and V). Mid-sized stumps, larger than LDL but smaller than ODL, accounted for 55% (90 stumps, basal area = 3.13 m²), representing trees in which heartwood had formed (categories III and IV). Stumps of trees smaller than LDL comprised 40% (65 stumps, basal area = 0.66 m²) (category V).

From LDL and cutting height, we identified different local harvest patterns. Stumps larger than LDL (categories I, II, III, and IV) accounted for 60% (98 stumps, basal area = 4.12 m²) of the total. Of these, 36% (59 stumps, basal area = 2.16 m²) were heartwood-containing trees cut at < 50 cm height (categories I and III). A further 24% (39 stumps, basal area = 1.96 m²) were heartwood-containing trees cut at > 50 cm height (categories II and IV). In total, Sha trees with a basal area of 4.78 m² had been harvested for various purposes, including wood fuel, cutch, poles, and agricultural tools. In informal interviews with locals, we learned that smaller trees were preferable for wood fuel and charcoal because they were easier to harvest, handle, and carry. The Sha harvest rate was 1.22 m² ha⁻¹ in the basal area.

Structure of Stands Containing Sha

A total of 415 standing trees were recorded in the 3.927 ha surveyed. We observed seven broken or damaged tree trunks (Fig. 4). Across all stands, we observed only two mature trees larger than the ODL (category I, 3.8% of total basal area, 0.06 m² ha⁻¹), in stands F and B (Fig. 5). The tree in stand B was not harvested because it was infected by *Ganoderma lucidum* fungi: such trees cannot be used in cutch production (Troup and Joshi 1983, 17; Wulijarni-Soetjipto and Siemonsma 1991, 38). Only one other tree with a diameter > ODL was found in stand F; although this tree was a healthy one, the reason
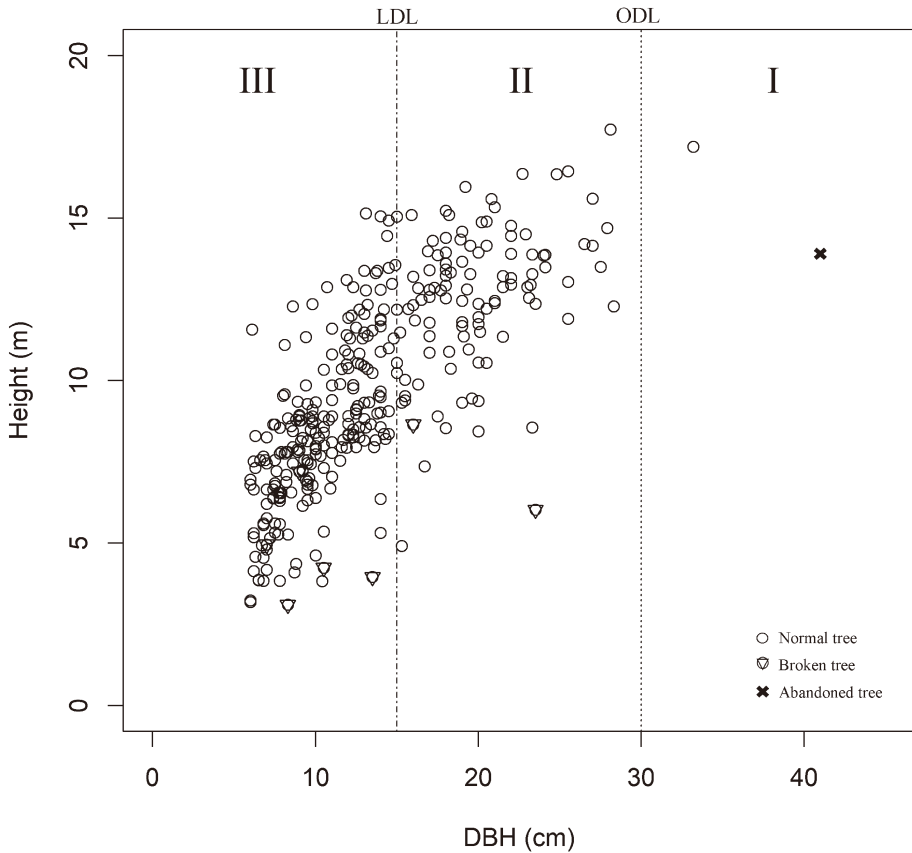
Fig. 4   Stand Structure of Sha Trees (*n* = 415) in All Periods (3.927 ha total)
Diameter criteria (LDL and ODL) are indicated by two vertical dotted lines.
ODL, official diameter limit (30 cm DBH); LDL, local diameter limit (15 cm DBH).
Based on heartwood formation, I + II = trees after heartwood well-formed; III = trees before heartwood well-formed.
I = 2 trees, 0.06 m² ha⁻¹ (3.8% of total basal area).
II = 108 trees, 0.87 m² ha⁻¹ (55.4% of total basal area).
III = 305 trees, 0.64 m² ha⁻¹ (40.8% of total basal area).
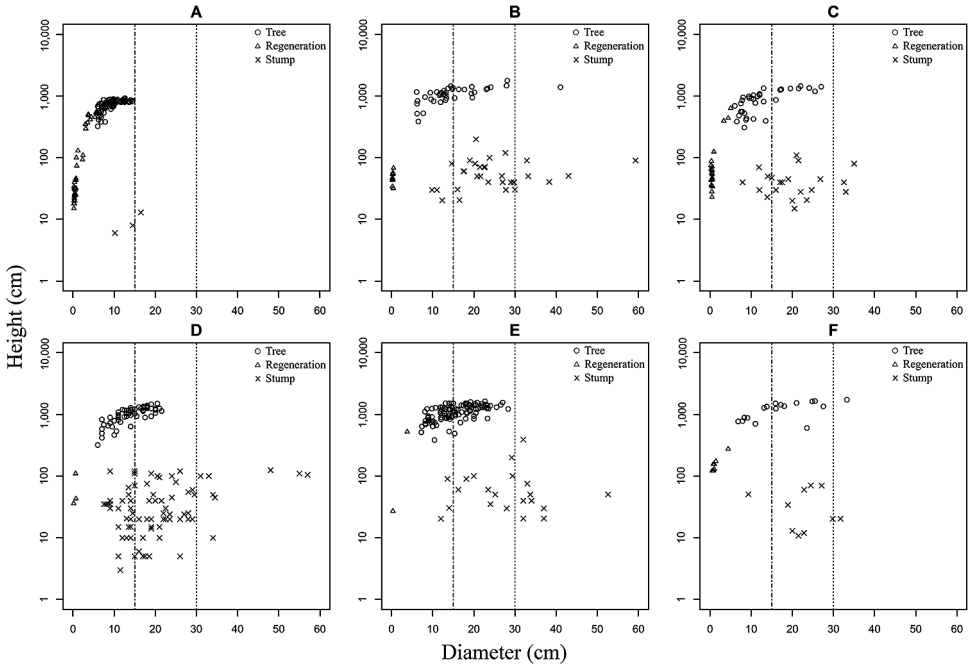
Fig. 5 Population Structure of Sha (seedlings, saplings, trees, and stumps) in Each Stand

Time since last official harvest: A = 1 year, B = 7 years, C = 9 years, D = 15 years, E = 18 years, F = no official harvest within the last 20 years.

Diameter criteria (LDL and ODL) are indicated by two vertical dotted lines.

ODL, official diameter limit (30 cm DBH); LDL, local diameter limit (15 cm DBH).

Diameter (cm) = DBH for trees and saplings > 2 m in height. = D_0 for seedlings and saplings ≤ 2 m in height and for stumps.

for its not being locally harvested was unknown (Fig. 5). The heartwood-containing trees that fell between the ODL and LDL accounted for 26% (108 trees) of the total standing trees and occupied 55.4% (0.87 m^2 ha^{-1}) of the total basal area. Trees smaller than the LDL accounted for 73.5% (305 trees) of the total standing trees and occupied 40.8% (0.64 m^2 ha^{-1}) of the total basal area (Fig. 4).

Comparison of Vegetation Structure among the Stands with Six Official Harvest Histories
We tested the effects of time since the last official harvest (categorical variable) on the diameter of Sha trees (quantitative variable). The DBH [$H = 137.43$, $P < 0.001$] and height [$H = 138.92$, $P < 0.001$] of Sha trees differed significantly among the six stands. According to pairwise comparison, DBH and height in stand A were lowest and significantly different from all other stands (B, C, D, E, and F). The greatest DBH difference (7.99 cm) and the greatest height difference (4.76 m) were found between stands F and

A. Except for stand C, which differed from E in DBH, stands B, D, E, and F, which had the same management status but different harvest histories, did not differ significantly. The tree height of stand C differed from B, E, and F, and that of stand D differed from F (Table 2). Among stands, we found significant differences in diameter [$H = 19.55$, $P < 0.05$] and height [$H = 25.97$, $P < 0.001$] of Sha stumps. According to pairwise comparison, the diameter was not significantly different among other stands (A, B, C, E, and F) except in stand D, which differed from E. The height of A was lowest among stands and significantly differed from stands B, C, and E. Stand D differed from B and E in stump height, and it had the greatest density (139 stumps ha^{-1}) of Sha stumps (Table 2).

Among non-Sha trees, a significant difference in DBH [$H = 13.13$, $P < 0.05$] was observed. However, according to pairwise comparison, DBH differences were not found among the stands (A, B, C, E, and F) except in D, which differed significantly from E. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant height differences [$H = 14.44$, $P < 0.05$]. According to pairwise comparison, stand A was lowest and significantly different from B, C, and F. Stand D differed significantly from F (Table 2). We found significant diameter differences of non-Sha stumps ($H = 23.78$, $P < 0.001$). Stand D was lowest and significantly different from stands A, C, and E. Additionally, we found stand D had the greatest density of total (Sha + non-Sha) stumps and was second nearest to the villages (Table 1). Stand F differed significantly from A and E in stump diameter. The stump height of non-Sha species did not differ significantly ($H = 8.63$, $P > 0.05$) (Table 2).

Discussion

According to A. Raizada and G. P. Juyal (2012, 169), Sha requires strong light and does not tolerate shade during regeneration. Bamboo and teak are also light-demanding species (Hla Maung Thein *et al.* 2007). The dominance of light-demanding species (Appendix) at our sites might be an indicator of past disturbances in the forests. Older canopy trees may have been felled by past fire or logging, leaving gaps that light-demanding tree species could later occupy (Fig. 6). Commercial hardwood species harvested in Myanmar can be divided into five categories, based on utility class and commercial value (Appendix). *Xylia xylocarpa* belongs to group I, and Sha and *L. villosa* belong to group V (lesser-known species). Teak is the most valuable commercial timber species in Myanmar. Despite being a lesser-known species, Sha was the most commonly harvested species at our sites because of its use in cutch production. *Terminalia* species were also heavily harvested; in cutch production, the bark of *Terminalia* species is added to provide color and as a hardener (Dautremer 1913, 251). However, the locals in Saw Township reported that

Table 2 Structural Attributes of Sha and Non-Sha Trees in the Six Stands

Species	Stand	Management Status	Standing Trees (Stems)				Stumps		
			Mean DBH ± SD (cm)	Mean Height ± SD (m)	Basal Area (m² ha⁻¹)	Density (trees ha⁻¹)	Mean Diameter ± SD (cm)	Mean Height ± SD (cm)	Density (Stumps ha⁻¹)
Sha	A	PPF	9.22 ± 2.00[a]	7.38 ± 0.14[a]	2.87	410	13.73 ± 3.22[ab]	9.00 ± 3.61[a]	8
	B	RF	14.83 ± 7.22[bc]	10.94 ± 0.28[bc]	1.41	66	24.71 ± 10.01[ab]	60.24 ± 36.07[b]	53
	C	RF	12.60 ± 5.82[b]	8.83 ± 0.35[d]	0.87	58	20.22 ± 7.22[ab]	43.89 ± 24.56[bc]	36
	D	RF	13.95 ± 4.24[bc]	10.08 ± 0.28[bd]	1.70	102	20.05 ± 9.34[a]	39.77 ± 34.87[ac]	139
	E	RF	15.78 ± 5.06[c]	11.11 ± 0.29[bc]	1.90	88	27.23 ± 9.97[b]	59.71 ± 42.28[b]	18
	F	RF	17.21 ± 7.72[bc]	12.14 ± 0.37[c]	0.80	29	22.85 ± 6.29[ab]	36.23 ± 24.48[abc]	17
Non-Sha	A	PPF	13.58 ± 9.56[ab]	7.13 ± 0.14[a]	1.61	80	40.00 ± 3.61[a]	38.67 ± 15.14	48
	B	RF	13.48 ± 6.31[ab]	10.61 ± 0.26[bc]	5.69	329	30.85 ± 12.94[abc]	69.20 ± 15.84	21
	C	RF	12.24 ± 6.06[ab]	9.84 ± 0.23[bc]	4.48	308	30.70 ± 18.04[ab]	76.27 ± 41.00	117
	D	RF	10.35 ± 4.07[a]	9.48 ± 0.35[ab]	6.27	647	14.67 ± 3.41[c]	72.00 ± 38.53	95
	E	RF	15.10 ± 10.04[b]	10.01 ± 0.33[abc]	9.00	350	43.09 ± 8.20[a]	82.14 ± 37.54	42
	F	RF	13.05 ± 5.89[ab]	11.20 ± 0.32[c]	9.03	562	17.24 ± 3.66[bc]	42.68 ± 28.45	127

Values were calculated for individual stems (≥ 6 cm DBH) and stumps, exclusive of seedlings and saplings. Values are mean ± standard deviation. Values sharing a common letter are not significantly different among the six stands (p > 0.05, adjusted p values using Benjamini-Hochberg method) by pairwise Wilcoxon rank sum comparison after the Kruskal-Wallis test.

Fig. 6   Photos of (a) Sha-bearing Forest Canopies, and (b) Stand Structure

they did not adulterate their cutch because it reduced the quality, making it less marketable.   Thus, *Terminalia* is likely to have been utilized for other purposes, especially for wood fuel.

In relation to forest undergrowth structure (Fig. 2), fire appears to have affected regeneration, since we found post-fire marks on seedlings and saplings, and a regeneration gap within the height range 1.7–2.7 m.   These findings were supported by two studies by R. S. Troup and H. B. Joshi (1983, 10–12) and P. A. Stott *et al.* (1990, 32–44).   According to the former, Sha seedlings have good recovery power; they die back due to fire in dry seasons and eventually shoot up when the rain falls.   Thus, the majority of regenerations under 1.7 m were probably new shoots being sent up from the portions of the taproots surviving in the ground after fire.   Stott *et al.* (1990, 32–44) have stated that fire can kill part or all of a plant, and a plant's susceptibility to fire depends on fire intensity, length of exposure to fire, and the plant's anatomical features, such as bark thickness and stem diameter.   For example, small trees of a given species are more easily killed than large ones.   The flame height of a tropical lowland forest fire can range from 0.5 to 2 m (Stott *et al.* 1990, 32–44).   The flame height might be the threshold for seedlings transitioning into established saplings.   If those seedlings grow fast enough to escape the next dry season's surface fire, they might be able to reach the established regeneration stage.[1]   Otherwise, they might again be affected by the surface fire in the next dry season. The phenomenon of dying back and shooting up might be repeated until the regenerations pass the fire threshold.   In this study, the regenerations we observed above 2.7 m were probably fire-resistant regenerations, and some or all of them might have been affected by fire at least once during their establishment.   The linkage between our study and the

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1) The height growth of Sha seedlings commences when the rains start; it is vigorous during the rains and comes to a complete stop in October.   Experiments at Dehra Dun, India, showed that the average height attained by Sha seedlings was 1.3 m in one growing season, 2 m in two growing seasons, and 3 m in three growing seasons (Troup and Joshi 1983, 10–12).

above two studies by Troup and Joshi (1983, 10–12) and Stott *et al.* (1990, 32–44) could explain why young Sha regenerations were more vulnerable to fire and why the regeneration gap was observed. The costs and benefits of surface fire have been much debated in Myanmar (Myat Thinn 2000). Fire can harm the regeneration of some species. Suzuki Reiji *et al.* (2004) studied the impact of forest fires on reforestation in the Bago Region of Myanmar and concluded that such fires had a detrimental effect on the long-term sustainability of teak reforestation. However, fire can aid in the regeneration of some species by helping to break the dormancy of seeds (e.g., Sha and teak). Although Sha withstands fire well, its growth is inhibited and many young seedlings die or sustain fire damage from the annual firing of grasslands (Troup and Joshi 1983, 12). Given the regeneration gap and post-fire marks we observed, we suspect that annual surface fires hinder the regeneration of Sha.

From a policy perspective, every harvested Sha stump smaller than the ODL (Fig. 3) may be said to be "illegally" cut. In other words, the ODL can be regarded as the *de jure* diameter limit. From the locals' perspective, on the other hand, this "illegal" harvest seemed rational. Because cutch is produced from heartwood, producers can harvest trees as small as 15 cm DBH, the minimum diameter for heartwood formation. In other words, a DBH of 15 cm was the *de facto* diameter limit (or LDL) used by local cutch harvesters. This is similar to the finding by S. S. Wanage *et al.* (2013) that the heartwood content of Sha trees is 40–50% once they reach 15 cm DBH. The heartwood content of trees increases in proportion to stem weight, and commercial harvesting can be initiated when trees attain a diameter of ≥ 15 cm (Wanage *et al.* 2013, 9). However, we found that heartwood-containing trees were not utilized solely for cutch production. Stumps with a diameter greater than the LDL and < 50 cm in height were likely to be from trees harvested for cutch production. On the other hand, stumps larger than the LDL and > 50 cm in height were likely to be from trees harvested for the manufacture of poles or agricultural implements. Sha wood is reported by locals to be durable and hard enough to be used in wooden harrows for agriculture. Sha fuelwood and charcoal are said to burn long and are thus used by blacksmiths. Stumps smaller than the LDL are likely to be from Sha trees harvested for wood fuel (fuelwood and charcoal) for two reasons: those trees could not be used to make cutch, poles, or agricultural tools; and smaller trees are convenient to cut, handle, and carry for fuel or charcoal making. There are several limitations in estimating how much wood was harvested for each purpose. We might have underestimated the harvest quantity because some stumps might have decomposed. Conversely, we might have overestimated the harvest quantity because some stumps < 50 cm in height might also have been harvested not only for cutch but also for making poles or tools. However, chances of harvesting at < 50 cm height for poles and tools are

very low for two reasons: cutting at lower heights is laborious, and the amount of heart-wood is relatively less important for such purposes as poles or tools.

We observed only two Sha trees larger than the ODL (Fig. 4), likely due to preferential local harvesting of young trees for cutch, wood fuel, and timber for subsistence and commercial purposes. If the largest tree had not been affected by fungi, it might also have been harvested. In fact, all Sha in RFs, regardless of size, are officially reserved by the government solely for cutch production. Nevertheless, heartwood-containing trees (category II, Fig. 4), accounting for > 50% of the total basal area, might be the *de facto* local reserves for future cutch production. Trees in category III (Fig. 4), which could be used for wood fuel, were developing into heartwood-containing trees. Therefore, reserving trees in category III is important for sustainable cutch production, and failing to maintain the balance between harvesting for different purposes could decrease the future cutch yield.

According to a comparison of stand structure among stands (Table 2, Fig. 5), the DBH and height of Sha species in stand A were lowest and significantly different from all the other stands; however, the DBH of non-Sha trees was not. The significant difference in DBH and height between stand A and the other stands is probably due to two reasons. First, stand A was harvested most recently (one year ago), and all remaining trees were smaller than LDL. This alternatively indicates that in stand A, it was possible that locals harvested all trees larger than LDL (Fig. 5). Second, stand A is a PPF, a forest type that is different from RFs and whose legal protection is not as strict as RFs' (Table 2). Proximity to the villages might also be a factor affecting the significant differences in DBH and height among stands. For example, stands C and D were nearest to the villages (Table 1), and thus they had the largest density of (Sha + non-sha) stumps; and they were significantly different from stands B, E, and F (Table 2). The mean DBHs of Sha trees in stands B, D, E, and F, which had the same management status but different official harvest histories, did not differ significantly from each other. Reasonably, differences in official harvest histories signified differences in DBH among the stands if the official regulation did work. However, time since the last official harvest did not considerably affect the DBH of Sha trees, perhaps owing to local harvest patterns especially based on heartwood formation. Stump data indicated that in all stands, the official and local harvest for cutch might be synchronized[2] and/or the cutch harvest is possibly accompanied by the local harvest for non-cutch purposes (Figs. 3, 5).[3] Tual Cin Khai

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2) Cutch production is seasonal (usually from December to February), indicating that although they have different legal status, both official and local harvests are temporally the same. During production season local people make encampments near the streams in the forests, where both legally and illegally harvested Sha can be obtained.

3) Local (illegal) harvesting for non-cutch purposes is non-seasonal and can take place all year round.

et al. (2016) conducted a field survey in teak-bearing forests and showed that repeated logging at shorter intervals could strongly degrade the forest, resulting in stands with very poor stocking, even of species with lower commercial value. They also confirmed that forest degradation was exacerbated by illegal logging, which often took place one or two years after official logging. Other field studies (Hla Maung Thein *et al.* 2007; Myat Su Mon *et al.* 2012; Tual Cin Khai *et al.* 2016; Zar Chi Win *et al.* 2018; Tual Cin Khai *et al.* 2020) have investigated the structure of selectively logged teak-bearing forests in Myanmar, and their conclusions converged toward deforestation and forest degradation being caused by "illegal" logging. Here, we found that the overall forest structure, though marginal, still seemed to meet local needs, because we found considerable recruitment of seedlings, saplings, and pole-size trees (Figs. 2, 4); this was also supported by the reverse J-shaped population structure (many small trees and few medium to large trees) (however, the curve is not shown in Figs. 2 and 4). Thus, from a policy perspective the forests were degrading, but from a local perspective they still seemed to meet local needs.

"Scientific" forest management in Myanmar began in 1856 with the introduction of a selection system, later accompanied by the adoption of management practices from India, which is a major producer of cutch. In India, Sha is carefully managed using silvicultural methods. In moist forests, the preferred size for cutch manufacture is 30–35 cm in diameter, with a felling cycle of ten to thirty years. In dry forests, the exploitable diameter is as low as 10 cm. Branches with a heartwood diameter of at least 2.5 cm are also used to obtain cutch (Awang and Taylor 1993, 157). The official working plan of Sha forest management in the study area prescribed selective felling of trees over an exploitable diameter, called the official diameter limit (ODL). Bryant (1998, 87) stated that the introduction of "scientific forestry" focusing on timber production while denying conventional forest use by local people during the colonial and postcolonial era led to "illegal" forest use. Illegal felling of Sha is likely to persist as long as forest management policy puts more emphasis on regulations than on local utilization and the biology of heartwood formation. At the local level, competition among different local utilization patterns (Fig. 3) might exacerbate illegal logging. This disconnect between government regulations, which are not effective at controlling logging despite state landownership, and local Sha forest users, who lack a sense of ownership, is likely to lead to resource depletion by the creation of *de facto* open access (Feeny *et al.* 1990, 8; Ostrom *et al.* 1999, 279). State ownership is seldom associated with successful management in less-developed countries in South Asia and Africa. In contrast, evidence is accumulating on successful community management in which users are able to restrict access to the resource and establish rules among themselves for its sustainable use (Feeny *et al.* 1990, 9–14). Study of these suc-

cesses suggests that community management through clearly defined property rights could improve management of Sha forests for sustainable cutch production. If the local community feels that the Sha forests belong to them, they might willingly protect their own groves. Under community management, Sha forests might be controlled by a distinguishable community of interdependent users. These users might exclude outsiders while regulating use by members of the local community. They might set their own harvest diameter limits, regulations, and management plans. In this situation, local people might manage the forest by sustainably harvesting the trees to maintain a balance among utilization for cutch production, wood fuel, and timber.

Overall, we found Sha forest structure is probably shaped by two factors: multiple local utilizations (including LDL) and surface fire. Given these two limiting factors, the government should focus on promotion of community forestry, with allocation of state-owned forests as community-owned Sha forests with multiple utilization patterns. It should also provide regular or intermittent financial and technical fire control support (i.e., prescribed or controlled burning or building of fire breaks). Since sustainable forest management depends on acceptance by all stakeholders (Günter *et al.* 2012, 26), the government and local community should cooperatively manage Sha forests not only for cutch production but also for wood fuel and timber.

Conclusion

We examined the management of Sha-bearing forests in Myanmar from the perspectives of official regulation and local utilization. From the official perspective, Sha trees are reserved solely for cutch production, which is regulated by the diameter limit set by the government, allowing only trees exceeding 30 cm in DBH to be cut. However, our data revealed that the official harvesting regulations were outweighed by local "illegal" harvesting customs, in which the diameter limit was based on heartwood formation. As well, different local utilization purposes and patterns might exacerbate "illegal" cutting. Although cutch boilers were willing to reserve Sha trees for cutch production, other local people wanted to utilize these trees for wood fuel, charcoal production, and making agricultural implements. We conclude that Sha forest structure is probably shaped by two factors: LDL and surface fire. Further studies are required on the long-term effects of surface fire and LDL on the natural regeneration of Sha-bearing forests.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix List of Species with Their Importance Value (IV), Composition, and Timber Grade

Family	Species	Local Name	Importance Value (IV)	Presence (☆) / Absence (–)						Overall Count (in All Stands)			Timber Grade
				A	B	C	D	E	F	Regeneration	Tree	Stump	
Mimosaceae	*Acacia catechu*	Sha	64	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+++++	+++++	++++	5
Mimosaceae	*Acacia leucophloea*	Ta Naung	1	–	–	–	☆	–	–	+	+	–	5
Rubiaceae	*Adina cordifolia*	Hnaw	7	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	2
Rutaceae	*Aegle marmelos*	Okshit	0	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	–	–	5
Mimosaceae	*Albizia chinensis*	Bon Mae Sar	5	–	☆	–	–	☆	–	–	+	–	5
Mimosaceae	*Albizia lebbek*	Kokko	5	–	–	–	☆	☆	☆	+	+	–	2
Mimosaceae	*Albizia odoratissima*	Thit-magyi	13	–	–	☆	–	☆	☆	+	++	–	2
Combretaceae	*Anogeissus acuminata*	Yone	14	–	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	++++	++	+	3
Euphorbiaceae	*Antidesma collettii*	Kinbilin	0	–	–	–	–	–	☆	+	–	–	5
Moraceae	*Artocarpus chaplasha*	Taung-peinne	0	–	–	–	–	–	☆	+	–	–	3
Poaceae	*Bambusa tulda*	Thaik-wa	0	–	☆	–	–	–	–	+	–	–	5
Caesalpiniaceae	*Bauhinia racemosa*	Palan	2	–	–	–	☆	☆	–	+	+	–	5
Bombacaceae	*Bombax ceiba*	Letpan	3	–	–	☆	–	☆	☆	+	+	–	4
Bombacaceae	*Bombax insigne*	Didu	0	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	–	–	4
Euphorbiaceae	*Bridelia retusa*	Seik Chay Bo	2	–	☆	☆	–	☆	–	++	+	–	5
Euphorbiaceae	*Bridelia tomentosa*	Chinya	0	–	–	–	☆	–	–	+	–	–	5
Fabaceae	*Butea monosperma*	Htone Pauk	5	–	☆	☆	☆	☆	–	++	+	–	5
Caesalpiniaceae	*Caesalpinia crista*	Sugauk-net	2	–	–	–	☆	–	–	++	+	+	5
Caesalpiniaceae	*Caesalpinia cucullata*	Kyaung-kyet	0	–	–	–	–	–	☆	+	–	–	5
Verbenaceae	*Callicarpa tomentosa*	Kyun-nalin	1	–	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	–	5
Caesalpiniaceae	*Cassia grandis*	Ngu Sat	0	–	☆	–	☆	–	–	+	–	–	5
Meliaceae	*Cedrela microcarpa*	Taw-tama	0	–	☆	–	–	–	–	+	–	–	5
Ulmaceae	*Celtis cinnamomea*	Kha-baung	3	–	–	–	☆	☆	–	–	+	–	5
Meliaceae	*Chukrasia tabularis*	Yinma	2	–	☆	–	☆	☆	☆	+	+	–	2
Hypericaceae	*Cratoxylum ligustrinum*	Bebya (Pae-ma-kyit)	6	–	–	–	☆	☆	–	+++	+	+	5
Euphorbiaceae	*Croton oblongifolius*	Thetyin-gyi	1	–	–	–	☆	☆	–	+	+	–	5
Fabaceae	*Dalbergia lanceolaria*	Thitpagan	3	–	☆	–	☆	–	☆	+	+	–	5
Poaceae	*Dendrocalamus strictus*	Hmyin-wa	0	–	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+++++	–	–	–

Appendix   List of Species with Their Importance Value (IV), Composition, and Timber Grade   —continued—

Family	Species	Local Name	Importance Value (IV)	Presence (☆) / Absence (–)						Overall Count (in All Stands)			Timber Grade
				A	B	C	D	E	F	Regeneration	Tree	Stump	
Ebenaceae	*Diospyros burmanica*	Te	1	–	☆	–	–	☆	☆	–	+	–	5
Ebenaceae	*Diospyros montana*	Gyok	0	–	–	☆	☆	☆	☆	+	–	–	5
Bignoniaceae	*Dolichandrone serrulata*	Tha-kut	4	–	☆	–	–	☆	☆	+	+	+	5
Euphorbiaceae	*Emblica officinalis*	Zibyu	2	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	+	–	5
Acanthaceae	*Eranthemum macrophyll*	Tamase	0	–	–	–	–	–	☆	+	–	–	5
Acanthaceae	*Eranthemum splendens*	Paung Kaung	0	–	–	–	☆	–	☆	+++	–	–	5
Fabaceae	*Erythrina arborescens*	Ka-thit	7	–	–	–	–	☆	–	–	+	–	5
Fabaceae	*Erythrina stricta*	Taung-kathit	0	–	☆	–	–	☆	–	+	–	–	5
Simaroubaceae	*Harrisonia perforata*	Tabu	12	–	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+	++	–	5
Apocynaceae	*Holarrhena pubescens*	Lettok	1	–	–	–	☆	☆	–	++	+	–	4
Ulmaceae	*Holoptelea integrifolia*	Pyauk-seik	2	–	–	–	–	☆	–	–	+	–	5
Rubiaceae	*Hymenodictyon orixense*	Khu-than	5	–	☆	☆	–	☆	☆	+	+	+	5
Juglandaceae	*Juglans regia*	Thitkya	4	–	–	–	☆	☆	☆	+	+	–	5
Lythraceae	*Lagerstroemia tomentosa*	Leza	0	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	–	–	5
Lythraceae	*Lagerstroemia villosa*	Zaungbale	11	–	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+	++	+	5
Anacardiaceae	*Lannea coromandelica*	Nabe	3	☆	–	–	☆	☆	–	+	+	–	4
Loranthaceae	*Loranthus graciliflorus*	Win Ahu	0	–	–	–	☆	–	–	+	–	–	5
Fabaceae	*Millettia pendula*	Thin Win	7	☆	–	–	☆	☆	☆	++	+	–	1
Rubiaceae	*Mitragyna rotundifolia*	Binga	3	–	☆	☆	–	☆	–	+	+	+	2
Rubiaceae	*Morinda tinctoria*	Ni Pa Say	1	☆	–	–	–	☆	–	+	+	–	5
Rubiaceae	*Nauclea sesslifolia*	Thit-phayaung	0	–	–	☆	–	–	☆	+	–	–	5
Bignoniaceae	*Oroxylum indicum*	Kyaung-shar	1	–	☆	–	☆	☆	–	+	+	–	5
Santalaceae	*Osyris wightiana*	Zaung-gyan	0	☆	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	5
Verbenaceae	*Premna tomentosa*	Kyun-bo	0	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	–	–	5
Fabaceae	*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*	Padauk	4	–	☆	–	–	☆	☆	+++	+	+	1
Sterculiaceae	*Pterospermum semisagittatum*	Nagye	1	–	–	–	☆	–	–	+	+	+	5
Euphorbiaceae	*Sauropus albicans*	Maung-makaw	2	–	–	–	☆	–	☆	+	+	–	5
Meliaceae	*Soymida febrifuga*	Dant-tagu-ni	1	–	–	–	–	☆	–	+	+	–	5

Family	Species	Local name	IV										Grade
Anacardiaceae	*Spondias pinnata*	Gwe	0	−	−	−	−	☆	−	+	−	−	5
Bignoniaceae	*Stereospermum neuranthum*	Hin-ngoke	0	−	−	☆	−	−	−	+	−	+	5
Lamiaceae	*Tectona grandis*	Kyun	27	−	−	☆	−	☆	−	++	++++	+	Premium
Lamiaceae	*Tectona hamiltoniana*	Dahat	4	☆	−	−	−	−	−	+	+	+	5
Fabaceae	*Tephrosia candida*	Toe-hay	6	−	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+	+	+	5
Combretaceae	*Terminalia bellerica*	Thit-seint	2	−	−	−	☆	☆	−	+	+	−	5
Combretaceae	*Terminalia oliveri*	Than	4	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	++	+	+	5
Combretaceae	*Terminalia pyrifolia*	Lein	8	−	☆	☆	☆	−	−	+	+	+	5
Combretaceae	*Terminalia tomentosa*	Tauk-kyant	5	☆	☆	☆	−	−	−	+	+	+	3
Cucurbitaceae	*Trichosanthes bracteata*	Kyi Ar	1	−	−	−	−	☆	☆	+	+	+	5
—	unidentified	—	5	−	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+	+	+	5
Verbenaceae	*Vitex limonifolia*	Kyungauk-nwe	2	−	−	−	−	☆	☆	++	+	+	5
Sterculiaceae	*Waltheria indica*	Khwe-tayaw	5	−	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	++	+	+	5
Mimosaceae	*Xylia xylocarpa*	Pyinkado	18	−	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	+++	+++	+	1
Rhamnaceae	*Ziziphus rugosa*	Zi-talaing	0	☆	−	−	−	−	−	+	−	−	5

Species are arranged in alphabetical order. Importance value (IV) for each tree species with ≥ 6 cm DBH was calculated as the sum of relative density, relative frequency, and relative dominance. Each "+" indicates 1–10 individuals. + indicates 41–50, ++ indicates 51–60, etc. Timber is classified into five grades according to utility class and commercial value. Teak is premium, and grade 1 is the best, followed by grades 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Malaysia's New Economic Policy:
Fifty Years of Polarization and Impasse

Hwok-Aun Lee*

The New Economic Policy has transformed Malaysia since 1971. Pro-Bumiputera affirmative action has been intensively pursued and continuously faced pushback. This paper revisits three key junctures in the NEP's fifty-year history that heightened policy debates—and the ensuing persistent polarization and stalemate in policy discourses. First, at its inception in the early 1970s, despite substantial clarity in its two-pronged poverty alleviation and social restructuring structure, the NEP was marred by gaps and omissions, notably its ambiguity on policy mechanisms and long-term implications, and inordinate emphasis on Bumiputera equity ownership. Broader discourses have imbibed these elements, and they tend to be more selective than systematic in policy critique. Second, during the late 1980s, rousing deliberations on the successor to the NEP settled on a growth-oriented strategy that basically retained the NEP framework and extended ethnicity-driven compromises. Third, since 2010, notions of reform and alternatives to the NEP's affirmative action program have been propagated, which despite bold proclamations again amount to partial and selective—not comprehensive—change. Affirmative action presently drifts along, with minor modifications and incoherent reform rhetoric stemming from conflation of the NEP's two prongs. Breaking out of the prevailing polarization and impasse requires a systematic and constructive rethink.

Keywords: Malaysia, New Economic Policy, affirmative action, ethnicity

Introduction

The year 2021 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP reconfigured Malaysia's political economy and, most pivotally, cemented pro-Bumiputera affirmative action—preferential programs to promote the majority group's participation in higher education, high-level occupations, enterprise management and control, and wealth ownership. During the policy's official phase of 1971–90, the Malaysian government implemented vast affirmative action programs; but the NEP also

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provided the imprimatur for myriad interventions long beyond that time frame. The Bumiputera category, comprising about 70 percent of Malaysia's current citizen population, consists of Malays (56 percent) and other indigenous groups (14 percent).

While everyone readily agrees that the NEP fundamentally transformed Malaysia, opinion toward its enduring presence is polarized and stalemated. Advocates assert that the NEP achieved tremendous success but remains unfinished business; detractors vouch that the NEP largely failed and has overstayed beyond its expiry date. This historical milestone presents an opportunity to re-appreciate the NEP's strengths, critically review its contents, and revisit its passage across time. The NEP judiciously distinguished its core elements of eradicating poverty and social restructuring, which pursued distinct objectives through distinct policy instruments. However, its framework was also marred by gaps and omissions, and popular and academic discourses have tended to reproduce the official framework or to make minor modifications branded as major changes, hindering the formulation of coherent solutions and perpetuating policy impasse. Current debates largely fudge, rather than confront, the complex challenge of preferential policies.

This paper examines the contorted state of NEP-related discourses through the lenses of three key junctures in the policy's history. First, although the NEP set out a well-crafted two-pronged strategy, it also shaped policy discourses through major omissions and biases: ambiguity on policy mechanisms, ultimate objectives, and the implications of attaining targets; demarcation of domains for applying ethnic quotas; inordinate emphasis on Bumiputera equity ownership; and overstatement of the role of economic growth in providing opportunity and the unattainable assurance that no group would feel deprived.

Second, policy debates flourished as Malaysia neared 1990, especially within the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC), which made proposals for the NEP's successor. The NECC report, and the official decade-long road map termed the National Development Policy (NDP) (1991–2000), retained the NEP's core, including the above-mentioned omissions, while couching the overarching agenda as "growth with equity." While the private sector was designated a more important role and investment conditions were selectively liberalized, the Bumiputera—especially Malay capitalist—development agenda actually intensified, while economic growth and private higher education placated minority discontent.

Third, another twenty years later, a "new economic muddle" mainstreamed misguided policy alternatives and false promises of change, engendering a peculiar state of affairs surrounding the NEP's second prong. The New Economic Model (NEM) of 2010 proposed refashioning affirmative action in a nebulous "market-friendly" manner taking

into account "need" and "merit." While the NEM effectively involved selective tweaks and modifications, it projected itself as a bold departure from the extant race-based preferential treatment. A fierce backlash ensued, which the government assuaged by introducing a Bumiputera economic transformation program. The program's emphasis on dynamic Bumiputera SMEs was timely and reasonable, although—like the NEM—it involved selective interventions, not systemic transformation. Policy rhetoric continually propagates sweeping statements on how Malaysia should conduct affirmative action on the basis of "need" instead of race, omitting rigorous scrutiny of pro-Bumiputera programs. These discourses conflate poverty alleviation with affirmative action, and they perpetuate both muddled perspectives and misplaced expectations of reform.

This paper proceeds with three main segments. The first revisits and critiques the original NEP debates and the program's reception in the early to mid-1970s; the second unpacks the NECC-NDP deliberations and outcomes of the late 1980s and early 1990s; the third assesses the debates of the past decade prompted by the NEM. The paper traces out conceptual, practical, and political factors that help explain the NEP's trajectory. Conceptually, the NEP's gaps and omissions have been retained while its cogent two-pronged structure has faded from collective consciousness. Practically, discourses on affirmative action outcomes and implications have fixated on quantitative targets and monolithic deadlines instead of the capability and readiness of Bumiputeras to undertake change, and opted for simplistic platitudes rather than systematic alternatives that integrate identity, need, and merit. Politically, UMNO has continuously applied pressure, with occasional fiery bursts, to retain preferential treatment for Bumiputeras. However, the current situation is also characterized by political postures on all sides that ultimately evade rather than resolve the problems. The paper concludes with some suggestions for a more systematic and constructive approach for Malaysia to move beyond fifty years of polarization and impasse on the NEP, involving a fundamental shift from the two prongs of poverty reduction and social restructuring to the principles of equality and fairness.

The New Economic Policy at Birth: Foundations and Enduring Precedents

The "Two Prongs": Compromise and Clarity
The natural and seemingly familiar starting point is the New Economic Policy's original wording. This inquiry undertakes a fresh and direct reading of the relevant policy documents, in view of popular and academic discourses on the NEP that have tended to reproduce abridged versions or relied on secondhand and partial recollections. The

literature generally upholds the NEP's noble goal of national unity, its two-pronged framework, and its assurances to minority groups, but it also tends to limit the analysis to these rudiments, omitting policy specifics.

The fiftieth anniversary is an opportune moment to revisit the process of compromise through which the NEP was forged, and to re-appreciate the clarity of its two-pronged structure. We should note that the policy emerged as part of a continuum. Demands for more proactive promotion of Bumiputera industry and commerce had intensified in the latter 1960s, notably with the First and Second Bumiputera Congress in 1965 and 1968, which made extensive proposals and spurred some change; but the Tunku Abdul Rahman administration did not systemically waver from its *laissez-faire* dispensation (Osman-Rani 1990).

The communal violence of May 13, 1969 traumatized the nation and catalyzed a fundamental policy break. Just Faaland's influence is evident, most pivotally in centralizing the problem of racial imbalances. In a paper written mere weeks after May 13, Faaland decried that the

> current ad hocism of economic policy discussion and decision-making badly needs to be replaced by analysis and consideration of the framework and means of a policy that is relevant to the basic issues of racial balance in economic development and growth. (Faaland 1969a, 247)

The NEP would adopt Faaland's conceptual framework—including a typology of modern versus traditional sectors—which attributed sociopolitical instabilities to interracial imbalances in employment, income, and ownership. Labor market stratification encapsulated the problem: Bumiputeras largely occupied lower-rung jobs, predominantly in the rural and traditional sectors; their participation was acutely low in professional and managerial positions, and in the urban and modern sectors (Faaland 1969a; 1969b).

The policy agenda was contested. Just Faaland, Jack Parkinson, and Rais Saniman's (1990) substantive account of the NEP formulation process offers invaluable firsthand insight, albeit with discernible self-evaluation bias. By this account, the "EPU School," representing the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and sections of the bureaucratic-political establishment, advocated for growth-centric, market-driven, indirect approaches to resolving racial disparities. In marked contrast, the newly formed Department of National Unity (DNU) pressed for redistribution, through robust state intervention, to redress racial imbalances proactively and directly.

The personal affinity of the "DNU School" with Prime Minister Razak, and its resonance with his ideological leanings, gave it the upper hand (Kamal 2019). Nonetheless, the emergence of the NEP's core elements, and the implications of continual policy mindsets and discourses, warrant a deeper look. Another internally circulated paper

by Faaland (1969b) set a more forceful tone. Among the central features of national strategy, Faaland listed in first place that Malaysia should "emphasize racial balance over national growth." The second item tempered that proposition by calling for balanced racial participation in the modern economy instead of redistribution from non-Malays to Malays.

Nonetheless, the lines were drawn, which generated concern over the zealousness of racial redistribution. A March 18, 1970 document titled "The New Economic Policy," issued by the DNU as a directive to all government departments and agencies in formulating the Second Malaysia Plan, stipulated three main objectives: (1) reduction of racial economic disparities; (2) creation of employment opportunities; and (3) promotion of overall economic growth. The DNU also declared, rather pugnaciously, "the Government is determined that the *reduction in racial economic disparities should be the overriding target* even if unforeseen developments occur which pose a harsher conflict than now foreseen between the three objectives" (DNU 1970, 310; italics in original).

Such assertions expectedly triggered pushback. Within the bureaucracy, EPU Director-General Thong Yaw Hong was moved to counterbalance what he characterized as "extreme interventionist measures" (Heng 1997).[1] Through subsequent deliberations, the poverty reduction "irrespective of race" and "no group will feel any sense of deprivation" provisos were inserted, evidently with the intention to safeguard minority group interests. The eventual articulation of the NEP's vision and framework, as a nine-page Chapter 1, "The New Development Strategy," in the Second Malaysia Plan (Malaysia 1971) embodied these ethnicity-driven compromises. The rhetoric of racial disparities and primacy of redistribution were toned down.

The NEP declared national unity as its overarching goal and established its "two-pronged" core objectives of poverty eradication irrespective of race, and accelerating social restructuring in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function. Widespread poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment, and disparities between race groups were identified as major threats to socioeconomic stability.

The two prongs have recycled in the collective consciousness for half a century. A combination of over-familiarity and ad nauseam recitation have perhaps eroded appreciation for the judicious distinction of objectives and instruments encapsulated in the two

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1) Ramon Navaratnam recalls, from close-up observation as an officer in the Treasury, that the DNU proposals were "overdoing" the Malay agenda and that Tan Siew Sin managed to be a "countervailing force" (Kathirasen 2019). There was such a strong and intransigent push for Malay primacy that Tan, as finance minister, was initially not even informed of the NEP's formulation (Author's interview with Ramon Navaratnam, August 16, 2021).

prongs. The NEP affirmed, albeit implicitly, the basic and noble principle that the poor and vulnerable of all groups deserved to be assisted on the basis of equality and dignity. Ethnic identity had no part in the provision of basic needs and in helping all Malaysians attain a minimal standard of living. Racial disparities featured as the problem addressed in the second prong: the identification of race with economic function.

The NEP also emphasized that the two prongs were "inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing," noting that they operated in tandem rather than as replacements for each other (Malaysia 1971, 3). The first would focus on raising productivity, structural change (movement into modern sectors), infrastructure, utilities, education, and social services. The second encompassed modernization of rural economies and "rapid and balanced growth of urban activities," education and training, and "above all, ensure the creation of a [Bumiputera][2] commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation" (Malaysia 1971, 4–6). The NEP grasped that the first and second prongs pursued distinct objectives that called for distinct policy instruments. In other words, the objectives of the second prong could not be achieved by using the instruments of the first.

Gaps and Omissions

Undoubtedly, it is difficult to disagree with the NEP's cornerstones. But a tendency to zealously embrace them has also caused the program's outstanding strengths to be under-appreciated and its subtle gaps and omissions to be overlooked. The NEP was inadequate in three crucial areas.

First, it insufficiently specified policy mechanisms and limits. Most consequentially, the NEP failed to appreciate the salience of Bumiputera preferential treatment to the second prong, and its application in sectors with finite opportunity. Social restructuring was contingent on Bumiputeras' accelerated progress in higher education, upward occupational mobility, and owning and operating of enterprises. It was clearly foreseeable, but scantly acknowledged, that ethnic quotas or other forms of preferential treatment would feature centrally in pursuit of the second prong. Public institutions would also be the primary vehicles: public universities, public sector employment, public finance institutions, and state-owned enterprises (Lee 2021a).

Recognition of preferential treatment would also add urgency to the need to develop capability, competitiveness, and confidence. Awareness of the scope and scale of these

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2) The original NEP, and official discourses through the 1970s, used the term "Malay commercial and industrial community," although it clearly applied to indigenous peoples as well. For consistency and without detracting from the original meaning, we apply the term "Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC)" throughout this paper.

interventions would attune the policy discourses to the reality that economic growth, no matter how rapid, still entailed finite resources to be allocated among contending groups. Instead, the NEP settled on an overpromise: "in the implementation of this Policy, the Government will ensure that no particular group will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation" (Malaysia 1971, 1). This phrase, which emerged not out of philosophical premises but as an ethnically driven compromise, would be a constant focal point of policy debates. A growing economy can continually generate employment and economic opportunity in the private sector. However, Malaysia's affirmative action operates predominantly in public institutions—notably, public university enrollment, public sector employment, or public procurement—where opportunities are limited; and hence redistribution in favor of Bumiputeras cannot avoid some degree of non-Bumiputera exclusion, even if the economy keeps growing.

It may be wishful to expect the NEP to openly acknowledge that Bumiputera preferential treatment was its core element, and that the allocation of finite opportunities would inevitably come at some expense to other groups. But it is evident that the NEP's circumvention of these precepts, intentionally or otherwise, induced misguided thinking and perpetuated policy clashes. NEP advocates believed that a growing economy would assuage minority discontent; detractors highlighted unequal access as a broken promise. Both sides continually talked past each other.

Indeed, by the mid-1970s the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Gerakan while assessing the Third Malaysia Plan markedly invoked the NEP promise that no group would experience any loss or sense of deprivation. Mandated transfers of existing private sector equity clearly violated the promise that only newly created wealth would be affected, but the "no deprivation" provision was taken to apply across the board.[3] In MCA President Lee San Choon's words:

> . . . we welcome the fact that this assurance has now been repeated in the *Third Malaysia Plan* and we trust that it will be adhered to in spirit as well as in substance. Indeed, if we can achieve our targets for the rapid growth and expansion of the economy, there need be no cause to fear that this assurance will be compromised. (Lee 1976, 4)

Predictably, there was a recurrence of minority grievance over perceived unfair opportunities to enter public university.

The second inadequacy of the NEP was that it was opaque and noncommittal about the implications of its timeline and targets. The time frame of 1971–90 and key targets

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3) Chee Peng Lim, writing in MCA's newsletter the *Guardian*, decried the ICA for negating the NEP premise that redistribution would be "achieved mainly through growth" (Chee 1976, 2).

were clear enough. By 1990, occupations at all levels and in all industries would reflect the national racial composition, and Bumiputeras would own 30 percent of equity. But the overarching goal for the community was obfuscated. The NEP's "within one generation" aspirations, coterminous with a twenty-year outlook, provided some hints. The 1971 version framed this generational goal as the Bumiputeras becoming "full partners in the economic life of the nation" (Malaysia 1971, 1). The ambition could be taken as a resolve for Bumiputeras to be co-equal and, by implication, self-reliant. The magnitude of the challenge was acknowledged. The Second Malaysia Plan noted that some goals, especially the creation of a Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC), might take longer than one generation to achieve (Malaysia 1971, 9).

Unfortunately, this astute observation was made in a passing and obscure manner. The NEP's full-fledged version rolled out in 1976, as a forty-page Chapter 4, "Outline Perspective Plan, 1971–90," in the Third Malaysia Plan (Malaysia 1976).[4] This detailed development program reduced the generational goal from Bumiputera full economic partnership to Bumiputera ownership of 30 percent of equity. It also refrained from evaluating whether the 1990 timeline was adequate and from expanding on a sector-by-sector approach with differentiated timelines for higher education, employment, enterprise development, and ownership (Malaysia 1976). The vast range of interventions that rolled out logically required customized timelines and specific modifications over time. Policy documents allowed expectations of one monolithic expiry date to become ingrained. In reality, the vast range of affirmative action rolled out in piecemeal fashion; and it did not simultaneously start in 1971, but discussions around policy termination or continuity, which would later converge in 1990, took a monolithic stance in which either all affirmative action would continue or all would cease.

Furthermore, the implications of reaching the targets were not methodically outlined. Policy targets crucially provide the grounds for evaluation and revision, but the complexities of Bumiputera preferential programs required more sophisticated formulation—most saliently, to account for the beneficiary group's capacity and confidence to undertake change. The NEP implied that hitting targets or reaching 1990 would constitute the basis for deliberating policy dissolution or continuity, without considering whether passing those thresholds automatically signalled the readiness and willingness of the Bumiputera population to do so—particularly since such change entailed some attenuation of privileged access. These longer-term and deeper aspects of affirmative action were not broached. Silence on this front permitted solidification of the view that

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4) The "within one generation" chief objective had shifted to 30 percent Bumiputera equity ownership by the *Mid-term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971–75* (Malaysia 1973), but the Third Malaysia Plan was more consequential as a policy road map.

decisions regarding continuation or termination of the NEP hinged solely on time limits and on national performance vis-à-vis numerical targets, especially 30 percent Bumiputera equity ownership.

The third shortcoming of the NEP was that in terms of the apportionment of emphasis and priority, it gave relatively less prominence to education and placed inordinate emphasis on equity ownership. The driving goal was twofold:

> . . . employment in the various sectors of the economy and employment at all occupational levels should reflect the racial composition of the country by 1990; the ownership of productive wealth should be restructured so that by 1990 the Malays and other indigenous people own and operate at least 30% of the total. (Malaysia 1976, 76)

Of the eight main objectives—related to employment, productivity, income, modernization, urbanization, BCIC—only one, the last on the list, directly addressed higher education: "expansion of education and training facilities, other social services and the physical infrastructure of the country to effectively support the attainment of the above objectives" (Malaysia 1976, 51–52).

Why did the NEP follow its particular course? Three plausible reasons warrant a brief discussion. First, the NEP, although a clear breakthrough in breadth and ambition, was at heart a continuation of norms already established in Malaysia. The special position for Bumiputeras and the practice of reservation derived from the independence constitution's Article 153 and became implicitly embedded as policy underpinnings. Specifically, the Malaysian government negotiated the allocation of socioeconomic opportunity not on principles of equality, preferential treatment, and fairness but through an ethnic framing of majority-versus-minority interests and a sectoral bifurcation of public sector intervention versus relative restraint in private sector affairs. Even while drawing a clear contrast between the first prong—which would apply "irrespective of race"—and the second prong—which would address "identification of race with economic function"—the NEP omitted the race-based preferential treatment that was operationally integral to the second prong. Malaysia's relative insouciance toward racial quotas arguably resulted from such policy measures becoming normalized within public institutions.

Second, the NEP mirrored the Alliance-Barisan Nasional mode of representation and negotiation of ethnic interests. R. S. Milne characterized the NEP as "a restatement of the 'bargain' between the races" (Milne 1976, 239). The ruling coalition had established norms for reaching settlements among constituent Malay, Chinese, and Indian parties. In a similar vein, personal interventions representing ethnic interests secured commitments to inclusivity in the NEP—but they also perpetuated the practice of bargaining for ethnically defined concessions rather than substantively deliberating the

balance of preference and equality.[5] In the face of intense pressures for Bumiputera economic advancement, especially in equity ownership, the minority group stance was understandably to resist over-encroachment.[6] Perhaps because tensions had heightened, the eventual compromises were greeted with a sense that the various communities should move on. Additionally, ethnicity-based targets seemingly provided clear grounds to debate policy continuation or termination.

Third, politics weighed in. The NEP was as much a political project as it was economic, but political interests and pressures shaped it in a few consequential ways. Subtle differences between the 1971 and 1976 versions speak volumes. Faaland *et al.* (1990) observe that the 1971 NEP articulation was more restrained in terms of targeting, mainly due to pressures from parties concerned that the policy was too aggressive. Heng Pek Koon (1997, 268) documents how Finance Minister and MCA President Tan Siew Sin resisted mandatory measures to relinquish equity until illness compelled him to resign in 1974. By 1975, policy had momentously swung in the opposite direction, evidenced by an increasingly assertive tone and incorporation of clear targets. In some ways, change was taking place regardless of the policy articulation. Notably, even while the Industrial Coordination Act (ICA), which mandated Bumiputera equity allocations, was passed, the Outline Perspective Plan provided an assurance that "Individual companies therefore will not be required to redistribute their existing equity to any significant extent. This underlies the policy that there will not be compulsory divestment on the part of individual enterprises" (Malaysia 1976, 85). The escalation of political pressure toward the mid-1970s raised concern that the government might accelerate the 30 percent target to an earlier date, which required extensive encroachment on private, especially Chinese, ownership (Gerakan Rakyat 1976).[7]

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5) Various other developments illustrate "ethnic bargaining." The ICA applied to medium and large enterprises—with size thresholds that were revised upward in response to protests from industry—and initially raised alarm among foreign investors as well, besides Chinese business. In higher education, an implicit political trade-off underpinned the approval of Tunku Abdul Rahman College to cater especially—albeit not exclusively—to Chinese students, since Institut Teknologi MARA had been established for Bumiputeras. The author thanks former EPU Director-General Sulaiman Mahbob for these insights (Author's interview, April 9, 2021).

6) Milne (1976) notes that after the NEP's launch in 1971, the MCA acknowledged that Chinese economic power would wane and that the community's policy influence was also dwindling, as reflected in the Chinese party's main achievement of increasing the non-Bumiputera equity ownership target from an initially proposed 30 percent to 40 percent, with the foreign ownership target concomitantly revised from 40 percent to 30 percent.

7) Gerakan Rakyat (1976, 3) registered alarm that "[t]here is still a feeling in the private sector that some of the officials would like to see the 30% target achieved within the next five years and not within the next 15 years and by each and every individual company."

New Economic Policy to National Development Policy: Change in Form, Continuity in Substance

Debates on the NEP heightened in the 1980s. The preceding decade had witnessed recurring discontent toward the NEP, especially in terms of non-Bumiputera access to public higher education and the pursuit of Bumiputera equity ownership. Alternatives to public university were limited, and the issue was compounded by perennial delays of approval for the proposed Merdeka University, the MCA's flagship higher education institution. A 1984 seminar, convened by the Barisan Nasional (BN) component party Gerakan to analyze NEP achievements and propose alternatives, presented alternate estimates of Bumiputera equity ownership that showed the 30 percent threshold had been surpassed, corroborating the case for the NEP's second prong to be terminated beyond 1990. On education and employment, Party President Lim Keng Yaik went so far as to say that the "rigid quota system" had vastly promoted Bumiputera upward mobility but deprived "many young and qualified non-Bumiputeras," and that the government must bring the "racial quota system . . . to an end as quickly as possible" (Gerakan 1984, 157). The seminar concluded by adopting a set of resolutions for a post-1990 revised NEP that would, first and foremost, emphasize economic growth, national unity, and poverty eradication irrespective of race—in other words, Gerakan supported the NEP's first prong but not the second (Gerakan 1984, 215). Notably, the party's Economic Bureau made the case for "channelling of resources to groups on the basis of their economic needs rather than on the basis of ethnicity" (Gerakan 1984, 206). Likewise, Lim Lin Lean, reflecting the MCA's disposition a few years later, argued that "economic need rather than ethnicity should be the overriding basis of future resource allocation" (Lim 1988, 55).

In the late 1980s the general disposition toward the NEP, backed by official statistical projections, was that the program was on track to reach the poverty reduction target of 17 percent by 1990 but would fall short on social restructuring. Behind the scenes, some rethinking was taking place. While drafting the Sixth Malaysia Plan, the EPU was attempting to steer the policy focus toward human resource development.[8] It was apparent that rent distribution and accelerated promotion of inexperienced Malays into corporate management, whether in the form of equity, contracts, or licenses, tended to breed patronage and rent-seeking, most starkly the "Ali Baba" liaisons in which a politically connected Malay secured a contract and outsourced the work to a non-Malay, typically Chinese, partner.

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8) Author's interview with Mohd Sheriff Kassim, EPU director general, 1989–91 (March 5, 2021).

An economic vision rooted in human resource development potentially could have inclined the system toward more productive rather than acquisitive interventions, but it remains unclear whether the scope, limits, and implications of Bumiputera preferential treatment would have been systematically acknowledged and integrated into the planning process. The *Mid-term Review of the Fifth Malaysia Plan* (1989) provides a hint of this prospective shift toward human resource development, involving employment, skills, and productivity, implicitly contrasted to wealth acquisition and rent-seeking:

> Industrial restructuring will continue to be the main thrust of future development . . . [requiring] a coordinated package of policies that simultaneously address the improvement of manpower skills, research and development, and a reemphasis of good work ethics and attitudes. (Malaysia 1989, 6)

However, it is doubtful whether the national policy to succeed the NEP would have systematically addressed Bumiputera development and presented a comprehensive plan that could replace the NEP, since the *Mid-term Review* relegated the crucial sphere of university enrollment to the 13th, and very last, chapter, titled "Social Services" (Malaysia 1989).[9]

Various conditions set the stage for a more growth-oriented and private sector-driven agenda (Kamal and Zainal Aznam 1989)—but in ways that under-declared the continuing, even expanding, redistributive thrust of national development policy. From the mid-1980s, with corporate-leaning Daim Zainuddin as finance minister and in response to economic recession and public debt concerns, coupled with the advent of massive FDI outflows from Japan and Northeast Asia, Malaysia's economic policy gravitated toward private investment-driven growth. These developments widened the gates for the privatization project, which reconfigured Malaysia's political economy in a general sense, and specifically as the vehicle for the BCIC. Some unease lingered in the Malay community from fiscal austerity and a government hiring freeze. Nonetheless, the boom was under way; real GDP galloped at 9.3 percent annual growth in 1987–90, compared to 4.6 percent for 1980–87.

A broadly deliberative policy formulation process commenced in the context of an increasingly buoyant economy—and a fraught political milieu. Power struggles within UMNO, social tension, and democratic distress, compounded by escalating Malay nationalist sentiments, put Malaysia on edge. Prime Minister Mahathir, having marginally prevailed in UMNO's controversial 1987 party elections and gained ignominy for the Operasi Lalang detention without trial of 108 opposition leaders and social activists,

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9) Additionally, Chapter 4, titled "Human Resource Development," composed while Malaysia was poised for a mass expansion of higher education attainment, omitted the institutions promoting Bumiputera mobility into college and university.

forged on with a pro-Malay program aligned with his predilections as the nation approached 1990, while also striking a conciliatory note. The calls for establishing a national forum originated from MCA but eventually gained wider traction and added weight in political calculations (Ho 1992; Jomo 1994). Ghafar Baba, as the newly ascendant deputy prime minister, demonstrated a shared burden with Mahathir toward the need to broaden support.[10]

The National Economic Consultative Council was formed in January 1989, comprising 150 members, with a 50-50 Bumiputera-non-Bumiputera split and diverse representation of political parties and civil society. The NECC evaluated the NEP's progress and discussed policies that should succeed it. Most discussions proceeded amenably, but the discussions under the "social restructuring" working group were heavily contested, even acrimonious, resulting in some walkouts.[11] The mood reflected the high stakes and polarized zeitgeist.

The NECC culminated with the February 1991 delivery of a hefty report, the "Economic Policy for National Development," widely known by its Malay acronym DEPAN (Dasar Ekonomi untuk Pembangunan Negara). DEPAN provided an extensive evaluation of the NEP, in terms of the distribution of benefits and the contrasting experiences and perceptions of the majority and minority groups: Bumiputeras' anxiety toward their disadvantaged economic situation that may leave them continually straggling, and non-Bumiputeras' unease at unequal opportunity and their place in Malaysia. The report acknowledged the discontent of non-Bumiputeras over unequal access to higher education as well as of Bumiputeras over lack of business opportunities and shortcomings in Bumiputera entrepreneurship (Malaysia, NECC 1991). It recognized the concept of social justice while cautioning against privatization and the various pitfalls of rent-seeking (Jomo 1994).

However, DEPAN would have benefited from more rigorous analyses of the preferential system and how effectively and equitably it was enabling the Bumiputeras. Among the gaps were its rather routine treatment of education and training, which reported Bumiputera proportions in diploma and degree programs but scarcely ventured into the roles and shortcomings of affirmative action in engendering these outcomes. Education was also overshadowed by a preponderant focus on Bumiputera equity owner-

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10) The author thanks Kamal Salih for highlighting Ghafar Baba's instrumental and intermediating role in the NECC (Author's interview, May 28, 2021).

11) Of course, Malaysia was as a whole consumed with whether and how the NEP would proceed with the second prong. The author thanks Yong Poh Kon, deputy chair of the NECC's social restructuring working group, and Kamal Salih, chief rapporteur of the NECC, whose intimate involvement in the debates lends weight to their recollections (Author's interviews, May 20, 2021 and May 28, 2021).

ship and employment as the most consequential outcomes of the NEP (Malaysia, NECC 1991, 77–80, 110–120). DEPAN's call for official data transparency, while commendable, was wedded to the common but misplaced view that achieving targets entailed terminating policies—and thus better data would facilitate concrete reform. It omitted evaluation of the capacity and confidence of the Bumiputera population to undertake modifications or curtailment of preferential treatment, and offered few specifics on alternate mechanisms besides quotas.

The NECC did not supplant institutionalized development planning under the EPU, but the EPU witnessed its proceedings and served as the secretariat for the DEPAN report. Although some proposals were not taken up, most prominently the formation of a National Unity Commission to oversee policy implementation, the pillars of DEPAN and the Second Outline Perspective Plan, more widely known as the National Development Policy (NDP), bore a close resemblance to each other. Both propagated variations of "balanced development" and "growth with equity," and both recommitted to the NEP (Malaysia 1991, 4–5; Malaysia, NECC 1991, 180–181). In view of Malaysia's political milieu, the NDP treaded delicately on redistribution, couching policy objectives in more discreet terms although the agenda would continually grow, especially with privatization already under way, marshalled by Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin with Mahathir's blessing.

It is a fair generalization to say that the NDP took Malaysia on a more growth-oriented path in the 1990s, but this in no way diminished the vigor of redistributive measures. MCA President Ling Liong Sik, in a 1991 speech expressing support for the NDP, asserted that the "principle of just and fair accommodation and compromise amongst all races must be regarded as a basic tenet of government" (Ling 1995, 112). The cautious undertone perceivably derived from the NDP's ambiguity of policy targets and timelines, which was a major point of contention.

However, the more consequential omission of the NDP was not that it lacked firm targets—unlike the NEP's 30 percent Bumiputera equity ownership and proportionality in employment—but that it sidestepped a full account of the myriad ways pro-Bumiputera policies would persist or expand (Lee 2021b). It also neglected to give attention to possibilities for preferential treatment to be rolled back or transitioned to a system less dependent on overt ethnic quotas. Soon after commencing an ostensibly growth-oriented policy in 1991, the Amanah Saham Bumiputera unit trust scheme was launched, and the microfinance institutions Tekun and Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad (PUNB; National Entrepreneurship Corporation Limited) were founded, while Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA; Council of Trust for the People) continued its vast Bumiputera-only programs in education and entrepreneurship, Bumiputera preference in public pro-

curement forged ahead, and affirmative action in public higher education continually expanded.

The BCIC took center stage, and along with privatization it would be a defining development of the 1990s (Thillainathan and Cheong 2016; Chin and Teh 2017). A further appeal of the policy was that the equity to be redistributed would not take away from existing Chinese or foreign companies.[12] But the NDP retained the NEP-rooted sweeping generalization that economic growth, "new" wealth redistribution, and income gains signified that minorities were not deprived of opportunity. Even Zainal Aznam (2012), while proving his intimate knowledge of Malaysia's policy regime and its outcomes, only touched on the ways in which redistributive requirements in corporate ownership and employment were implemented flexibly and predominantly on new equity or new recruitment, and omitted the foremost non-Bumiputera complaint—unequal access to public higher education admissions and government scholarships.

Ultimately, the decisive theme was not the scope and means of maintaining Bumiputera preferential treatment and the capacity of the community to grapple with change, but whether or not to keep ethnic quotas (Means 1990). The NDP succeeded the NEP on the grounds that Malaysia had not attained the NEP's mission, but the case was made in a selective and incomplete manner. Attention fixated on how Bumiputera equity ownership fell short of the 30 percent target—but in other programs that had reached or superseded targets, e.g., public sector employment and public university enrollment, there was minimal policy deliberation on the possibility of modifying or rolling back Bumiputera preferential treatment. Vision 2020, Mahathir's evocative and galvanizing mission statement presented in 1991, was more forthright:

> If we want to build an equitable society then we must accept some affirmative action. . . . By legitimate means we must ensure a fair balance with regard to the professions and all the major categories of employment. But we must ensure the healthy development of a viable and robust Bumiputera commercial and industrial community. (Mahathir 1991)

The thirty-year aspiration was couched in terms of "fully competitive Bumiputeras, on par with non-Bumiputeras" (Mahathir 1991). However, there was no meaningful follow-through on this quest for parity. A Vision 2020 national convention in December 1991, in which policy strategies and some action plans were discussed, steered clear of the Bumiputera agenda (SERU 1992).

Why did the NDP take shape the way it did? First, it essentially retained the NEP template, hence extending the latter's gaps and omissions. The NDP continued to: (1)

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12) Author's interview with NECC member R. Thillainathan, April 23, 2021.

neglect systematic engagement with the preferential mechanisms undergirding the NEP's second prong and with the implications of reaching policy targets; (2) demarcate domains for such programs (predominantly in public institutions and the public sector) and other domains that were relatively exempted from redistributive requirements (predominantly in the private sector); (3) perpetuate the panacea of economic growth for resolving distributive conflicts and assuaging minority discontent (Malaysia 1991). The new dispensation would augment private sector opportunities, but the public sector remained a domain of marked Bumiputera preference that invariably entailed some exclusion of minorities. Rapid economic growth and the expansion of private tertiary education did eventually allay tensions, but by circumvention rather than reconciliation.

Tellingly, affirmative action based on merit and need was broached again by the MCA in 1989 but failed to gain traction and was eventually conceded (Osman-Rani 1990). The notion was emotively resonant, but it was negated by its ambiguity and confinement to an oversimplistic race-vs-merit/need dichotomy, with little consideration of blending merit-based and need-based selection with continual consideration of ethnic representation, particularly in public universities. Limited to these binaries, ethnic quotas were eventually retained partly due to a realization that non-Malay students would be more assured of university spaces under an ethnic quota than an income-based quota.[13] Merit- and need-based affirmative action dissolved due to political resistance and pragmatism in maintaining the status quo, but also due to the superficiality of these purported alternatives to race-based affirmative action.

Second, the consultative approach, and veiling of the redistributive agenda, sought to broaden the NDP's appeal and shift the spotlight away from the pro-Bumiputera policies toward various ethnic settlements. Eventually, the Chinese community warmly received the NDP, an outcome attributed to the program's commitment to growth and deregulation and its accommodation of cultural and educational interests (Heng 1997). Public demonstration of broad engagement, and Vision 2020's inclusive Bangsa Malaysia aspiration, evidently facilitated buy-in across various communities (Osman-Rani 1992).

Third, political interests prevailed on the policy. Demands for the NEP's extension resounded at the 1989 UMNO General Assembly; the NECC felt the pressure.[14] This point must be qualified; absence of such influence would not necessarily have conceived a post-1990 plan that dismantled the NEP's second prong. While politics perpetuated the fixation with ethnic quotas, the NECC's debates on NEP continuity focused substantially on equity measurement issues rather than Bumiputera development more broadly

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13) Author's interview with NECC member Toh Kin Woon, January 12, 2021.
14) Author's interviews with Sheriff Kassim (March 5, 2021) and Sulaiman Mahbob (April 9, 2021).

(Lim 2014).[15] The singular figure of Mahathir, of course, also loomed large, for his public utterances that ethnic quotas would be maintained (Means 1990) and his prized BCIC.[16] Indeed, the NDP's growth with equity thrust, with privatization as the vehicle for the BCIC, accommodated his agenda. Rapid economic growth and private higher education expanded socioeconomic opportunities, especially for non-Bumiputeras, but Bumiputera preferential policies remained firmly rooted, and even expanded.

Nonetheless, a misconception that redistributive policies diminished after 1990 pervaded across the political divide. This view served both sides; it allowed the government to deflect attention from contentious ethnic policies, while fuelling an oppositional stance that the NEP ended in 1990 and therefore its perpetuation constituted a broken promise. All parties failed to recognize the embeddedness of Bumiputera affirmative action regardless of the NEP or NDP umbrella, and omitted cogent analyses of policy outcomes and alternatives.

It may be helpful to recap the first two historical junctures before launching into a discussion of the third. Table 1 presents key information on the three historical junctures.

"New Economic Muddle": Systemic Incoherence, Selective Interventions

The 1990s further reshaped discourses. Affirmative action burgeoned behind the scenes, but rapid wealth accumulation, and the ascendancy of a Bumiputera corporate elite considerably marred by profiteering, patronage, and rent-seeking, garnered the most attention (Lee 2017). General growth in income and opportunity, especially in newly approved private higher education institutions, provided a vent for pent-up frustrations, perhaps precluding critical scrutiny of those policy sectors. However, the NEP became conflated with privatization, which was arguably the most momentous project of the 1990s and driver of the above-mentioned unsavory outcomes, but only one part of a vast pro-Bumiputera system. Indeed, the outreach of affirmative action in higher education,

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15) The measurement of equity ownership consumed considerable time and energy. Among the various points of contention, one that resulted in change concerned the classification of shares held by nominees as non-Bumiputera, which was the basis for equity ownership statistics disseminated from the Third Malaysia Plan (Malaysia 1976) through the Fifth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia 1986). This method patently overstated non-Bumiputera ownership and was perceived as a ploy to under-declare Bumiputera equity holdings and justify wealth transfer measures. The Sixth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia 1991) reported nominees as a separate category (Author's interview with Yong Poh Kon, May 20, 2021).

16) *New Straits Times*, January 18, 1990 (cited in Means 1990, 196).

Table 1   Malaysia's New Economic Policy: Summary of Three Historical Junctures

Time Period and Historical Juncture	Key Elements of Policy Debate	Key Effects on Policy Discourse

<u>1969–76</u>
New Economic Policy's inception
• Post-May 13, 1969 National Operations Council
• NEP presented within *Second Malaysia Plan* (1971) and *Third Malaysia Plan* (1976)
	• Clarity on "two prongs"
	  1. Poverty reduction irrespective of race
	  2. Social restructuring to eliminate identification of race with economic function
	• Protections for minorities arising from ethnic bargaining
	• Omitted specification of instruments and mechanisms
	• Preferential treatment and key policy areas not recognized
	• Inordinate emphasis on Bumiputera equity ownership
	• Inadequate formulation of sector-by-sector timelines
		• Coherent (implicit) framing:
		  1. Basic needs through universalist measures
		  2. Mobility, participation, and achievement through group-targeted measures
		• Policy not grounded in equality and fairness principles
		• Inadequate focus on developing capability and competitiveness as preconditions for graduation out of preferential treatment
		• Erroneous expectation of 1990 as one monolithic expiry date

<u>1989–91</u> Transition from NEP to the National Development Policy	• Recommitment to NEP, under banner of "growth with equity" • Misguided notion of "need and merit" replacing race-based policies (just help the poor and all races will benefit) • Policy continuity premised on unrealized 30% Bumiputera equity ownership; pronounced fixation especially in the 1990s	• Misconception of NDP as a departure from NEP's focus on redistribution; under NDP, pro-Bumiputera measures not only continued but expanded • Need-based replacements not attainable because ethnic interest secured through quotas • Lack of prioritization and follow-through on Bumiputera capability and competitiveness

<u>2008–10</u>
End of dominant Barisan Nasional rule; "new economic muddle"
	• Conflation of NEP's two prongs: need-based affirmative action = pursuit of the NEP's second prong by using the instruments of the first prong
	• Confusion over "market-friendly" affirmative action = more competitive selection of Bumiputeras within existing system, *not* replacement of race-based affirmative action
	• Notions of replacing race-based with need-based and merit-based policies, instead of recognizing and integrating their complementarities
		• Muddled policy discourses and illusory "reform":
		  ○ Expansion of need-based programs for well-being, *not* replacement of Bumiputera affirmative action in promoting mobility, participation, and achievement
		  ○ Heightened tension: majority anxieties over loss of privilege vs. minority expectations of increased access and fairness
		• Continual lack of emphasis on building Bumiputera capability and competitiveness

Source: Author.

employment, SME development, and microfinance to ordinary Bumiputera households greatly exceeded that of privatization, which benefited the top sliver.

Political watersheds preceded the next pivotal policy, the New Economic Model, launched in 2010. The 2008 general election saw the fifty-year ruling Barisan Nasional

(formerly the Alliance Party) lose its two-thirds of parliament seats and govern without a formidable majority. That electoral outcome, a failure by BN's standards, triggered a prime ministership handover from Abdullah Badawi to Najib Razak, who set out an inclusive platform to lure back disaffected non-Malays. Pakatan Rakyat, an unprecedentedly strong federal opposition, had also attempted to rewrite the NEP, by projecting "need-based affirmative action" as a replacement for BN's race-based affirmative action, prior to the release of the NEM.[17]

A curious bipartisanship emerged. The NEM, under BN's aegis, trumpeted the same bold promise—but it collapsed under the combined weight of its own incoherencies and the subsequent political backlash. The NEM's muddled and gap-riddled treatment of affirmative action is encapsulated in its summation of the subject:

> Affirmative action programmes and institutions will continue in the NEM but, in line with the views of the main stakeholders, will be revamped to remove the rent-seeking and market distorting features which have blemished the effectiveness of the programme. Affirmative action will consider all ethnic groups fairly and equally as long as they are in the low income 40% of households. Affirmative action programmes would be based on market-friendly and market-based criteria together taking into consideration the needs and merits of the applicants. An Equal Opportunities Commission will be established to ensure fairness and address undue discrimination when occasional abuses by dominant groups are encountered. (Malaysia, NEAC 2010, 61)[18]

The flaws derived, firstly, from unexamined bias and hasty generalization. The impetus for revamping affirmative action hinged exclusively on the problems of rent-seeking and market distortion, which are serious problems but pertinent predominantly to public procurement and wealth distribution programs, and emphatically do not represent the totality of affirmative action. The NEM superimposed the most acute problems of affirmative action onto the entire system and showed no cognizance of the reality that rent-seeking and market distortion would factor in differently, if at all, in the affirmative action programs of greater scope and outreach, especially in higher education, microfinance, mass savings schemes, and public sector employment. The NEM document made no

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17) Dasar Pakatan Rakyat (Pakatan Rakyat Policy), the coalition's signature policy statement of December 2009, proposed need-based affirmative action with a few elements concerned predominantly with alleviating poverty—irrespective of race—and combating corruption. Notably, the policy included provisions for scholarships based on merit and need, but no position on higher education admissions.

18) The NEM also gave outsized importance to corruption and patronage, while not touching on education, employment, SME development, microfinance, and numerous other aspects, in evaluating the NEP: "Ethnic-based policies worked but implementation issues also created problems. The NEP has reduced poverty and substantially addressed inter-ethnic economic imbalances. However, its implementation has also increasingly and inadvertently raised the cost of doing business due to rent-seeking, patronage and often opaque government procurement. This has engendered pervasive corruption, which needs to be addressed earnestly" (Malaysia, NEAC 2010, 7, 61).

mention of the vast range of pro-Bumiputera measures—including MARA, PUNB, Tekun, matriculation colleges, Asasi pre-university foundation courses, Permodalan Nasional Berhad (National Equity Limited), public procurement, government-linked companies (GLCs), SME loans through SME Corp, and public sector employment (Malaysia, NEAC 2010).

Moreover, the NEM made sweeping claims about switching from race to need and merit, akin to the inchoate merit and need suggestions of the 1980s that failed to provide policy specifics beyond anodyne and vapid declarations. The NEM mainstreamed the lowest income bracket, termed the bottom 40 percent of households (B40), as a target group but failed to realize that low-income targeting predominantly applied to basic needs provision and had limited relevance to the pro-Bumiputera system. In essence, the question was whether pro-poor or pro-B40 preference could replace pro-Bumiputera preference. To some extent, opportunity could be allocated preferentially on the basis of B40 socioeconomic status, instead of Bumiputera identity, in higher education admissions and scholarships and microfinance, but much less so, if at all, in the other affirmative action policy sectors of employment, business, and wealth ownership. In the awarding of government contracts or SME loans to Bumiputera firms, not only must capability and potential take precedence, but giving preference to poorer—and possibly less competent—operators may be downright hazardous, e.g., in public works. The NEM's proposal to establish an Equal Opportunities Commission even appended the bizarre qualification that the institution would address "occasional abuses by dominant groups," rather than framing the problem more prudently as a matter of principle and conduct regardless of frequency or perpetrator.

The NEM's grandiose yet opaque pronouncements allowed it to be appropriated in the service of opposing interests. Clearly, its propositions for "market-friendly" and "market-based" reforms entailed selecting more capable and less corrupt Bumiputeras over less capable and more corrupt Bumiputeras, not an abolition—nor even substantial downsizing—of the Bumiputera preferential system. Unfortunately, the cryptic presentation of a policy "revamp" triggered polarized, and mutually amplifying, reactions (Gomez 2015). On one side, the NEM confirmed desires for affirmative action to be dismantled, exhibited in the resounding welcome it received from some segments. At the opposite end, the NEM's deficits in clarity and temperance allowed misinterpretations to be taken as a threat to Malay privileges, and for sentiments to be inflamed. The Najib administration conceded to a ferocious anti-NEM groundswell from segments of the Malay community, effectively rallied under the banner of the newly formed NGO Perkasa (Segawa 2013). Not only was the NEM effectively retracted, but Najib also promulgated Bumiputera Economic Empowerment, subsequently renamed the Bumiputera Economic

Transformation Programme (BETR), from 2012 with an emphasis on creating dynamic Bumiputera SMEs and corporations and reaching out to the Bumiputera B40.

Again, it is imperative to differentiate political dynamics from policy contents. While the political milieu induced Najib to launch the BETR with fanfare and aggrandizement, there is every likelihood that such interventions would have emerged under a different label—even if the anti-NEM backlash had not transpired. We must recall that the NEM did not commit to eliminating Bumiputera programs but committed to continue promoting competitive Bumiputera enterprise while avoiding past proclivities toward rent-seeking and corruption. The BETR, rebranded again in 2015 as the Bumiputera Economic Community, mainly experimented with new modes of promoting Bumiputera enterprise— and in a selective and targeted manner, while omitting attention to the vast regime of Bumiputera preferential programs, many of which were arguably underperforming (Lee 2017). The BETR and Bumiputera Economic Community thus introduced some novel measures but also overstated their scope and impact.[19] However, popular and political discourses remained polarized, with the government typically overselling the BETR, and critics dismissing it preemptively without attempting to unpack its contents (Kua 2018). Academic literature has largely neglected the subject.

Developments preceding the NEM illustrate the propensity for declarations of affirmative action reform to become overblown in the public mindset. Liberalization of Bumiputera equity allocations in various service sectors was announced in 2009, and it received a resounding welcome. Concurrently, the government established the private equity institution Ekuinas to promote Bumiputera ownership and fill the gap emerging from the rollback of ethnic equity requirements. Ekuinas as a follow-up package escaped notice, yet it patently demonstrated the systemic endurance of pro-Bumiputera policies. It was difficult, but also highly necessary, to enhance capacity building and modify overt ethnic quotas in programs with extensive outreach, especially in higher education, public procurement, and micro/small business support (Lee 2014). Unsurprisingly, the NEM did not attempt to effect change in these areas.

Thus, Malaysia's affirmative action policy discourses continue to be mired in stasis and polarization—despite putative reform agendas, and in some ways precisely because of such rhetoric. Three reasons for this bedraggled state of policy discourse can be posited. First, the prevailing views of affirmative action reform continually lacked a systematic formulation, especially by conflating the NEP's judicious two-pronged distinc-tion between essentially need-based poverty alleviation and ethnicity-conscious social

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19) The *Mid-term Review of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan* expressly vowed to take "appropriate action, including automatic termination, if contracts or approved permits awarded are sold or transferred to a third party" (Malaysia 2018, 11–14).

restructuring. Rather than calling for the second prong to be abolished, a more logical if politically controversial argument more prominent in the past, in recent times the argument follows along the lines that the NEP's second prong should be pursued by using the instruments of the first prong. The appearance of an ostensibly bold reform agenda succumbing to political pressure has caused most to overlook the manifest flaws in the NEM's conception of affirmative action—and the fact that all along it called for modification, not overhaul. Academic literature has also erroneously conceptualized universalist and targeted interventions as substitutes, without considering that the problems being solved—and hence the instruments required—are fundamentally different, albeit complementary (Gomez 2012; Gomez *et al.* 2013).

The notion of need-based affirmative action as an all-encompassing replacement for race-based affirmative action has become entrenched—more vocally as an opposition platform, but also in the form of broadly conceived pro-B40 policies. As the argument goes, need-based affirmative action will ultimately benefit Bumiputeras to a greater extent, since they comprise a disproportionately higher share of the poor and disadvantaged. However, need-based policies address fundamentally different problems, revolving mainly around basic needs, rights, and entitlements, not the questions of access, participation, and capability that predominantly occupy the realm of affirmative action. A national consensus on social assistance—sealed by the expansion of welfare programs for the poor irrespective of race under Pakatan-governed states since 2008 and the federal government under BN, then Pakatan, then Perikatan Nasional—has, perhaps unwittingly, precluded rigorous attention to the vast, embedded system of Bumiputera preferential programs.

Another popular position paints the NEP as the epitome of BN race-based policy failure and marries it with the UMNO-dominant coalition's race-based politics, which induces another tightly held conflation—that eliminating race-based *politics* readily expunges race-based *policies*. The logical holes and political limits of this mindset were strikingly demonstrated by the inability of Pakatan Rakyat to meaningfully replace race-based policies with its professed need-based affirmative action throughout a decade-plus rule in state governments (2008–present), and by Pakatan Harapan's (PH) advocacy of pro-Bumiputera policies in its 2018 general election campaign (Lee 2018).[20] The PH

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20) Lim Guan Eng's views are influential due to his long occupancy of the DAP's secretary-general post, and they are broadly embraced. Such views stem from a predisposition that effusively supports the NEP's first prong and fixates on the most blatant abuses associated with the second prong. Two essentially identical public statements of Lim's, released in 2007—prior to his holding any office—and in 2021—after his lead roles in the Penang state and federal cabinet and then return to the opposition—demonstrate the immutability of this thinking (Lim 2007; 2021).

federal administration struggled to maintain policy coherence, primarily reacting to electoral sentiment by retaining pro-Bumiputera affirmative action with token offerings to minorities, but raising minority expectations of reform that were much more complicated than it envisaged.[21] Having lost power in 2020, PH has reverted to its rallying cry of need-based affirmative action.[22]

Second, the prevalence of policy sloganeering over substantive analysis stems from deficient empirical rigor and propensities on all sides toward selective and preconceived positions. Empirical analysis of Malaysia's affirmative action requires breadth in accordance with the vastness of the system. However, official sources recycle threadbare truisms about NEP successes and shortfalls, epitomized in the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, which gave unqualified endorsement to all spheres except equity ownership:

> The NEP has restored confidence and understanding among ethnic groups and created various opportunities for economic participation. Among the successes of the NEP are reducing hardcore poverty, increasing household income, restructuring of society and reducing ethnic group identification based on economic activities and enhancing political stability. Nonetheless, the target of at least 30% Bumiputera equity ownership has not been met. (Malaysia, Ministry of Economic Affairs 2019, 4-01)

The NEP's lack of attention to policy design and mechanisms, and to transition paths away from overt quotas and preferences, persists—but unlike 1971, when such foresight may have been beyond reach, by the 2010s hindsight should have sufficed to engage in rigorous policy debates. Engrossed in its appealing but ultimately misplaced promotion of a "market-friendly" and pro-poor alternative agenda, the NEM mostly sidestepped the challenging and contentious aspects of the NEP but was spiritedly embraced by an urban, multiethnic populace and segments of civil society,[23] as well as the media, especially

21) A nationally representative opinion poll of March 2019, ten months after PH's 2018 election victory, is instructive (Merdeka Center 2019). Respondents were asked to select the two issues they deemed most important to them. Among Malays, the top three were inflation (58 percent), job opportunities (23 percent), and preservation of Malay rights (21 percent); among Chinese, the top three were inflation (44 percent), corruption (40 percent), and fair treatment of all races (33 percent); and among Indians, the top three were inflation (57 percent), job opportunities (30 percent), and fair treatment of all races (22 percent). The importance attached to racially delineated opportunity reflected a nation pregnant with anxieties and expectations that were poorly reconciled.

22) Among political figures, Anwar Ibrahim led in advocating this approach, with Parti Keadilan Rakyat's Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad and William Leong among the more vocal proponents (Kow and Lee 2019; Leong 2019; Nik Nazmi 2019). The case was advocated by the MCA, as noted earlier with reference to the 1980s, and more recently by Wee Ka Siong (*Star*, September 15, 2013). Notably, Daim Zainuddin, while chairing the Council of Eminent Persons, also expressed support for need-based affirmative action (Daim 2019).

23) Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia prominently voiced support for replacing race-based with need-based affirmative action (*Aliran*, August 12, 2019).

English-language publications both local and international (*Economist*, May 18, 2017).[24] These notions of reform clearly represent popular yearnings, although the expectations projected onto the NEP differ. Some may expect greater access to public higher education, others more opportunity for government contracts and enterprise funding, and for some it boils down to a general aversion to ethnically framed policies.

Indeed, mainstream criticisms are prone to blinkers of their own. The dominant NEP critique continually cleaves to a narrow appraisal that affirmative action overwhelmingly benefits Malay elites in a manner exacerbated by rent-seeking and corruption (Gomez 2012). This argument often appends an assertion that intra-ethnic inequalities have been rising as a result of affirmative action. The argument that there was runaway wealth accumulation at the top, spurred by privatization and liberalization, persuasively applied to the 1990s. Calculations of the Gini coefficient of inequality, based on the nationally representative household income surveys, documented rising inequality in the decade prior to the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The data also showed that inequality was highest within the Bumiputera population, prompting arguments that inequality within ethnic groups should be given more priority than inequality between ethnic groups (Ishak 2000; Ragayah 2008). In the post-Asian financial crisis era, income inequality levels fluctuated, then markedly declined from 2004 to 2019, such that in 2019 the level of inequality within the Bumiputera population was the lowest among the three main ethnic categories (Lee and Choong 2021). The widely held assumption that inequality has been rising, and is most severe in the Bumiputera population, is empirically refuted by the most authoritative evidence.[25]

The relationship between income inequality and affirmative action is complex. The post-Asian financial crisis context, which saw the collapse of privatization and reconfiguration of privatized entities as GLCs, is significantly removed from the plutocratic Bumiputera wealth accumulation of the 1990s. Over the past two decades, some interventions disproportionately benefiting high-income households, such as GLC top appointments, have caused inequality to rise; other interventions that have grown the middle and lower middle classes—especially mass higher education and declining earnings premiums on higher education qualifications, recruitment in government and GLCs, and

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24) One magazine even went so far as to argue that government contracts should be awarded based on income—a preposterous prospect, since the implication was that instead of granting preference to Bumiputera firms, government contracts should be awarded preferentially to poor households, or poorer contractors (*Economist*, May 18, 2017).

25) The Gini coefficient of Bumiputera household income rose from 0.429 in 1989 to 0.448 in 1997 and reached a zenith of 0.452 in 2004, but it subsequently declined steadily to 0.389 in 2019. Inequality within the other communities broadly increased in the 1990s and fell in the 2010s, resting at 0.411 (Indians) and 0.417 (Chinese) in 2019 (Department of Statistics, cited in Lee and Choong 2021).

small business support—have caused inequality to fall. On balance, the drop in intra-Bumiputera inequality signals that inequality-reducing trends have been outweighing inequality-increasing trends.

However, in seeking to explain the resistance to affirmative action reform, much of the literature inordinately emphasizes the vested interests of politically linked elites in retaining the system (Chin 2009; Gomez 2012) or simplistically reduces the problem to a lack of reformist political will (Gomez *et al.* 2021). This thinking neglects the expansive and embedded network of affirmative action and the socioeconomic access it affords to the Bumiputera middle and lower classes—and the specific ways this complicates efforts to change the system. Nationally representative opinion polls show solid support on the Malay ground for policies granting Malays special access, and also widespread unease among other groups (Merdeka Center 2010; Al Ramiah *et al.* 2017).[26] An alternate and more systematic analysis accounts for these social currents and identifies the decisive shortcoming of the system: while vastly extending socioeconomic access to Bumiputeras on a preferential basis, these numerous programs have fallen short in empowering the beneficiaries. Ultimately, Malaysia is unable to move on from the NEP's second prong not because the system benefits only the elite, as widely argued, although upwardly skewed distribution is an important problem that affects some parts of the system. Rather, the primary reason pro-Bumiputera policies endure is because the system vastly provides opportunities but inadequately utilizes those opportunities to develop Bumiputera capability and competitiveness. The combination of extensive access and insufficient empowerment contributes to the pervasive sense among Malays that special assistance remains necessary and that the community remains under-equipped for open competition.

Third, as in the previous historical junctures, political rhetoric to maintain Bumiputera privileges still reverberates, but there are nuances to appreciate. Unlike overt pressure from the erstwhile hegemonic UMNO, which secured massive expansions of pro-Bumiputera policies in 1971 and 1990, BN's initial tone in presenting the NEM in 2010 was more inclusive, and the subsequent promulgation of Bumiputera transformation paled in magnitude to the previous two episodes. In part, accommodations of minority

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26) The Merdeka Center (2010) found that 73 percent of Malay respondents agreed with the statement "Malays/Bumiputeras need all the help they can get to move ahead so programs like the NEP should be welcome," while 59 percent agreed that "As the original inhabitants of this country, Malays/Bumiputeras should continue to be accorded with special rights and privileges." Ananthi Al Ramiah, Miles Hewstone, and Ralf Wölfer (2017), surveying Peninsular Malaysia, asked respondents to mark, on a scale of 1 to 5, their level of comfort with Malays receiving special privileges, to which Malay respondents averaged almost 4 per 5, while Chinese and Indian respondents averaged around 2 per 5.

groups have also rolled out, whether through the introduction of 10 percent allocations to non-Bumiputeras in previously exclusive Bumiputera programs in 2001–2, reduction in Bumiputera equity requirements in 2009, or introduction of special interventions for Indian or Orang Asli communities in the mid-2010s. Popular demands for welfare programs have also heightened government efforts to groom performative legitimacy by continually implementing these basic needs and pro-B40 measures, and reiterating the "regardless of race" nature of such outreach. These are small marks of progress, although in the grand scheme of things Malaysia continues to evade a direct, critical, and systematic reckoning with affirmative action (Malaysia 2021).

All sides, whether championing Bumiputera transformation or need-based affirmative action as a replacement for race-based affirmative action, opt for convenient answers and often oversell their positions. The political will to maintain the system undeniably endures, but politics also contribute to a rudderless drift in policy discourses.

The New Economic Policy beyond Fifty

The NEP's arrival at its fifty-year milestone marks an opportune moment for retrospection and introspection. The NEP remains insinuated throughout the Malaysian collective consciousness and is invoked in public discourses—often in ambiguous, prejudiced, and even revisionist terms. After three momentous junctures in its fifty-year history, the NEP still lacks closure. In line with the three-angled structure of this paper, we conclude with some thoughts on how Malaysia can move forward systematically and constructively—in terms of policy conception, policy design, and mechanisms—and on the politico-economic prospects for change. This framework applies primarily to the pursuit of inclusiveness; Malaysia's economic growth and sustainable development strategies require independent policy formulation—with integration of overlaps.

Conceptually, a good place to start is by re-appreciating the NEP's strengths, especially its principal basis for distinguishing the two prongs. This dual framework can be broadened systematically, with a focus on equality and basic needs for all—irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other forms of identity—rather than the NEP's specifications of poverty reduction as the outcome and race as the only targeted population category. The principles of fairness and diversity constitute the second pillar; this corollary to social restructuring also broadens the perspective from racial imbalance to equitable representation, participation, and capability development in relevant socio-economic spheres. Rather than carving out domains where Bumiputera quotas apply versus domains where they do not, the interplay of group preference and need-based

preferences should be applied in a comprehensive manner. The Malaysian government should find specific ways to incorporate need-based selection, especially in higher education—some of which are already in place, on an ad hoc basis—as well as microfinance, and ways to more rigorously provide opportunity to Bumiputeras and disadvantaged groups based on merit and competition, integrated with plans for graduating out of preferential treatment.

In policy design and empirical evaluation, the repeated inability of quantitative targets and deadlines to deliver breakthroughs in reform signals the need to focus more on process and qualitative outcomes, by clearly identifying programs that involve group preferential treatment and focusing on capability development as preconditions that facilitate future reform. Empirical analysis must follow up by focusing on outcomes that are more pertinent to capability development, such as student achievement and graduate employability (Lee 2012), and the share of micro, small, and medium enterprises. Rather than one monolithic target or deadline for the entire system to be dismantled, various programs should run their own course, with customized targets and timelines (Lee 2021a).

The politics surrounding affirmative action remain fraught with polarized positions but also stultified by the pervasive discourses of reform. Majority and minority group interests remain adversarial, but in new and arguably less pronounced ways. A different approach that might help break out of the gridlock starts by considering the dynamics of change. Essentially, the common calls for affirmative action to be abolished boiled down to one of two premises: first, guilt over excluding minorities from certain opportunities; and second, regret over maintaining a failed project that should have been abandoned (Chin 2009). A possible third path could be charted, anchored in an acknowledgement that the majority Bumiputeras must be sufficiently empowered with capability and competitiveness in order to undertake systematic reform. Attention then focuses on a building-up process, while simultaneously finding ways to integrate more need-based assistance and merit-based selection, and other mechanisms besides quotas for promoting equitable representation. The process also calls for minority and majority groups to collectively pursue equality and fairness, but also to rethink the familiar dispositions and look beyond communal interests. Minority groups will need to shift from grievance-centric stances to advocacy of more effective Bumiputera capability development; the majority must acknowledge the preferential mechanisms through which they receive benefits and the imperative of graduating out of receiving special treatment. New avenues of engagement require a level of trust and candor that remains insufficient. However, given that a target-hitting and expiry date approach has not broken Malaysia out of the persisting policy impasse, an approach based on trust building and continuous

engagement might be the basic reset that the country needs.

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Television in Post-Reform Vietnam: Nation, Media, Market
Giang Nguyen-Thu
Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019.

Television in Post-Reform Vietnam: Nation, Media, Market by Giang Nguyen-Thu discusses the reordering of Vietnam's nationhood and nationalism in the post-Reform era and how this reordering took place through the production and consumption of popular television programs. While this argument about nationalism is itself an important contribution to the area studies scholarship of contemporary Vietnam, the book is also innovative in treating Vietnamese television not as the party-state's propaganda instrument but as a site in which individual and national identities take shape independently from party-state interventions. Supported by intricate analyses of television programs, the book has an exceptionally sharp theoretical purchase, and its empirical ground is rich, sympathetic, and compelling. This scholarly achievement is produced not just out of the author's masterful command of theoretical resources but also her firsthand experience of the subject matter during her formative years in post-Reform Hanoi.

The introduction sets up the context by giving an overview of the scholarly debates over nationalism and media in Vietnam, as well as the historical development of television in Vietnam after 1975. Following this, Chapter 1 presents the central argument in a nutshell. In Vietnam, widespread penetration of television came in the 1980s and 1990s. Television became a site for reimagining how an ordinary person could conduct one's way of life. Up to the 1980s, people's imagination about their life was heavily saturated with the state's official moralism, such as stories of heroic fighters and sacrificial devotion. In contrast, melodramas of the early post-Reform years (such as *The Rich Also Cry*, or *Người Giàu Cũng Khóc*) enabled people to reimagine their lives in fresh ways, as they received the dramas' mundane themes—such as money, love, and family struggles—like a mirror that reflected their own lives. The consumption of these stories became routine moments of self-reflection among ordinary viewers, transforming their frame of reference from pre-Reform state moralism to post-Reform banality. In addition, people acutely felt that this consumption was being shared by numerous, unknown others in different households at the exact same time of day. These changes ushered in a new sense of collective belonging, or a new form

of nationalist sentiments, *sensu* Benedict Anderson.

Chapter 2 analyzes the images of nostalgia exhibited in two popular dramas of the 1990s and 2000s (*Hanoian*, or *Người Hà Nội*; and *The City Stories*, or *Chuyện Phố Phường*). In these programs, nostalgia was a critique of the post-Reform lives that people were living as of then. And through nostalgia-as-critique, viewers of these dramas collectively forged a sense of one nation being lived and shared at this particular point of history. The author draws on the Foucauldian concept of "memory *dispositif*," or a governmental representation of memory that induces certain kinds of self. Chapter 3, then, uses the concept of "ordinary television" in order to depart from the view of media as an instrument of state propaganda. This chapter focuses on new genres of programs such as game shows, talk shows, and reality shows. Here Nguyen-Thu draws extensively on the Foucauldian idea of "care of the self," or a form of self-reflexive ethical conduct that is distinct from moralism imposed from above.

Chapter 4 discusses a talk show series titled *Contemporaries* (*Người Đương Thời*, aired from 2001 to 2012). This program invited successful individuals, typically entrepreneurs, to talk about the interesting stories behind their extraordinary lives. By portraying these people as relatable figures whose decisions, choices, and courses of life were driven by passion for both individual achievement and national prosperity, *Contemporaries* enabled its audience to imagine the post-Reform nation as inherently individualist and yet nationalist as well. Such articulation between the individual and the national was made possible by the historical context of the time, wherein many people accepted the following question as a relevant one: How could Vietnam integrate and catch up with the global economy after decades of hardship and "belatedness"? Here, individual pursuit of economic success seamlessly aligned with improvement of national standing in the global world. The figures featured in *Contemporaries* added flesh and blood to this individual-cum-national ethic of improvement.

Chapter 5 uses affect and trauma as key concepts to discuss *As If We Never Parted* (*Như chưa hề có cuộc chia ly*, aired from 2007 to 2017). *As If We Never Parted* featured people whose family members went missing at various moments of the country's history of warfare, conflict, and poverty. Such tragedies are ubiquitous in Vietnam. Each episode was a story of searching for a missing person, discovering them, and reuniting them with their family. While the program addressed the country's past memories, the latter were presented not as histories of socialist heroism but as personal traumas and consequent healing. Audiences would sympathize with these affective stories, and they would reflect on their own traumas. This chapter has visceral descriptions of some particularly successful episodes, the reading of which is as captivating as it must have been to watch these episodes as they were aired. These powerful analyses demonstrate successfully that the experience of ordinary viewers no longer followed the orbit of official moralism. Instead, viewers' engagement was deeply affective, intimate, and corporeal.

Up to this point, Nguyen-Thu may sound celebratory of the new nationhood that emerged in

the age of television. However, Chapter 5 cautions against such a conclusion, for something gets concealed in all this imagination of nationhood mediated by the sense of the personal. *As If We Never Parted* projected past suffering of the nation through images of reaching toward normalcy— normal home, normal family, and normal life. Because this normalcy was framed as a matter of individuals, the viewer would easily neglect the structural cause behind these tragedies, whether it be poverty or exploitation. Such a narrative eventually "eases the guilt of the winner without providing the same sense of collective justice to the side of the loser" (p. 121). Nguyen-Thu sees this normalizing narrative as a form of governmentality, a neoliberal tendency that orients the conduct of people's life.

The concluding chapter summarizes the book by foregrounding several sets of theoretical frameworks, such as globalization versus nationalism, nationalism versus neoliberalism, and non-state nationalism versus state-initiated developmental agenda. The sets of two seemingly opposite themes, as Nguyen-Thu shows here, are in fact mutually nested within each other.

The book is a compelling piece. If at all, though, the relative weakness of the book might lie in its methodology. While Nguyen-Thu systematically cites firsthand voices of people involved in the production of television programs, she draws much less rigorously on voices of consumers. Although the book's meticulous examination of program contents makes a strong evidential base, one would naturally expect that the arguments about ordinary viewers' reception of contents would have also been strengthened by interviews, commentaries, memoirs, or diaries.

Overall, this book provides colorful details and rich subtleties of how people in post-Reform Vietnam embraced their own lives and, in that process, underwent an important reordering of their nationalist sentiments, not through socialist heroism but through self-reflexive consumption of images and stories of ordinary and extraordinary lives of others. The personal is at the same time the national. For the reification of this imagined community, television played a pivotal role. This eye-opening book is recommended to anyone interested in understanding contemporary Vietnam, or post-authoritarian transitions in general.

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Capitalism Magic Thailand: Modernity with Enchantment
Peter A. Jackson
Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2022.

Customers in malls shop for amulets that attract money like magnets. Monks pronounce incanta-

tions for businesspeople to win over customers. Spirit mediums become possessed to predict winning lottery numbers. Anyone familiar with Buddhist Thailand is aware of the intersections between religious practice and the accumulation of wealth. In *Capitalism Magic Thailand: Modernity with Enchantment*, Peter Jackson, a leading voice in the study of Thai Buddhism, sets out to examine these practices as well as the broader religious milieu in which they flourish.

Focusing on material culture and ritual, Jackson argues that linkages between wealth and religion were reinvigorated after the end of the Cold War by neoliberal policy, the increased marginality of economic models other than capitalism, and advancements in visual technologies and digital media. Downplaying the novelty yet emphasizing the greater visibility and proliferation of wealth-oriented religiosity in recent decades, he uses words such as "efflorescence" to evoke its liveliness. Jackson's thesis rejects Max Weber's prediction about the progressive "disenchantment" of modernizing societies, proposing instead that modernity itself generates ever more magic. The book ultimately aims to contribute to debates beyond Thai Buddhism, doubling as an exploration of "the conditions under which capitalist modernity produces novel forms of enchantment, not only in Southeast Asia but more generally across the globe" (p. 3).

To be sure, the phenomena studied by Jackson are not free from controversy, in Thailand and beyond. Critics describe practices linked to wealth accumulation as dangerous departures from a supposed original tradition, which, in their eyes at least, emphasizes liberation from material attachment. Jackson himself steers away from moral judgments. Expressing frustration with a scholarship that too often refuses to take prosperity religion in Thailand seriously, he urges readers to move "beyond an emphasis on the Thai cults of wealth as a commercialization of Buddhism [and] to instead view them from an alternative perspective as a spiritualization of the market" (p. 27). A subtle but crucial shift.

Capitalism Magic Thailand features seven chapters, some of which offer extensive reworkings of theoretical interventions articulated by the same author in previous publications. Chapter 1 argues that modernity produces two seemingly contrasting ways to engage with religion. One, in Jackson's own words, "rationalizing" and "reformist," invokes adherence to the sacred scriptures; the other, based on ritual, results in ever-new iterations of "magic" and "enchantment." Chapter 2 focuses on yet another duality, as it proposes that Thai Buddhists manage their religious lives strategically by relegating practices deemed controversial to the private domain, while conforming to more orthodox forms of Buddhism in public.

Chapter 3 contemplates the diversity of beliefs and practices that exist within Thai religiosity, offering a series of analytical lenses, including, most usefully, the idea that different temporal and spatial contexts (in Thai, *kalathesa*) command different engagements with religion. Chapter 4 explores different religious practices and cults that are united by the common goal of material accumulation. Chapter 5 details how Thai Buddhists seek to secure the favor of prosperity-oriented deities via amulets and spirit possession. Chapter 6 interweaves the development of

prosperity religion with the history of modern Thailand, stressing linkages between major political or economic processes and the intensification of wealth-related practices among the elite and middle classes. Chapter 7 explores in detail the relationship between capitalist modernity and enchantment, also illustrating how media technology contributes to the "auraticization" of magical personas such as kings and monks.

From a methodological perspective, Jackson keeps his argument as comprehensive as possible by considering data gathered via meticulous engagements with secondary literature. He simultaneously maintains the focus on the nexus between religion and economy by "bracketing out," as he explains in the Introduction, practices that, while also booming, are not strictly or ostensibly related to wealth. Nonprofessional mediums who reserve spirit possession for family members, infertile couples who pray for a pregnancy, and university students who flip tarot cards on campus to assess their chances at romance, while arguably on a continuum with the contexts he describes, therefore do not figure in his narrative. More generally, the author chooses to zoom out from the voices of individual religious actors in favor of a narrative in which social groups are moved by economic and political changes that unravel on a global and national scale.

The analytical categories emerging from this bird's-eye perspective are neat. Too neat perhaps, at first glance. Working ethnographically, I can hardly think of Thai interlocutors who fit easily in the dual categories of reformist or magical Buddhism, the "rational" Buddhists I know also making claims that raise eyebrows, and those more inclined toward "magic" likewise presenting as vehicles of some kind of original truth. In the same way, I hesitate to identify specific social contexts that correspond to either the public or the private domain. These dualities, however, once understood as a theoretical model rather than a descriptive account, allow for an endless spectrum of possibilities, offering a useful framework to navigate the complexity found on the ground.

Worthy of praise for its scope and the illuminating theoretical advances, *Capitalism Magic Thailand* is an invaluable resource for anyone working on Buddhism and on the cultural dimensions of capitalist modernity in Southeast Asia. Jackson continues to be one of the most thought-provoking thinkers working on religiosity in the region and beyond.

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