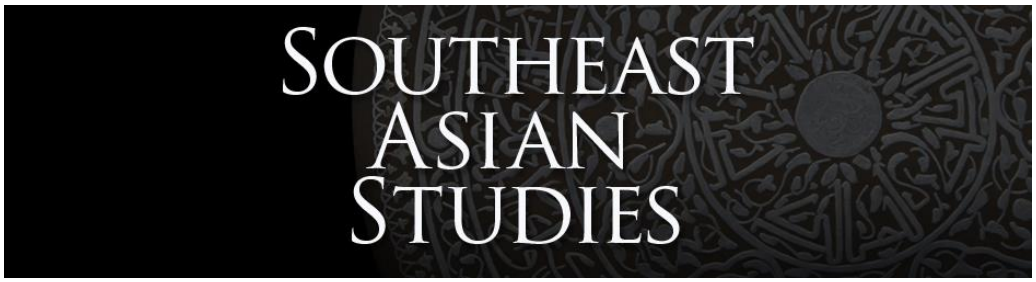

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CONTENTS

Son Preference in a Welfare State: The Case of Vietnamese Australian Families

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Son preference has traditionally been a fundamental cultural value in Vietnamese families, and this preference appears to have intensified in Vietnam in recent years. The key explanation for why parents prefer sons to daughters is that Vietnamese families embrace Confucian notions of gender hierarchy. Based on in-depth interviews with twenty first-generation Vietnamese migrant parents from refugee and skilled migrant backgrounds, and 18 Vietnamese Australian children of migrant parents, this paper explores whether Vietnamese migrants to Australia and their children display a preference for sons in their families. The findings suggest that sons are no longer valued in the ways that they were in Vietnam. Many parents in this study did not express a need to live with, receive financial support from, or be cared for by their sons. The children also expressed fewer financial support and caring obligations to parents. We propose that the greater financial security afforded to the elderly by the social welfare system in Australia may decrease parents' dependence on sons, lowering the value of sons in families. This strongly suggests that the economic value of sons is key to the persistence of son preference in Vietnam, more so than Confucian notions of gender hierarchy.

Keywords: Vietnamese migrant, son preference, migrant family, Australia

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Introduction

In many Asian societies there is a strong preference for sons. Over several decades, there has been an increase in the sex ratio at birth favoring sons throughout Asia (Nanda *et al.* 2012; Den Boer and Hudson 2017). In Vietnam, for example, although the national fertility rate decreased from 2.25 in 2001 to 1.99 in 2011 (Vietnam GSO 2013), the sex ratio saw a dramatic rise, from 104 boys per 100 girls in 2003 to 113.8 in 2013 (Vietnam GSO 2013). Sex selection technologies, including female infanticide and abortion, have been used by many couples in order to birth sons (Guilmoto 2012; Kadoya and Khan 2017). Despite economic development and social changes in many Asian countries, son preference still strongly persists in parents' attitudes (Das Gupta *et al.* 2003).

The reasons that parents prefer sons over daughters are of great interest to researchers. A key explanation in the literature is Confucian values related to gender hierarchy. While daughters are seen as "children of others," sons are considered central to the parents' identity and play a particularly important role in continuing the patriarchal family line (Bélanger 2002; Nanda *et al.* 2012). Others argue that the economic value of sons in terms of financial support to parents' material well-being also fosters son preference (Caldwell 2005; Guilmoto 2015). Scholars have long investigated this issue by presenting evidence of economic and social development in many Asian countries as the main factor impacting son preference practices (Luong Van Hy 2003; Chung and Das Gupta 2007; Den Boer and Hudson 2017). However, there has been little discussion about the relations between social welfare support, health care for aging parents, and son preference attitudes in the migration context. Further, little is known about parents' and children's views and practices related to the value of sons and how this cultural value has been modified/preserved across generations in the migrant family.

Our paper is designed to fill the gap in the literature by presenting the voices of twenty first-generation Vietnamese migrant parents, from refugee and skilled-migrant backgrounds, and 18 Vietnamese Australian children to explore whether son preference persists in a migration context where parents have access to a strong social welfare system and enjoy financial security, like in Australia. This paper asks the questions: What are the views of first-generation migrant parents and children of migrants to Australia regarding son preference in families? And why do they preserve, modify, or reject this cultural value?

In the following sections, we discuss son preference in Vietnamese families, the Vietnamese community in Australia, social welfare policies for the elderly in Australia, and literature on the economic value of sons and the persistence of son preference across contexts. We then discuss the study and its findings, showing that son preference is both

reduced and qualitatively changed in first-generation Vietnamese migrants and largely absent in the children of such migrants. In our analysis we consider why this is the case, arguing that the presence of a public pension and superannuation system supports Vietnamese migrant parents in old age, reducing the need for sons to provide for the parents materially. The findings contribute to the growing body of research aimed at understanding the modifications of cultural values in a migration context. It can therefore be suggested that economic development and an expanded social welfare system could reduce the patriarchal obligation of sons in the family. However, sons also perform important cultural rituals, such as ancestor worship, and provide social support to parents; and the shift away from son preference also brings with it a lesser commitment to those cultural practices. This was experienced as a loss or a concern for some participants, but for most it was an acceptable trade-off.

Son Preference in Vietnamese Families

Historically, cultural values in Vietnamese families have been strongly influenced by "rice culture" or "irrigated crops," Buddhist beliefs, and the teachings of Confucianism. As a result of these influences, three key sets of cultural values—harmony and solidarity, filial piety, and gender hierarchy—have persisted in Vietnamese families over generations (Kibria 1995; Pham Van Bich 1999; Tran Thi Thanh Giang 2018). These family values mutually reinforce each other to shape family relationships such as those between parents and children, husbands and wives, and children and their siblings and relatives. Son preference is part of gender hierarchy but is also related to harmony and solidarity and filial piety.

Gender hierarchy underpinned Vietnamese culture and emerged from Confucian thought. It was imported to Vietnam from China and situated fathers and husbands as the pillars of the home through their role as the primary breadwinners and household decision makers (Pham Van Bich 1999; Rydstrøm 2006). According to Confucian thought, sons are needed for patrilineal reasons, to carry on the family name and line. This patrilineal obligation brings with it responsibilities, including the ritual worship of ancestors and the care of aging parents (Kibria 1995; Pham Van Bich 1999). Thus, eldest sons along with their wives and children usually live with the son's parents after marriage. They are required to shoulder the main responsibilities of taking care of parents socially and economically. Further, in Vietnamese families, the relationship with ancestors is powerful: one shows respect for the souls of the dead through ritual worship of ancestors, and sons play a pivotal role in this. Sons are expected to worship their parents when they

pass away and maintain the practice of ancestor worship in their families, while women are expected to worship their husbands' ancestors (Rydström 1998; Rydstrøm 2006).

It has been found that the main reason for the persistence of son preference in Vietnam is the continuity of lineage, which includes family name and ancestor worship. In a survey conducted in 2012 on the reasons for having boys in Vietnam, 69 percent of respondents expressed the importance of sons for maintaining the family lineage (Nanda *et al.* 2012). A family name or lineage is passed on only by sons; daughters' surnames are not passed from one generation to another, because daughters are expected to marry out to another family. Therefore, the first as well as subsequent sons are considered to be under the greatest pressure to have their own sons for the continuity of the family line (Rydström 1998). Further, sons play an essential role in cultural rituals. If sons are absent, the responsibility for performing these rituals is transferred to a nephew or another male family member, but not to a daughter. Women cannot even practice the family rituals of their birth families after they get married (Bélanger 2002; Guilmoto 2015; Hoang Lan Anh 2016).

In contemporary Vietnam, son preference still persists and may even have intensified (Guilmoto 2012; 2015). Jonathan and Dominique Haughton (1995) have found that although many Vietnamese women are well educated and participate equally in the labor workforce, they still prefer sons. In many rural areas, the birth of a son is still the most significant event in a woman's life and can elevate her status with her parents-in-law; it can also be viewed as insurance against polygyny, divorce, and even domestic violence (Bélanger 2002). Elder sons are still obliged to provide for and often co-reside with aging parents. Although in recent decades the Vietnamese government has improved the social welfare system by introducing government pensions and subsidized health care, these social security schemes provide limited assistance for the elderly (Den Boer and Hudson 2017). Many older adults in rural areas continue to have low living standards and face financial problems (Bui The Cuong *et al.* 2000). As a result, most elders still depend on their immediate families, especially adult children or sons, as their primary sources of support and care (Goodkind *et al.* 1999; Den Boer and Hudson 2017).

It is evident, then, that son preference remains an important norm in Vietnamese families. Sons play a key role in carrying on the family name, worshipping ancestors, and taking care of parents. While modernization and urbanization may have led to changes in household composition and changed some expectations of family relationships, the obligations of sons to look after their parents and carry on the family lineage clearly persist. In other words, the Confucian ideology related to the sons' role persists in many families in contemporary Vietnam. However, there is little information on what happens to this fundamental cultural value upon migration: do these practices and obligations

persist in a migration context?

Vietnamese Community and Social Welfare Policies for the Elderly in Australia

The Vietnamese community in Australia is complex, with people having arrived for different reasons and from different backgrounds and generations. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2019), the Vietnamese community is the sixth largest ethnic group in Australia, with approximately 236,700 people, accounting for 1 percent of the population. The largest Vietnamese community group in Australia is made up of refugees who left Vietnam mainly after the fall of the Saigon regime on April 30, 1975 (Viviani 1984). During the 1980s and 1990s, Vietnamese migrants arrived under the Family Reunion Program. More recently, there has been a new group of Vietnamese migrants to Australia: skilled migrants who have foreign language proficiency and professional knowledge and migrate by choice. Australia is a destination of choice for many Vietnamese skilled migrants because of its perceived educational, economic, and employment opportunities (Watkins *et al.* 2003).

Australia is considered to be a nation with effective social welfare for the aged (Gray and Agllias 2009; Agnew 2013). Australian social welfare policies have been designed to support older adults by providing pension and health-care assistance. The pension system has three pillars: old-age pension, superannuation guarantee, and voluntary retirement savings (Agnew 2013). The first pillar, old-age pension, was introduced in 1909. It is available from age 65 and is paid subject to income and assets tests. This pension provides a basic income to those with incomes and assets below specified threshold levels. Approximately two-thirds of current retirees in Australia rely on pension as their main source of income (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007). The second pillar, superannuation guarantee, commenced in 1992. It requires all employers to make contributions on behalf of their employees into individual accounts in a superannuation fund. Benefits from superannuation savings can be taken at the age of 56. These first two pillars are supplemented by the third pillar, voluntary long-term savings, including voluntary superannuation contributions (Agnew 2013; Bateman and Liu 2017). Under the three-pillar pension system, older adults in Australia are provided with financial stability.

Health-care assistance is also an essential service for the elderly in Australia. This is provided through government (commonwealth, state/territory, and local), community, and voluntary sector programs (particularly families and carers), as well as the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors (Parliament 2003). All older adults can access services such

as residential services, aged care services, carer assistance, and dementia support programs. Recently, home care packages have been introduced for older Australians through which they can access affordable care services to receive help at home. This service enables the aged to live the best life they can (Laragy and Vasiliadis 2020).

In addition, all retirees in Australia are eligible for government benefits such as the senior card scheme—offering discounts on transport and other services—the commonwealth seniors health card, and the pensioner concession card. The last two provide access to cheaper health care, medicine, and other discounts (Parliament 2003). With the three-pillared approach, Australian older adults are well supported. This is a very different situation from Vietnam, where, as discussed above, sons are expected to provide for and care for parents in the absence of state support.

The Economic Value of Sons and the Persistence of Son Preference Beliefs

The economic value of children/sons has also been seen as a key reason for son preference. According to the wealth flow theory of demographic transition (Caldwell 1982; 2005), the high cost of having children is an important concern to parents. John Caldwell argues that the economic value that comes from children benefits individuals, couples, or families and contributes directly to high or low fertility rates. Caldwell (1982; 2005) further notes that the economic value of children is determined primarily by the direction of the intergenerational wealth flow, which has been from younger to older generations in all traditional societies, such as Vietnam, particularly from children to parents.

The wealth flow of resources between children and parents includes money, goods, services, and guarantees that one person will provide for another (Caldwell 2005). In Caldwell's view, there are two types of society: one with stable high fertility, where children provide their parents with resources; and the other with lower fertility rates, where children receive resources from their parents. The economic value of sons, thus, is one of the important factors influencing the persistence of son preference beliefs in many societies (Bélanger 2002; Guilmoto 2015).

Caldwell's notions of the economic value of children and intergenerational wealth flow have been characterized by scholars as an important tool to analyze fertility transition and the persistence of son preference in many countries. According to Pauline Rossi and Léa Rouanet (2015) and James Raymo *et al.* (2015), parents who expect to be financially supported by and live with their children when they are old desire larger numbers of children. Further, sons' economic value has been found to be the main factor influencing the continuing requirement for male offspring in Vietnam's rural areas (Bélanger

2002). While the economic value of daughters declines when they marry, parents in Danièle Bélanger's study invested in sons to safeguard their own future (Bélanger 2002). Similarly, in a survey on son preference in Nepal, Priya Nanda *et al.* (2012) found that the care that sons provide to parents in old age and their sharing of the workload burden are among the most important reasons for having a boy in that country.

Caldwell's theory of intergenerational wealth flow has been extended and modified by scholars to argue that the patriarchal value attached to sons is still the main factor influencing the persistence of special privileges for sons (Hsuing 1988; Whyte 2004). Similarly, Carol Vlassoff (1990) revealed that economic factors alone did not account for the pervasive son preference in an Indian community where sons had a deeper cultural significance that persisted even when widows were financially well-off or independent. Likewise, the ideology of filial duties is still thought of as a key aspect of a son's moral duty in Vietnam, even if the parents are not in need of assistance (Barbieri 2009).

However, the high economic value of sons for parents has been reduced by social changes and economic development. Research into the field of gender demography indicates that economic and social development in many Asian countries has had a significant impact on gender hierarchies (Luong Van Hy 2003; Chung and Das Gupta 2007). Industrialization and urbanization, for example, have impacted the ability of sons to provide emotional and financial support to their aging parents in many rural areas. When sons move to cities to study and work, it is difficult for them to take day-to-day care of their aging parents (Luong Van Hy 2003; Barbieri 2009). This is further exacerbated in the case of international migration, where children move far away from their parents. Further, public policies often play an important role in helping to reduce son preference. Efforts made by the Korean government to reduce son preference in recent decades include raising levels of female education and promoting female labor force participation (Chung and Das Gupta 2007).

Migrants tend to arrive in their new home with their own distinct set of cultural values associated with their homeland (McDonald 1995). In the literature on the continuities of cultural values in migrant families, migrant parents have been described as clinging to cultural values belonging to their country of origin (Chaichian 1997; Foner 1997). They also tend to apply their values of origin in bringing up their children (Herrero-Arias *et al.* 2021). Through the sharing of values across generations, many of the cultural values associated with the migrants' homeland persist strongly after migration (Renzaho *et al.* 2011; Tingvold *et al.* 2012; Choi *et al.* 2013). Different experiences prior to migration and different times of departure have also been identified as important variables influencing parents' attitudes toward cultural maintenance in migrant families (Bottomley 1979; McDonald 1995). For example, refugees have been discussed in the

literature as a particular group that hold on to the cultural values of their homeland at the time they left, carefully preserving those values in their new land as a special way to maintain their cultural identity and to recover after losing homes, property, status, and family members (Camino and Krulfeld 1994; Malkki 1995). These experiences, however, are considered to be different from those of skilled migrants, who generally have lived with the modern and multicultural values of their country before departure, migrated by choice, have foreign language proficiency, hold necessary qualifications, and possess background knowledge about the country of destination (Nguyen Hong Chi 2014).

Cultural values related to son preference are brought by many migrants to their new cultural settings. The current literature on son preference in the context of migration shows the persistence of these values in many Asian immigrant communities in Western countries (e.g., Kale 2012; Almond *et al.* 2013; Postulart and Srinivasan 2018). For example, Douglas Almond *et al.* (2013) found a tendency to select sons over daughters by abortion among first-generation immigrants arriving in Canada as adults. Similarly, evidence from Britain has revealed that while the fertility rate of India-born mothers in England and Wales decreases, there is an increase in the sex ratio at birth and sex-selective abortion occurring among this group (Dubuc and Coleman 2007). Commenting on this issue, Rajendra Kale has strongly argued: "When Asians migrated to western countries they brought welcome recipes for curries and dim sum. Sadly, a few of them also imported their preference for having sons and aborting daughters" (Kale 2012, 387). In other words, the son preference ideology has not only persisted strongly in Asian immigrant parents' attitudes but has also led to practices of fetal sex selection that discriminate against daughters in the new cultural setting.

To explain the factors influencing the modification and preservation of son preference in the migration context, it has been suggested that cultural assimilation may attenuate son preference. As Almond *et al.* (2013) have argued, first-generation immigrant families from South and East Asia in Canada are much more likely to exhibit son preference in their family-size choices than are second-generation families. The length of residence in the new destination influences cultural maintenance among these immigrant groups. However, by rejecting a solely cultural understanding of the factors contributing to these issues, recent attention has focused on gender, race, transnational dynamics of migration, and socioeconomic context of the country of migration (Postulart and Srinivasan 2018), as well as the availability of prenatal sex-selective techniques and legal abortion in the host society (Dubuc and Coleman 2007). These seem to indicate that son preference persists in immigrant communities because of conditions in the local context rather than the persistence of culture related to the Confucian ideology. Building on past research into the cultural, social, and economic value of sons and the persistence of son preference,

this paper provides important insights into the modifications of this Confucian cultural value when people migrate to a welfare state.

Research Methods

The open-ended nature of the research questions necessitates a qualitative approach (Waller *et al.* 2016). As discussed above, there have been two separate waves of Vietnamese migrants to Australia. Up until the 1990s, most Vietnamese migrants were from refugee backgrounds, whereas since the 1990s most have been skilled migrants. We were interested in whether first-generation migrant parents maintained a preference for sons: if so, why; and if not, why not. We were also interested in exploring whether the children of Vietnamese migrants from the two waves preferred sons for cultural reasons. We also wanted to investigate the differences in views and practices toward son preference between first-generation Vietnamese refugees and skilled migrants as the two groups were born and raised in different times in Vietnam and migrated to Australia under different social contexts and times.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with twenty first-generation Vietnamese migrant parents and 18 second-generation Vietnamese Australian children. The inclusion criteria for first-generation participants were that they were born and raised in Vietnam, and that they had immigrated to Australia at the age of 18 or older (Rumbaut 2004). The first generation had to be parents. The children of migrants included people who were born or raised in Australia, and children who were born in Vietnam and brought to Australia between the ages of five and 12.

The first-generation Vietnamese refugees and skilled-migrant parent participants migrated to Australia at different times, with different class backgrounds, and under different social conditions. Ten parents came to Australia as refugees from both urban and rural areas in southern Vietnam. They had lived in Melbourne for approximately forty years. Most refugee participants were from working-class backgrounds and worked in unskilled jobs in factories, vegetable farms, and the like. Their ages ranged from fifty to 67 years. The other ten parent participants were skilled migrants who came from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the two big cities in northern and southern Vietnam. They had lived in Melbourne for approximately ten years. The skilled-migrant participants worked as doctors, accountants, and lecturers in Melbourne.

Of the 18 second-generation children, ten came from refugee backgrounds and eight from skilled-migrant backgrounds. They were aged between 14 and 37, with the younger participants being children of skilled migrants and the older being children of refugees.

Of the twenty first-generation parents in the study, 15 had both sons and daughters while five had daughters only. Of the 18 second-generation participants, three had their own children.

Although the participants were recruited from the two main groups of the Vietnamese community in Australia, the sample size of the study was small. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot represent the entire Vietnamese community in Australia. Further, almost all the refugee participants were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, while many refugees in Australia have obtained higher education and work in skilled occupations. The different backgrounds and resettlement in Australia of this group could influence the different strategies they adopt to preserve cultural norms in their lives.

The project was approved by a university human research ethics committee. For the recruitment of participants, flyers and email advertisements were sent to Melbourne Vietnamese community organizations to make sure a broad cross-section of Vietnamese could be selected to participate in the project. We also used word-of-mouth and snowball sampling techniques in the investigation, whereby existing participants suggested other potential participants (Neuman 2011; Waller *et al.* 2016). One of the limitations of this method is that it can produce a sample of participants with limited variation. To overcome this issue, we started by recruiting at least three unconnected participants for each group. We aimed for maximum variation in the sample (Waller *et al.* 2016) to identify a broad range of attitudes toward son preference.

Interviews were digitally recorded, and field notes were taken. All interviews with first-generation parents were conducted in Vietnamese, and all interviews with second-generation children were conducted in English. The interviews in Vietnamese were translated into English by the first author and subsequently checked by a professional interpreter. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule with questions about beliefs and practices pertaining to the roles of sons in families. The interviews were conducted by the first author, who is Vietnamese but neither a skilled migrant nor from a refugee background. Being an "insider" with the participants allowed the first author to relate to the Confucian cultural values in Vietnamese families. Parents were asked for their views toward son preference, and the reasons why they wanted to discontinue, preserve, or modify the son's role in families. Children were asked about their parents' and their own attitudes toward the roles of sons in families. Both parents and children were also asked about their practices toward the roles of sons in their daily lives. The transcripts were imported to NVivo software and coded thematically. The thematic analysis focused on the identification of themes emerging from the transcripts recorded through interviews (Waller *et al.* 2016).

Results

Through the analysis, we found that migrant parents and children of migrant parents from both skilled and refugee backgrounds largely rejected son preference. The main reason was that sons were not important for providing financial assistance to parents or taking care of elders in Australia. In the Australian context, where older people are strongly supported by the social welfare system through old-age pension, superannuation policies, and retirement services (Agnew 2013; Laragy and Vasiliadis 2020), many of the Vietnamese parents and children did not see the need to retain the traditional value of sons in their families.

"The Son Is Not Significant at All": Parents' and Children's Views

The refugee and skilled-migrant parent participants in this study were born and raised in different social and cultural contexts in Vietnam. They migrated to Australia at different times and for different reasons. Prior to migration, refugee participants had lived in "old Vietnam" over fifty years ago. At that time the country had been little affected by industrialization and modernization, and the Confucian values relating to son preference persisted strongly in many Vietnamese families (Pham Van Bich 1999; Lê Ngọc Văn 2012). Therefore, we might expect refugee parent participants to hold the cultural values from the time they left (Bottomley 1979). Further, many refugees had had traumatic experiences both prior to leaving Vietnam and at sea, such as attacks by pirates and family members going missing or dying. They began their lives in Australia under tough conditions, because they lacked English language skills, qualifications, and knowledge about their new country. Most did not enter the education system in Australia, and worked in unskilled jobs. In contrast, most skilled-migrant participants were born and raised after the Vietnam War and the economic reform (Đổi Mới). Most of them were well educated, had a mastery of English, and worked in professional fields. Although the experiences of refugee and skilled-migrant parents in this study were shaped by their distinct social, political, and migration contexts, almost all no longer valued sons in the ways they had in Vietnam. For example, Nam, a forty-year-old skilled-migrant father of two daughters, explained his attitude toward the role of sons:

> If I lived in Vietnam, I would think about having sons and I would distinguish between sons and daughters. It is not really easy to forget the roles of sons when you live in Vietnamese society. [Because] When daughters get married, they move to live with their husband's families and take care of their parents-in-law. It means that they will not be able to support you anymore.

Similarly, Tiên, 38, a skilled-migrant mother of two sons, said that giving birth to a son

was very important to her parents-in-law and improved her position within the family. Tiên gave birth to her first son when she was in Vietnam:

> They [her parents-in-law] were very happy when I gave birth to my first son. I felt like they behaved better toward me. I became an important woman in their family at that time. My husband is the oldest son, so it was very important for them to have a male grandchild. However, I myself feel relaxed about the gender of my kids. Both sons and daughters are very nice to me.

Tiên explained how she achieved an elevated status in the eyes of her parents-in-law by having a son. Tiên was not alone in her experience. Almost all the mothers in the skilled-migrant group reported that while their husband's families in Vietnam wanted sons, they themselves did not care about the gender of their children now that they were in Australia.

In their interviews, many of the refugee-background parents also recalled the importance of having sons in Vietnam. For example, Hải, 68, a refugee father, recounting the story of the escape journey that his family made forty years ago, mentioned his views toward sons: "After discussing with my parents [about the escape plan], we decided to leave my middle son in Vietnam with them. You know, just in case we died in the sea, the son would continue the family line."

At the time they fled the country on a fishing boat, Hải and his wife took two of their three sons and one daughter with them. Before starting the dangerous journey, they carefully considered the sons' role in the family relating to the responsibilities of keeping the lineage. Hải's family was lucky to arrive safely in Australia. Three years later, the son who had been left in Vietnam arrived in Melbourne to join them under the Family Reunion Program. Interestingly, in his interview later about his family life in Melbourne with his children, Hải did not mention much about the roles of his sons in terms of lineage obligations. Rather, he talked about the equal roles of sons and daughters in preserving strong relationships with their extended families.

Hoa, a 55-year-old refugee-background mother, shared a similar view on having sons in her family: "If I had only one son, I would wish to have one more daughter. If I was in Vietnam, it might be different. I have only one daughter, so I think it is enough for me when living here."

Hoa spoke about the Vietnamese and Australian contexts and how her preferences were different in each place. At the time of the interview, Hoa's daughter has two children and lived nearby. Hoa noted that she helped her daughter by picking up the grandchildren from childcare and looking after them when her daughter needed her to. Hoa was happy having only a daughter.

When the children of migrants were asked about son preference, many of them did

not seem to be sure about the roles of sons in traditional Vietnamese families. This view was exemplified by Quân, a 17-year-old son of skilled migrants:

> Keeping family line is when you marry, your child is going to keep family name. I don't know . . . I don't really care about family line because it is gonna be just the surname, so . . . My parents don't really expect me to hold the family name, so it is not important.

For Quân, lineage just meant a surname, which would be taken naturally by his children when he started a family. Quân came to Melbourne with his parents and his older brother when he was five years old. At the time of the interview, his brother had graduated from university and was working and living in another state. Quân lived with his parents in a nuclear family. Quân's extended family was still in Vietnam. In this case, the patrilineal importance of sons was challenged; Quân was not concerned about maintaining the family line.

Many of the children from refugee families were parents at the time of our interviews. The majority agreed that having sons was less important in Australia than in Vietnam. For example, 31-year-old Thu was born in Australia to a refugee family. She is now the mother of two sons and two daughters. She said:

> In Vietnamese culture, it is a lot more important that you have to have sons, at least one son to carry on the family name . . . and pass it on to the next generations. But I don't feel like that is important for my children. I did not worry about what gender they were. . . . The son is not significant at all.

Thu was aware of Vietnamese family values in terms of keeping the family name, because she was raised in a refugee family that has been living in Australia for almost forty years. She married a Vietnamese Australian man from a refugee family; he is the eldest son in the family. In this situation, her husband was expected to take on the main obligations to his family (Kibria 1995; Lê Ngọc Văn 2012). Despite this, Thu said she placed no special value or obligations on sons.

Factors Influencing the Lack of Son Preference

Superannuation, Old-Age Pension, and Own Savings: Financial Security for Parents

One of the main reasons the migrant parents in this study did not place a high value on sons was financial security. Almost all mentioned superannuation, pensions, and their own savings, which helped them to feel comfortable in their later lives. They did not expect their children/sons to provide them with financial support. In this case, the economic value of sons and the expected flow of wealth from children to parents (Caldwell 1982; 2005) were absent because the parents had their own financial resources. Eco-

nomic and social development have had a significant impact on parents' attitudes toward the importance of sons (Luong Van Hy 2003; Chung and Das Gupta 2007).

Most of the parents in the study used to work full-time, are working, or are retired. They are financially stable and not in need of assistance from their children. For example, 68-year-old Hải, a refugee father, stated:

> I do not need them to express gratitude to me by giving me money, because I can set up everything by myself. I have worked for many years, so I have my superannuation, several hundred thousand dollars. I have my own house and car, so if I want to go on holiday I can go whenever on my own, without their financial support.

Hải used to be in the South Vietnamese army. He escaped from a re-education camp and left Vietnam after the Vietnam War. When he first came to Australia, he had to take manual jobs because he lacked English proficiency and other necessary skills. He retired after many years working in a factory and felt financially secure. Later in the interview, Hải spoke about the benefits of the Australian government's old-age pension. He believed that his superannuation and pension could easily support him in his old age (Agnew 2013). Many refugees in this study felt a peace of mind about their retirement income being enough to cover all their expenses. Although the refugee parents may have expected to need sons to provide for them in their old age, the reality in Australia was that sons were not necessary, and as a result this specific value of sons was diminished.

Like the retirees from a refugee background, more recently arrived skilled migrants also did not expect to receive financial support from their sons in their old age. Hồng, a 37-year-old mother of two young sons and lecturer at a university, believed that her generation should show gratitude to their parents by providing financial support, because in the Vietnamese cultural context parents depend on their children, especially the oldest sons (Guilmoto 2015; Den Boer and Hudson 2017). However, she did not expect her children to do the same for her:

> I have to take care of my mum in Vietnam. This is my obligation, and my mum needs that, I guess. But I don't think I need my children to provide me money when I get older. I spend an amount of money to raise my kids, but I also have savings for myself so I can do everything I want when I got older. I will do everything by myself.

Hồng said that her mother was living in Vietnam with her brother. He was unemployed so could not support their mother financially. This meant that Hồng had to send money monthly to her family in Vietnam. In this case, Hồng felt financially secure not only with her savings but also with her independent life in Australia, where she did not need to consider the economic value of her sons like her mother did.

Hải and Hồng were typical of the parents in this study. Although the refugees with manual jobs had lower incomes than the skilled migrants with professional jobs, neither group expected their sons to provide for them in their old age. Sons were not needed in this way, and this affected their views about son preference more generally.

However, even though financial support was no longer necessarily a reason for preferring sons, the expectation that sons would provide company and emotional support still resonated for some refugee participants. For example, 65-year-old Thái, a refugee father, said:

> I do want my children to help me when I am sick; I will feel better and not lonely. Although I know that the health-care systems and community services for elderly in Australia are very good, but . . . you know, just drop by my house, or make phone calls and so I could share emotion with them. It's very important for me, like Vietnamese saying: your children are your savings.

For Thái, the convenience of retirement services in Australia was not his focus; what he needed was for his children to live nearby, to visit, and to take care of him frequently. In this respect, his children made him feel safe in his old age. It is likely that the important role of children and sons still persists in such parents' beliefs despite the positive aspects of social security for the elderly in Australia because son preference is not just financial—it also involves lineage and emotional support.

Aged Care Services: Social Welfare Resources for Parents

One of the key aspects of son preference in Vietnam is the importance of sons—or first sons—living with and caring for their parents (Guilmoto 2015). However, most parent participants from both the refugee and skilled-migrant cohorts did not expect their children/sons to live with them when they were older or to be taken care of by them. Khuê, a 62-year-old refugee father, for example, explained that he felt confident about going to a nursing home despite his awareness of the cultural value of being taken care of by children:

> I think as we are Vietnamese, so we always want to stay with children when we are older, but I should not do so. I do not want to annoy my children. A nursing home is a good idea when I need help.

Khuê has two sons. At the time of the interview, his two sons had started their own families and were living independently. Khuê and his wife were retired.

Similarly, Mi, a 63-year-old refugee mother, described her views about receiving help from her sons:

> When I cannot do everything by myself any longer, I will go to a nursing home. They have their own families; they have to work very hard, and they are very busy, so I do not want to annoy them. Here, the retirement services are very professional in taking care of the elderly, so it is better for us. In Vietnam, it is terrible if children bring their parents to aged care services. This is seen as an extreme violation of children's moral standards, but here is Australia, you know.

Mi has three sons and had been a single mother for twenty years. She was not living with any of her sons at the time of the interviews. She ran a small hair salon. Elsewhere in her interview she spoke about feeling financially secure and living on her own. She felt happy with her independence and her work, enjoying offering haircuts to customers every day.

It is both uncommon and frowned upon in Vietnam for elderly people to live alone without their children's support, or in a nursing facility (Guilmoto 2015; Den Boer and Hudson 2017). Despite this, Khuê and Mi both expressed the sentiment that being cared for by others outside the family or living in a nursing home were positive options for them in Australia. Most parents in this study, like Khuê and Mi—who had both been living in Melbourne for forty years—had adult children who lived independently at the time of the interviews. They stressed that their children had their own families and their own lives, so they could not live with them. Their knowledge of resources outside the family available to the elderly in Australia, which facilitated closeness without co-residence between elderly parents and their children, appeared to make this possible.

Similarly, Trà, a 34-year-old skilled migrant who had been living in Australia for almost ten years, found the idea of not living with her children acceptable: "I don't think I can stay with them forever. Whenever they feel like moving out, we are happy about that because they are mature enough and have their own lives. We have our own lives too."

Trà came to Australia on her own to study. After graduating, she took on a job in New Zealand as a research assistant. After two years living there, she started a family and got a job in Melbourne as a lecturer. For many global citizens like Trà, living in the same house as their adult children and being dependent on them is not something they would choose. Many others mentioned that retirement services in Australia offered a possible option for them if they needed assistance.

Both refugees and skilled migrants did not feel it necessary for their children to take care of them. They understood and expected that their children would most likely not live with them in adulthood, and that they may need to move to a nursing home at some point. While they hoped that their sons—and children in general—would stay in touch, they did not expect sons to provide housing and emotional support in the same ways that they would have in Vietnam.

Obligations of Sons in Supporting Parents: Children's Views

Most of the children of Vietnamese migrants, whether from refugee or skilled-migrant backgrounds, were aware of family values and spoke highly about the importance of family closeness and support. A key part of son preference is the idea that children should be grateful for their parents' love and support and that first sons should repay that by caring for their parents in later life (Guilmoto 2012).

Almost all the children from refugee backgrounds understood that their parents had left Vietnam under dangerous conditions to create a better future for them. Thirty-seven-year-old Tân arrived in Melbourne with his parents on a boat when he was five years old. His parents had to work hard to support the family, and he is grateful to them: "I appreciate what they have done for me—how much they have done for me. They worked a lot of jobs, supported my sister and myself for school and for university."

Tân's parents were outworkers who sewed garments from home in their early days in Australia. They also took on other manual jobs. Tân was typical of the son participants from a refugee background in this study. Most expressed gratitude for their parents' sacrifices and understood that their parents paid a high price in fleeing from their homeland and resettling in Australia. Most sons said that although their parents did not need them to take care of them or provide for them financially, they would be happy to do so if their parents needed it.

Many of the daughters of refugees did not expect their parents to need support from them. For example, Hoa, a 36-year-old daughter of refugees, said:

> My mum and dad own a restaurant. I know that financially they are OK, and I also know that they want to go to nursing homes or other services for the elderly when they need help. . . . My brother and I do not need to think about that [looking after parents] too much.

Hoa has two siblings: an older brother and a younger sister. All of them have their own families and live in different states from their parents. From Hoa's perspective, her older brother is not under any financial obligation to their parents as would be expected in the traditional ideology of son preference in Vietnamese families (Luong Van Hy 2003; Guilmoto 2012).

Regarding the views and practices of sons' obligation to live with their parents, although many of the children were aware of their responsibilities, they did not feel obliged to live with their parents. Bảo, a 14-year-old son of skilled migrants, for example, expressed his dream of living independently:

> I will move out because I want to make my decisions, start a new life with my family, and I want to be independent. . . . Nothing wrong with that, I guess. Taking care of them at home? Yes, if they need me I will be happy to do it, but I do not think they need.

Bảo indicated that he could take care of his parents at home, but his expectation was that he would not need to. This idea was echoed in other interviews with children of refugees. Hùng, a 37-year-old oldest son in a refugee family, was not living with his parents at the time of the interview, but with his mother-in-law:

> I have been living with my mother-in-law since I married. My parents did not care, and of course, I did not care much about that. She [his mother-in-law] did not want to live alone, so my wife and I decided to live there [his mother-in-law's house].

It is unusual in Vietnamese families for the oldest son to live in his mother-in-law's house, because his own parents are expected to be his first priority (Lê Ngọc Văn 2012; Guilmoto 2015; Den Boer and Hudson 2017). However, for many children of refugees this was not a consideration. It should be noted that in some cases it was still considered important for children to take care of their parents if the parents were in need. The key difference in Hùng's case is that the obligations are now considered obligations of children, not just sons.

Bảo and Hùng are not the only sons in this study who do not expect to live with their parents when the latter get older. The other son participants in the study reported that they appreciated what their parents had done for them and would be happy to support their parents financially, but they still would prefer to live independently.

Discussion

This paper discusses twenty Vietnamese migrant parents and 18 Vietnamese Australian children's views and practices toward cultural values regarding son preference in families. The findings reveal that values regarding the traditional role of sons in Vietnamese families change after migration to Australia: sons are not seen as necessary in Vietnamese Australian families in terms of taking care of and providing financial support to parents in their later lives, and neither migrant parents nor children of migrant parents expect firstborn sons and their families to live with their parents. When migrants come to Australia, they move from a society where children are seen as providing resources to one where they are seen as a cost (Caldwell 1982; 2005). In this study, both groups changed their views on the value of sons. The parent participants did not embrace the traditional roles of sons regardless of the length of time living in Australia, how old they were, their social class, or whether they were from a refugee or skilled-migrant background. Further, this study shows that although almost all participants who were the children of Vietnamese migrants understood the traditional roles of sons in families, they

did not attempt to or plan to practice son preference. All the adult children in this study lived apart from their parents. Many said that they did not need to provide financial or other material support to their parents. Teenage participants tended to be prepared to take care of their parents if the need arose, but planned to set up independent lives outside their parents' houses once they became adults. In other words, son preference values have not been preserved in second-generation Vietnamese people born and raised in Australia.

These findings are a marked contrast from the continued commitment to son preference in contemporary Vietnam (Bélanger 2002; Guilmoto 2012). One of the main factors influencing this is that many elderly parents in Vietnam still face challenges in their old age due to the limitations of the social welfare system and lack of financial security (Goodkind *et al.* 1999). Living in these uncertain conditions leads aging parents to be dependent on their children/sons (Bui The Cuong *et al.* 2000; Guilmoto 2015). As a result, sons are expected to provide first assistance when the parents need help (Friedman *et al.* 2003; Den Boer and Hudson 2017). In this way, having a son is seen as one of the best ways for parents to feel safe and secure in society. In this study, however, the financial security and social welfare available in Australia are found to have greatly influenced parents' and children's attitudes toward son preference values.

This finding suggests that the migration experience has led to a diminishment of the importance of this Confucian value for Vietnamese migrants. After arriving in a new land, the cultural assumptions that migrants bring with them might be preserved or modified in the new cultural setting (McDonald 1995). In this study, son preference was, for the most part, discarded as a key cultural value. Cultural values are preserved in many migrant families through sharing beliefs and practices across generations. In refugee families in particular, retaining cultural practices can be seen as an effective way to reconstruct a livelihood, enhance the ability to settle into a foreign cultural environment, and engage with the new environment in the early stages of resettlement (Loizos 2000). On the other hand, the modification of heritage culture has been seen as an inevitable process that migrants experience when adapting to new contexts where they must engage with new people and different norms and values (Suárez-Orozco *et al.* 2002; Berry 2005; Kutor *et al.* 2021). In line with these views, the evidence obtained in this study reveals that a fundamental aspect of Confucian values regarding son preference in families has been modified and rejected by Vietnamese migrants in the new context of Australia. In other words, Confucianism is not only dismissed by many families in contemporary Vietnam (Guilmoto 2012) but has also been rejected by Vietnamese migrant families.

In addition, previous literature has described immigrant parents as clinging to cul-

tural values of origin and making constant efforts to transfer those values to the next generation (Chaichian 1997; Tingvold *et al.* 2012), while children who are born and raised in the host country tend to be alienated from their ethnic heritage culture (Zhou and Bankston 1998). As a result, the cultural gaps between first-generation parents and children in migrant/immigrant families have been presented as a source of conflict in migrant families (Foner 1997; Zhou 2009). However, it was found in this study that although most parent participants from both refugee and skilled-migrant backgrounds understood values relating to the obligations of sons to financially support and care for their parents, they found it unnecessary to expect their children to practice these values in Australia. Living in a new context, they were confident in identifying which values were unsuitable for their new lives. This adds to the growing body of research aimed at understanding the process of negotiating cultural clashes in immigrant families.

Early findings by Sylvie Dubuc and David Coleman (2007), Kale (2012), and Samantha Postulart and Sharada Srinivasan (2018) have found the persistence of son preference and sex selection behaviors in many Asian communities in the West. The central analysis of these studies has focused on available conditions in the countries of migration, such as the availability of prenatal sex-selective techniques, medical services, and abortion policies, rather than cultural explanations. Our findings have added to the literature by providing a detailed description and interpretation of why son preference does not persist in Vietnamese Australian families. It takes a more embedded perspective to understand how the economic value of sons and the expected flow of wealth from children to parents can shape the parents' attitudes, not just Confucian culture related to gender hierarchy attached to the sons.

Conclusion

In this study we found that after migration to Australia, Vietnamese migrants no longer express a strong preference for sons, and the children of Vietnamese migrants express no preference for sons. Our findings suggest that in Australia, Vietnamese migrants are able to access a strong social support system that provides older adults with financial and material support, including pension, a strong health-care system, and specific care for the aged. The migrants and their children in our study identified this as a key reason why parents did not expect their sons to provide for them. Thus, the patriarchal obligation of sons is challenged when people live in a state where wealth flows from sons are not seen as important by the parents (Caldwell 1982; 2005). It can therefore be expected that economic development and an expanded social welfare system could lead to an

attenuation of the Confucian cultural persistence of son preference in Vietnam.

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"Anak ng Bayang Dukha": A Computational and Comparative Keyword Analysis of Sakdalista and Communist Discourses from 1925 to 1941

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In Philippine historiography, there has been a tendency to either classify political movements using rigid, positivist, and "elite" categories or to challenge such definitions by arguing for a certain almost universally "indigenous" Filipino character. In contrast, the current study proposes to use computer tools and corpus linguistic techniques to balance the recognition of both continuity and dynamism, as well as sameness and difference, between movements. More specifically, the study uses a Keyword in Context (KWIC) analysis to compare the writings of the Sakdalistas and the Communists, two of the largest mass movements in early 20th-century Philippines. The keyword analysis reveals, on the one hand, distinct discursive features in the writings of the two groups, with the Sakdalistas deploying a language that is more concerned with morality and the Communists deploying a more economistic tongue. On the other hand, a closer examination of these keywords in context also reveals a shared critique of imperialism and its connections to capital, as well as the common presence of two discourses in tension: a discourse of inclusive nationalism and a discourse of division among the people. In other words, the comparative keyword analysis shows that the Sakdalistas and the Communists had distinct political characteristics while also oscillating between similar languages and arguments on the nature of colonial Philippines. The identification of these patterns may contribute to a more nuanced and empirical understanding of the complexity of social movements in both the Philippines and Southeast Asia in general.

Keywords: Sakdal, Sakdalista, digital humanities, Philippine Communism, mass movements, keyword analysis, Tagalog political discourse

Over the last century of Philippine historiography, there has been a tendency in the study of social movements and political organizations either to classify them according to rigid, positivist, and "elite" categories or to argue against such classifications by positing a

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certain universal, popular, and ultimately unchanging Filipino character (often some form of indigenous syncretic millenarianism). Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979) has done much to move Philippine scholarship away from the former tendency. It has also, unfortunately, promoted the latter (Anderson 2004; Richardson 2013, 452–465; Guillermo 2014; Scalice 2018).

In many ways, this is a manifestation of a larger pattern in Southeast Asia scholarship, which transitioned in the 1960s and 1970s from what Victor Lieberman (2003) called an "externalist" historiography to a more "autonomous" one. Historians who wrote in the former vein "embraced the positivist assumption that diligence and goodwill alone would eliminate bias" (Lieberman 2003, 6), and in so doing allowed for the perpetuation of a colonialist perspective on Southeast Asian history. One of the chief assumptions of this perspective was that indigenous Southeast Asians were incapable, inert, and lacking in agency, while "external" actors—India, China, and Europe—were the primary drivers of Southeast Asian civilization. In contrast, "autonomous" historians sought to "show how local peoples had been able to absorb, translate, and recontextualize external forces, in short, to maintain control of their environments" (Lieberman 2003, 11). Ironically, however, while this approach succeeded in showing Southeast Asian agency, there was still a tendency to portray Southeast Asian societies as fundamentally static, with core indigenous beliefs and practices remaining essentially unchanged across centuries (Lieberman 2003, 13–15).

This problem of accounting for both continuity and dynamism—and accounting for the interplay of both sameness and difference—takes an even more complicated turn when discussing social movements in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. The already complex character of contentious politics becomes even more so in the context of the development of modern social and political formations during the colonial period. Ignoring such complexities, however, can lead to faulty classifications. Shiraishi Takashi (1990) has shown this to be the case with the typical division of early twentieth-century Javanese social movements (*pergerakan*) into "nationalist," "Islamic," and "Communist" categories. Instead of such neat divisions, Shiraishi argues that there was "a complex and dynamic process of translation and appropriation" (Shiraishi 1990, 339). This process saw the emergence of figures like Haji Misbach and newspapers like *Islam Bergerak*, which fused an Islamic worldview, identity, and eschatology with Marxist critiques of capital and imperialism (Shiraishi 1990, 249–298; Lin 2018, 323–335). Similarly, Anna Belogurova has argued that the Malayan Communist Party developed when "new ideas of nationalism and radicalism were grafted onto existing concepts and organizational forms, which shaped the hybridization of anti-imperialist and labor organizations" (Belogurova 2019, 5). Thus, across maritime Southeast Asia, "the movement for independence was

intertwined with globalist thinking in the form of Comintern internationalism, the pan-Asianism of Sun Yatsen, Christianity, Islam, and anarchism" (Belogurova 2019, 6).

Such is also the case with the Sakdalistas, one of the largest Philippine mass movements of the 1930s. The literature on the Sakdalistas can be roughly divided into two groups: earlier works that identify broad socioeconomic causes behind the Sakdal Revolt of 1935 (Hayden 1942, 376–400; Stubbs 1951; Guerrero 1968; Sturtevant 1976, 215–255)[1] and later studies that, by studying Sakdalista discourse, complexify certain simplistic conclusions derived from the first set of studies (Terami-Wada 2014; Delupio 2016). Terami-Wada Motoe, for example, criticizes previous research for "[failing] to bring out the Sakdalistas' way of thinking" (Terami-Wada 1992, 19), while characterizing her own work as an attempt "to look at the history of the Sakdalistas from within" (Terami-Wada 1992, 21). In doing so, she shows how the Sakdalistas were a modern social movement that drew on diverse influences: traditional ideas of morality and honor, radical interpretations of Christian teaching, Gandhi-inspired calls for civil disobedience, etc. Sakdalistas also responded to shifting currents in both national and international politics, such as the rise of fascism, pan-Asian activism, and the growing threat of World War II.

The current study hopes to build on this kind of research, but to do so using a combination of methods that has yet to be applied to the subject of Philippine mass movements. Specifically, this study proposes to use computer tools and corpus linguistic techniques to do a comparative Keyword in Context (KWIC) analysis of the writings of two contemporaneous political movements: the Sakdalistas and the Communists.

The benefits of combining these two elements—using corpus tools and comparing movements—necessitates further elaboration. There is both a theoretical and a practical reason for the use of corpus tools. One of the advantages of corpus linguistics, as Michael Stubbs (2002, 226–231) argues, is its capacity to overcome common dualistic paradigms. In lieu of studying the abstract entirety of a language system (e.g., whether langue or competency) or surrendering in the face of the infinitely variable and immeasurable fragments of everyday utterance (e.g., whether parole or performance), corpus linguistics observes the routine or repeated co-presence of words in large sets of utterances. The study of any individual utterance, therefore, is situated within empirically identified patterns.[2]

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1) As Ileto (1979, 6–7) points out in a different context, David Sturtevant's *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines, 1840–1940* (1976) functions as a sort of transition between these two groups.

2) See also Wolfgang Teubert's argument (2007) that corpus linguistics makes it possible for linguists to study the parole more than the langue. For this reason, Teubert describes corpus linguistics as "parole linguistics."

This capacity to account for variation of individual phenomena, while also identifying larger structures and routines out of which these utterances emerge, can be useful for striking a balance in recognizing both continuity and dynamism, as well as sameness and difference. This is particularly true when dealing with thousands of texts—a situation where the qualitative analysis of every single text is impractical (or even impossible). For example, Marlon Delupio's (2013; 2016) ambitious study of the poetry and cartoons of the Sakdalistas succeeds in showing the variety of beliefs that Sakdalista members held (Delupio 2016, 77–105) and the range of themes they wrote about. But at certain points, Delupio's study also risks flattening away the complexity of these themes due to an overreliance on the Sakdalista manifesto, "Ano Ang Sakdalismo" (What is Sakdalism). Delupio classified Sakdalista texts using the three core principles (*simulaing-ugat*) outlined in the manifesto: (1) The Philippines is only for Filipinos (*Ang Pilipinas ay maging sa mga Pilipino lamang*); (2) All Filipinos should be equal in achieving comfort from their livelihood, equal in the kind and dignity of their personhood, and equal in rights (*Ang lahat na Pilipino ay maging pantay-pantay sa pagtamasa ng ginhawa sa kabuhayan; pantay-pantay sa uri at dangal ng pagkatao; at pantay-pantay sa mga karapatan*); and (3) Those in government should sacrifice to improve the conditions of the People (*Ang mga taong pamahalaan ay dapat magpakahirap upang guminhawa ang Bayan*). On the surface, this schema makes sense. After all, the purpose of "Ano Ang Sakdalismo" was to explain what the Sakdalistas stood for. But the manifesto was published immediately after the failure of the Sakdal Revolt, "perhaps to explain what had led to the uprising and to clarify the Sakdalista Party's stand" (Terami-Wada 2014, 162). As this was a time of disagreement and demoralization among Sakdalistas, some of whom would leave the party (Terami-Wada 2014, 73–77), the manifesto, though important, must be read more circumspectly. Even the narrower claim that it documents "official" Sakdalista discourse may risk papering over contradictions, disagreements, or fluctuations in thinking that existed even among the leadership of the movement.

To an extent, of course, such a narrowing is both necessary and desirable. As mentioned, it is difficult to sift through and classify thousands of texts. More important, the existence of multiple strains of thought does not negate the fact that some patterns of thinking may be more prominent than others, especially in complex phenomena like social movements. Nevertheless, the problem is how to empirically account for each of these elements without diminishing the other—i.e., how to recognize the predominance of certain patterns over others, while also accounting for potentially contradictory discourses. Corpus linguistics, as mentioned, provides one possible approach to doing so.

Meanwhile, the reason for comparing two social movements, particularly the Sakdalistas and the Communists, is rooted in the aforementioned problem of classifying

Philippine movements. As already discussed, this problem has often taken the form of positing either that movements are completely different from one another—e.g., some are fanatical, others are rational—or that all movements are the same—e.g., they are all millenarian. The latter tendency can be seen in Francisco Nemenzo's essay (2010) on the "millenarian-populist aspects" of the first Communist party of the Philippines.[3] The former tendency, meanwhile, can be seen in David Sturtevant's (1976) classification of the Communists as being part of the "Great Tradition" of "rational" revolt, while the Sakdalistas are relegated to being a transitory movement between the "Great" and "Little" traditions. Interestingly, these kinds of questionable classifications can also be found in the writings of the Sakdalistas and Communists themselves. As the most prominent radical mass movements of the 1930s, the Sakdalistas and the Communists had a tense and complicated relationship.[4] Although their leaders were initially friendly, relations between them eventually broke down. In the process, the Sakdalistas shifted from asserting that both movements were *anak ng bayang dukha* (children of the poor) to branding the Communists as Russian agents. The Communists, meanwhile, labeled their Sakdalista counterparts Fascists and spokesmen of the bourgeoisie.

A careful comparative analysis of these two movements, therefore, can allow for a more nuanced understanding of overlaps and divergences in their political thought. In fact, as this study will show, a comparative keyword analysis reveals distinct features and priorities in the languages deployed by both two groups. Sakdalistas deployed a language that was more concerned with morality, while Communists deployed a language that was more economistic in nature. Meanwhile, a close examination of certain keywords also reveals shared ideas between these movements about imperialism and their connection with capital. Furthermore, an analysis of the keyword *bayang* reveals that both movements exhibited, with varying degrees of emphasis and tension, two potentially contradictory discourses: a discourse of inclusive nationalism and a discourse of division among the people. In other words, both the Sakdalistas and the Communists, while having distinct discursive characteristics, also oscillated between similar languages and arguments on the nature of the political and economic situation of colonial Philippines. Such findings point to the potential usefulness of both computer-aided discourse analysis and comparative study to comprehend the complexity of political movements, both in the Philippines and in other regions.

3) See Richardson (1993) for a critique of Nemenzo's arguments.

4) In longer studies about either movement, it is almost a given that a few pages will discuss the relationship between the Sakdalistas and the Communists. See, for example, Fuller (2007, 99–101), Richardson (2011, 242–247), Terami-Wada (2014, 93–96), and Delupio (2016, 99–105).

Methodology

Corpus Creation

Three Tagalog-language corpora were created for this study. As part of the author's longer-term research into the Sakdalistas, the first corpus created was a general *Sakdal* corpus, composed of all Tagalog-language articles from the 157 surviving issues of the *Sakdal*, the official weekly newspaper of the Sakdalistas from 1930 to 1938 (during which time the movement reached its peak). Overall, the *Sakdal* corpus contains nearly 2.5 million words. This corpus alone took over two years to create. Consequently, due to both practical concerns and for the sake of consistency, other Sakdalista publications like the declaration of the party platform ("Pamahayag at Patakaran" 2009) and publications of organizations that succeeded the Lapiang Sakdalista (e.g., the Ganap Party) were not included.

The choice of texts for the second corpus was contingent on a number of factors, especially lack of access/availability. Thus, it was not possible to make a corpus out of Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (Communist Party of the Philippines; PKP) publications such as *Titis* (Spark) (1933), *Sinag* (Ray of light) (1934), and *Kalayaan* (Freedom) (1935).[5] Instead, the second corpus, the Crisanto Evangelista (CE) corpus, is composed of articles, pamphlets, and speeches written by the leaders of the first PKP. Typescripts and photocopies of these documents were collected by Roland Simbulan.[6] Most of the documents are by Crisanto Evangelista, one of the founders and primary intellectuals of the PKP, though one article is by Jacinto Manahan (1932) and some are signed by the leadership of various organizations associated with the Communists. In the interest of creating a larger and more usable corpus, the author set 1925 as the cut-off date for inclusion of articles. This decision was based on Jim Richardson's insight (2011, 92–93)—corroborated by the CE corpus data—that Tan Malaka's visit to Manila in 1925 marked a turning point in the spread of Marxism in the Philippines. The CE corpus, in sum, is made up of articles written by Evangelista and a few other Communist leaders between 1925 and 1941, which altogether comprise around 120,000 words.[7]

The final corpus, the "Sariling Diwa" or SD corpus, is a subset of the larger *Sakdal* corpus. The SD corpus is composed of all copies of "Sariling Diwa," the main editorial

5) These three newspapers were published by the PKP during the 1930s. *Titis* was published from February 1931 to mid-1933. *Sinag* was published for a few months beginning May 1934. *Kalayaan*, finally, was launched in July 1935 and would continue to be published throughout the decade (Richardson 2011, 213; Fuller 2007, 150).

6) The author thanks Ramon Guillermo for providing copies of these documents.

7) For more details on the primary resources that constitute the CE corpus see "CE Corpus Materials" in the reference section.

of the newspaper. This subcorpus was created to have a Sakdalista corpus that, in contrast with the general *Sakdal* corpus, is more comparable to the CE corpus in terms of both conventions of linguistic usage (vis-à-vis genre) and the rhetorical position these articles occupied within their respective movements. It is also a better match in terms of size; the SD corpus has around 180,000 words. (An alternative, a subcorpus composed of Benigno Ramos's writings, was also considered. In some ways, such a corpus would have been more directly parallel to the CE corpus, given Ramos's role as founder and primary intellectual of the *Sakdal*. Unfortunately, it was too difficult to ascertain what could and could not be included in such a corpus, because Ramos was known to use pen names and because Sakdalista articles are often unattributed.)

In corpus linguistics, it is necessary to be transparent about extra processes followed in the creation of corpora. Therefore, without going into too much detail, the various changes made are described below:

1) Ads were excluded from the *Sakdal* corpus.
2) Lines or phrases referring to the separation of articles (e.g., "*May karugtong sa pahina 4*" [Continued on page 4]) were removed.
3) Due to practical considerations, the author did not change typos, spelling variations, and idiosyncratic transition markers. While this has a slight effect on the calculation of keywords, the effects were easy enough to account for during analysis.
4) Due to practical considerations, and because they are not recognized by the concordance software, diacritics were removed.

At this point, it should be acknowledged that by forming corpora exclusively from written texts, the current study is skewed toward the articulations of the literate sections of the Sakdalista and Communist membership. Nevertheless, analyzing these materials has an important place in understanding the overall contours of Sakdalista and Communist discourses. Apart from the fact that the writings of Philippine mass movements in general, including their leaders, is an underdeveloped object of study, the impact of these writings was not limited to the literate membership. In the CE corpus, many documents were written for small publications with working-class audiences (e.g., *Tinig Manggagawa* [Voice of the worker]) while others were used as organizational guides. Much the same can be said for the *Sakdal*, which would publish summaries and transcripts of speeches from meetings. Furthermore, the *Sakdal* was commonly read aloud in villages (*barrios*) for nonliterate members (Terami-Wada 2014, 17). These documents should be seen, therefore, not simply as arguments articulated in a void but as political arguments artic-

ulated in the context of addressing the concerns of existing and prospective members—i.e., articulations in the context of building mass movements.

Keyword Analysis

The current study uses a modified version of the keyword analysis method proposed by Costas Gabrielatos (2018, 238–244). This method differentiates between "keywords of difference" (words with statistically unusual frequencies in one corpus compared to another) and "keywords of similarity" (words that appear in more or less the same ratio relative to the respective size of each corpus). Keywords of difference are ascertained by using a high statistical significance threshold (in this study, Bayesian Information Criterion [BIC] >= 2.0) and arranging the remaining words by highest to lowest effect size score (in this study, from highest to lowest Log Ratio). Keywords of similarity, meanwhile, are determined by searching for words whose effect size scores are closest to zero, regardless of statistical significance.

Afterward, the candidate key items (CKIs) are run through an agglomerative hierarchical clustering analysis that uses Euclidean distance to compare individual CKIs and between-groups linkage to compare clusters. The default method is to divide the total number of CKIs by the number of keywords per corpus that can be practically studied (usually 100 words). However, a greater number of smaller clusters can be specified for more fine-grained analyses (Gabrielatos 2018, 242–247). This turned out to be necessary to analyze keywords of difference between the SD and CE corpora. Between these two corpora, there are 766 CKIs for keywords of difference. Unfortunately, dividing these into only eight clusters (~766/100) resulted in one or two clusters with hundreds of CKIs each. Therefore, a total of 77 clusters instead (with a hypothetical average of 10 CKIs per cluster) was specified for the keywords of difference. For keywords of similarity, however, which had a total of 13,757 CKIs, the CKIs were divided into 138 clusters (~13,757/100).

To form the final lists of keywords to be analyzed, the author included as many CKIs as were necessary to reach at least 100 keywords per corpus for each type of keyword, then included any CKIs that belonged to the same cluster as the 100th keyword. Six lists in total were formed, four corresponding to keywords of difference and two corresponding to keywords of similarity. The reason for having twice as many lists for keywords of difference is the large disparity in potential meanings between what the present author calls "keywords of absence" (which appear in only one corpus) and "keywords of preference" (which appear in both corpora, but more frequently in one). Therefore, separate lists were made for each of these subcategories of keywords of difference.

Finally, the patterns of emergence of these keywords in the corpora were compared.

Overall context—i.e., the concordances and articles in which these keywords appeared—was taken into account. Additionally, frequent word clusters (or n-grams) of certain keywords were examined. This was done to ensure that the keywords were analyzed in a manner consistent with their actual usage in the material. Many unexpected patterns can be properly understood only by examining the concordances and articles. For example, some keywords of difference in the SD and CE corpora emerged solely due to idiosyncratic differences in spelling, while some keywords of similarity, despite appearing with equal prominence in both corpora, were used in vastly different ways by the two movements. It is important, therefore, to not only rely on raw quantitative data for the analysis, but to combine this with careful qualitative reading.

AntConc 3.5.8 was used to make the word lists and identify clusters and concordances. The default settings of AntConc were used, except for adding the apostrophe (‘) and hyphen (-) characters to the "Token Definition." Word lists were transferred to Microsoft Excel[8] to calculate for statistical significance and effect size, and then transferred to SPSS Statistics v25 for hierarchical clustering analysis.

Sakdalista and Komunista: A Tale of Two Parties

The Sakdalista movement began with the founding of the *Sakdal* by the Tagalog poet Benigno Ramos. The first issue was published on August 30, 1930. Over the next few years, the Sakdalistas quickly grew with their calls for immediate independence, land reform, tax alleviation (for the poor), support for local production, etc. In 1933 Sakdalista leaders founded the Lapiang Sakdalista (Sakdalista Party) to try to prevent the formation of the Philippine Commonwealth, which they argued was a plot to further delay independence. They participated in the legislative elections the following year. Their strong showing in some local elections surprised the leaders of the more dominant parties (Terami-Wada 2014, 42–43). Nevertheless, the Sakdalistas were not strong enough in the legislature to prevent the formation of the commonwealth or push for immediate independence.

These difficulties, and increasing harassment from the government and police, led to the Sakdal Uprising on May 2, 1935. The revolt was quickly put down and the Sakdalistas thrown into disarray. The weakened party that emerged would live on for another three

8) Because Excel converts to formulas any cell that begins with a hyphen, a few "words" from the word lists that began with hyphens (due to how these words were written in the original texts) were converted by Excel to the placeholder "#NAME." To overcome this problem, an extra apostrophe was added to the beginning of these words (e.g., *‘-ang* in place of *-ang*).

years. In 1938, following a shift in tactics from Ramos that not everyone agreed with, the Sakdalistas were reorganized as the Ganap Party (Terami-Wada 2014, 117–125). In 1941, with the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, the Ganap Party sided with the invaders, believing that they would end American colonialism. In 1944 Ganap Party members formed the initial core of the widely reviled Makapili, a pro-Japanese militia (Terami-Wada 2014, 174–177, 181–189). After the war, the Ganap Party was no more.

The Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, meanwhile, was founded on the 34th anniversary of the Philippine Revolution (August 26, 1930)—just four days before the first issue of the *Sakdal* was released. Within its first year, the PKP faced intense government persecution, including the arrest of its leaders. This persecution was exacerbated by the PKP's overly sectarian and ultra-leftist tactics, a result of its adherence to the belligerent strategy of the Communist International (Comintern) at the time. Thus, the PKP found itself isolated from potential allies and facing many difficulties while organizing (Richardson 2011, 250–251).

In 1935, however, the Comintern changed its strategy from revolutionary sectarianism to building united fronts with anti-Fascist forces. The PKP accepted this shift, softened its criticism of other groups, and emphasized the need for national unity. Over the next half-decade, the PKP would swell in size until it was double its original peak before the persecutions (Richardson 2011, 252). The PKP also merged with the large Partido Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (Socialist Party of the Philippines), which was based in Pampanga. When World War II broke out, the PKP organized the guerrilla Hukbalahap, the largest anti-Japanese armed resistance in the archipelago. After the war, faced with renewed persecution from the newly independent Philippine government, the PKP launched the 12-year-long Huk Rebellion.

As previously mentioned, the Sakdalistas and the Communists had a tense and complicated relationship. One reason for this tension was competition over members. Both the Sakdalistas and the Communists drew most of their support from Manila and the provinces of Central and South Luzon (Richardson 2011, 255; Terami-Wada 2014, 154; Delupio 2016, 1–3). Additionally, while both movements had members from the middle classes and the intelligentsia, the bulk of their supporters were peasants and laborers (Richardson 2011, 252; Terami-Wada 2014, 141–144). During the American colonial period, peasant groups and labor unions were "prone to large and swift fluctuations, readily attracting adherents when they appeared dynamic and excited hope, but just as abruptly contracting when their promise faded" (Richardson 2011, 197). In that regard, the Sakdalistas at their peak (just before the 1935 revolt) seem to have been more successful in gaining the support of the peasantry (Richardson 2011, 198). The PKP, in contrast, may have had a deeper base among the urban working class due to its roots in

the labor movement. Eventually, though, by the second half of the 1930s, the PKP also gained a sizable following among peasants and rural workers (Richardson 2011, 252).

The first mention of Communism in the *Sakdal* is in its sixth issue (October 4, 1930), in an article summarizing a speech from a meeting of the Palihan ng Bayan (a nationalist organization that was strong in the provinces of Rizal and Laguna). In this speech, the "courageous" (*matapang*) G. Santiago G. Flores from the Palihan ng Bayan criticized Communists for the "divisions they foster among the people and their propagation of the spirit of RUSSIAN BOLSHEVISM here in our country" (*ginagawang paghahatihati sa mga tao at pagpapalaganap ng espiritu ng BOLSIBIKISMO sa RUSIA dito sa ating bayan*) (Anonymous 1930b). At this point, both the *Sakdal* and the PKP were only a few months old, and far from their intense war of words in the early months of 1935. Nevertheless, by October 1930 the general thrust of the Sakdalistas' disagreement with the Communists was evident: the latter's alleged splitting up of the Filipino people. Although this criticism came from another organization, the use of the word "courageous" to describe the speaker indicates general agreement with this sentiment by the writer of the *Sakdal* article.

However, two months later the *Sakdal* published an even longer article by Jose Quirante, a Communist, praising the Soviet Union (Quirante 1930). Soon after, it published a eulogy for Antonino Ora, a Communist leader who died in an automobile accident (Anonymous 1931b). In these articles, one sees the more complicated relationship between the Sakdalistas and the Communists that emerged in their early years. Although the *Sakdal* did not directly support the Communists, it still recognized the PKP as a parallel organization of the poor and oppressed (Anonymous 1931a; 1931e).

Many reasons have been given for why the relationship between the movements soured. According to Delupio (2016, 100), it began when the Communists joined the elections of June 1931, which *Sakdal* supporters boycotted. Terami-Wada (2014, 94), meanwhile, says it was the result of a decision by Ramos to distance the *Sakdal* from the Communists following the arrest of the latter's leaders in May 1931.

Terami-Wada (2014) also argues, however, that this decision became noticeable only in mid-1932. In fact, in the months following May 1931, the *Sakdal* published multiple articles defending the Communists and even calling them "martyrs of the poor" (*mga martir ng bayang dukha*) (Anonymous 1931c). Meanwhile, on December 26, 1931, and January 2, 1932, the *Sakdal* published Evangelista's English-language article titled "An Open Letter to the Philippine Capitalist Press." Richardson (2011, 242) agrees that the conflict between the Sakdalistas and the Communists truly erupted in 1932, and that the catalyst was criticism from the Communists, who called Benigno Ramos a Fascist and the *Sakdal* editors "spokesmen of the bourgeois class" (*tagapagsalita ng uring burgesya*)

(quoted in Richardson 2011). This attack, in turn, was simply one example of the aforementioned sectarianism exhibited in the early years of the PKP (Fuller 2007, 75; Richardson 2011, 243–246).

Eventually, between their shifting fortunes and policies, the leaders of the two parties began to occasionally work together again. One sign of this renewed amicability was the publication in the *Sakdal* of an article by the Communist leader Guillermo Capadocia (1937). Interestingly, though, even at the height of their disagreements, ordinary members of both parties sometimes still supported each other. For example, during the Sakdalista revolt of May 1935 some ordinary Communists came to support the Sakdalistas, even while the PKP leadership was debating what their official position would be (Terami-Wada 2014, 95).

Keyword Analysis I: Moral versus Economic Discourse

How did this complicated relationship between the two movements manifest in the patterns of their political language? Both the Sakdalistas and the Communists saw themselves as defenders of the poor, but they characterized the poor differently. The Sakdalistas tended toward general descriptors like *dukha* (poor), which appears 121 times in the SD corpus but only five times in the CE corpus. The Communists, meanwhile, were more likely to use occupational words like *magbubukid* (farmer/agricultural worker), *anakpawis* (worker/laborer), and *manggagawa* (worker/laborer). Interestingly, though many Sakdalistas were farmers and laborers (Terami-Wada 2014, 141–144), the SD corpus rarely uses either *magbubukid* or *manggagawa* to refer to them. Even *magsasaka*, a synonym of *magbubukid*, appears only seven times in the SD corpus while appearing nine times in the smaller CE corpus.

It is easy enough to find a reason for this difference. A central concept in Marxist philosophy is class struggle, where "class" refers to a group of people with similar interests because of their historical positions within the economic system. Categories like *manggagawa* or *magbubukid* are important for Marxists not only because they describe generally impoverished populations, but because they refer to specific groups in the economic system that have specific historical relations with one another—e.g., the complicated possibilities of alliance and conflict between the proletariat and the peasantry. (On that note, a caveat that must be noted here is that *magbubukid* may refer to different groups in the agricultural sector, from small landholding peasants to tenant farmers and hired labor. It is not as strict, therefore, in identifying economic groups vis-à-vis ownership of the means of production. Nevertheless, it is more specific in identifying positions

within the economic system than terms like *dukha*.)

This same worldview emerges in CKIs that describe oppressors of the poor. The following keywords, among others, appear more prominently in the CE corpus: *burges* (bourgeois), *mamumuhunan* (investor/capitalist), *asendero* (large landlord), *kapitalista* (capitalist), and *maharlika* (aristocracy). These CKIs do not simply describe the rich and powerful but rather social groups that own the means of production. They have no counterparts in the top CKIs of the SD corpus, where the CKIs used to describe oppressive groups are *dambuhala* (monster or giant), *berdugo* (executioner), and *kostabularyo* (constabulary).

Such differences between the SD and CE corpora can be compared with different characterizations of class conflict among "yellow unions" and "red unions" from around 1928 to 1933. According to Ramon Guillermo (2009, 99–110), many early socialists in the Philippines interpreted class conflict through the lens of morality, emphasizing the morality of individual capitalists when negotiating between factory workers and owners. This emphasis on morality to solve inequality is incompatible with the usual Marxist position that conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is inextricable from their relative positions in the mode of production. In other words, while there will always be capitalists who are more "moral," the occasional morality of individual capitalists does not change the overall economic situation (where, to keep up with the competition, it is necessary to rely on and eventually increase the exploitation of labor power).

Consequently, the vocabulary of the CE corpus tends to emphasize economic relations: "capital," *kalakalin* (trade), *paggawa* (labor), etc. In contrast, there are more words in the SD corpus concerned with morality: *kapurihan* (honor), *kahihiyan* (shame), *karangalan* (honor), *kalooban* (inner concerns, will, sentiment, or workings), etc. An interesting keyword in this regard is *katungkulan* (responsibility/office), which is often used in the SD corpus to mean office/position in government. In this context, the Sakdalistas criticized how political leaders, including the leaders of supposedly radical organizations, did whatever it took to acquire *katungkulan*, *kayamanan* (wealth), and *salapi* (money) instead of trying to improve the lives of the people (*bayan*).

Interestingly, even among keywords of similarity (which appear with equal prominence in both corpora), the moral/economic division emerges. Even when using the same words, for example, Sakdalistas and Communists often, though not always, used them differently. The best example is perhaps *maliliit* (small). In the SD corpus, most of its concordances refer in a general way to oppressed groups—e.g., the *dukha* and *mangmang* (uneducated) that are exploited by the *malalaki* (large). Meanwhile, in the CE corpus, *maliliit* often points to specific class categories, e.g., *maliliit na burges* (petty bourgeoise).

Keyword Analysis II: Capitalism Linked with Imperialism

The findings above confirm Richardson's observation that Sakdalista rhetoric was "more moralistic, earthier, and more personal" than that of the PKP (Richardson 2011, 242). It should be noted, however, that these keywords do not show that Communist discourse is completely economistic or that Sakdalista discourse is solely concerned with morality. What they show is the relative prominence of certain patterns in one corpus versus another. In other words, economic relations are more central to the Communists' understanding of society, and moral concerns are more central to Sakdalista discourse. But the prominence of these themes in one corpus does not preclude their presence in the other. In fact, given the Sakdalista goal of creating a more just and equitable society, it would be surprising if there were no discussion in the *Sakdal* about economic relations.

These discursive intersections can already be seen in the concordances of *maliliit*. Although, as mentioned earlier, the word is often used differently in the corpora, there is one important overlap: the reference to "small" countries/nations (*bayang maliliit or maliliit na bayan/bansa*) oppressed by larger countries like the United States. Another keyword of similarity, *taksil* (traitor), exhibits a similar mix of diverging and intersecting usages. On the one hand, most uses of *taksil* in the SD corpus refer to how Filipino politicians have betrayed the people by serving foreign interests. The people being betrayed here are Filipinos in general (countrymen or *kababayan*) as opposed to any specific economic group. In contrast, most uses of *taksil* in the CE corpus refer specifically to the betrayal of the working class, both in the Philippines and abroad (e.g., "the traitors that make up the International in Amsterdam" [*mga taksil na bumubuo ng Internasyonal sa Amsterdam*] [Evangelista 1929]). Nevertheless, four of the 13 uses of *taksil* in the CE corpus also refer to Filipino politicians defending imperialistic American interests. These "traitors" include the Federalists, Quezon, his allies, and bourgeois reformists (*repormistang burges*)—all of whom are "traitors to the welfare of those who spill sweat and to the freedom and peace of the entire people" (*taksil sa kapakanan ng mga nagpapatulo ng pawis at sa kalayaan at kapayapaan ng sangbayanan*) (Lupong Pangbansa ng Partido 1939, 19). The characterization of victims here is interesting. On the one hand, the phrase "those who spill sweat" (*mga nagpapatulo ng pawis*) implies that the primary victims of this betrayal are laborers (i.e., *mga anakpawis* or, literally, "children of sweat"). On the other hand, the phrase "freedom and peace of the entire people" (*kalayaan at kapayapaan ng sangbayanan*) gestures toward a broader Filipino nation.

Significantly, these last lines were written in 1939, after the PKP had already changed its overall political strategy. It is unsurprising, then, that the Communists in

1939 would gesture toward the liberation of the entire nation. But changing Comintern strategies alone are insufficient to explain this gesture. After all, nationalist language and argumentation were always part of PKP writings, even when they were arguing that internationalism was superior to "nationalism-protectionism." This continuity can be seen in the concordances of another keyword of similarity, *kagyat* (immediate/urgent).

In both the SD and CE corpora, *kagyat* is connected with the popular American-era slogan for "immediate, complete, and absolute independence" (*kagyat, ganap at lubos na kasarinlan*). In the SD corpus, the slogan is generally used straightforwardly: the Sakdalistas want immediate independence. Thus, they criticize the empty promises of politicians who claimed to support independence and then did nothing after gaining power. Similar criticisms are expressed in the CE corpus. In an article from 1930, Evangelista argues that bourgeoisie nationalists make use of the "flag of 'immediate, complete, and absolute independence'" (*watawat na "kagyat, ganap at lubusang pagsasarili"*) (Evangelista 1930c) simply to gain power. Meanwhile, in articles long before their tactical shift (in 1935), the Communists expressed support for immediate Philippine independence. For example, in 1929—in the same article where, ironically, Evangelista argues for internationalism over nationalism—the slogan for complete and immediate independence is rewritten so that independence becomes intertwined with class struggle. According to Evangelista (1929), "The struggle of laborers within [the terrain of] class struggle is headed towards their own upliftment . . . towards the complete redemption of the laborers and the immediate freedom of the Philippines and other colonized people" (*Ang pakikibaka ng mga anakpawis sa batayang makauri* [class struggle] *ay tungo sa kanilang ikagiginhawa. . . . Tungo sa ganap na ikatutubos ng mga anakpawis at sa kagyat na ikalalaya ng Pilipinas at ng mga bayang kolonya*). For Sakdalistas, the true nationalism of the people (*bayan*) is contrasted with the false nationalism of Filipino politicians. For Communists, nationalism can be dangerous because it disguises the real relations between workers and capitalists. Nevertheless, Communists push for independence because true independence is aligned with internationalism. True independence will lead, after all, to the bettering of people's lives.

This points to a deeper reason than simply "strategy" for the overlap in nationalistic language between these movements: anti-imperialism. Additionally, many passages from both corpora show that this shared anti-imperialism was not only based on the two groups' opposition to the conquest of "small" countries. Rather, for both Sakdalistas and Communists, imperialism was seen as being connected with capitalist greed.

In the SD corpus, the connection between imperialism and capitalism can be seen in occasional references to "American capitalists" (*kapitalistang Amerikano*). The phrase appears in five different articles in the SD corpus, always in the context of Filipino politi-

cians serving American capitalists instead of ordinary Filipinos. For example, the "Sariling Diwa" from November 14, 1931, while criticizing the greed of "traitorous" (*taksil*) politicians, refers to Manuel Quezon, Sergio Osmeña, and Manuel Roxas (all future presidents of the Philippines) as "three agents of American capitalists and killers of the reason of the people" (*tatlong ahente ng mga kapitalistang amerikano at pamatay sa katuwiran ng bayan*). Meanwhile, in an editorial about the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the law that established the commonwealth, the Cuban situation is used to illustrate connections between capitalism and imperialism:

> Cuba is independent, but America remains king and lord. No Cuban will win an election to be president of the republic if they are not the men of and held by the nape by American capitalists. The moment that an enemy of imperialism wins [an election] will be the awakening of Cuba, and this is what the capitalists are watching out for, and that is why they spend millions to ensure that their men will win.
>
> *Ang Cuba ay nagsasarili, ngunit ang Amerika rin ang hari at panginoon. Walang kubanong magtatagumpay sa halalan sa pagkapangulo ng republika kung hindi bata at hawak sa batok ng mga kapitalistang amerikano. Oras na may magtagumpay na kalaban ng mga imperialista ay siyang pagkagising ng Cuba, at ito ang iniingatan ng mga kapitalista, kaya gumagasta sila ng angaw-angaw magwagi lamang, ang kanilang mga bata.* (*Sakdal*, July 14, 1934)

Naturally, imperialism and capitalism are also seen as connected in the CE corpus. This is one reason why the Communists, despite criticizing "nationalism-protectionism," also believed they were continuing the spirit of the anticolonial 1896 Philippine Revolution. In the pamphlet "Ang A-B-K ng Anakpawis," Evangelista writes:

> The new imperialism is the policy of capital on the basis of conquest and appropriation [which they do] because of the scramble for markets to carry their goods, because of [their need for] raw materials, because of large profits from investing capital in other countries, and because of the abundant labor power that can be easily obtained through low wages.
>
> *Ang bagong imperyalismo ay ang patakaran ng puhunang salapi sa salig sa panlulupig at pangangamkam dahil sa pag-aagawan sa mga pamilihang mamagdalhan ng kanilang mga kalakalin, dahil sa kailangang materya prima at uling, dahil sa malalaking napapakinabang sa pagdadala ng puhunan sa ibang bayan, at dahil sa saganang lakas ng paggawa na maluwag na matatamo sa pamamagitan ng napakakakang bayad.* (Evangelista 1932a)

Of course, it is important to note that the words *kapitalista* and *kapitalistang* are not used in exactly the same way in both corpora. For the Communists, these words are understood through the lens of historical materialism, which argues that the domination of the bourgeoisie during capitalism emerged out of contradictions in the previous mode of production. This narrative does not appear in either the SD or the *Sakdal* corpus.

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	81	45	36	3.62787	sa
2	74	46	28	3.52522	ng
3	73	54	19	4.50613	mga
4	63	33	30	3.38252	ang
5	60	19	41	4.27816	at
6	33	12	21	2.85885	na
7	32	17	15	3.18077	ay
8	12	7	5	10.23740	imperialista
9	12	5	7	3.40594	hindi
10	10	3	7	4.50527	upang
11	9	7	2	3.66082	ito
12	8	4	4	3.91345	isang
13	7	7	0	12.15723	pamamaraang
14	7	0	7	12.00914	pagyari
15	7	0	7	11.90726	pagpapaunlad
16	7	0	7	11.25816	paglikha
17	7	6	1	4.52277	o
18	7	7	0	13.78173	makapuhunan
19	7	2	5	8.85494	komunista
20	7	7	0	12.97437	katunayang

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	52	49	3	4.87036	mga
2	44	28	16	3.71828	ang
3	43	31	12	3.59564	ng
4	37	24	13	3.35108	sa
5	33	0	33	8.64677	amerikano
6	29	8	21	3.52605	na
7	20	7	13	3.35631	ay
8	20	11	9	3.54680	at
9	9	0	9	7.88590	dayuhan
10	6	3	3	4.34663	lamang
11	6	2	4	4.93941	kanyang
12	6	1	5	5.09949	iyan
13	6	2	4	3.92946	ito
14	5	4	1	5.60366	tayo
15	5	4	1	4.89095	o
16	5	0	5	4.71407	kanilang
17	4	3	1	3.86979	lahat
18	4	1	3	3.10233	kung
19	4	3	1	8.42426	hawak
20	3	3	0	11.64035	trust

Fig. 1 Top Collocates of *Kapitalista* (left) and *Kapitalistang* (right) (*Sakdal* Corpus); Window Span 5:5
Source: Author.

Nevertheless, it seems that *kapitalista* in the *Sakdal* is not simply a synonym for a more general word like *mayayaman* (rich). This becomes more apparent when looking at the general *Sakdal* corpus. In the *Sakdal* corpus, where *kapitalista* and *kapitalistang* appear 160 times combined, more than one-third of these appearances show up within the following three clusters: "American capitalists" (*kapitalistang Amerikano*), "foreign capitalists" (*kapitalistang dayuhan*), and "capitalists and imperialists" (*kapitalista at imperialista*). This pattern can also be seen in the collocations of *kapitalista* and *kapitalistang* (see Fig. 1). In contrast, the collocations of *mayayaman* and *mayayamang* (rich [+modifier]) (see Fig. 2) show a stronger connection with words like *marurunong* (educated) and *malalaki*. The word *imperialista* makes no appearance here, and while *amerikano* (American) and *dayuhan* (foreigner) do seem to have a connection with *mayayamang*, their connections are weaker than they are with *kapitalistang*.

In sum, in the *Sakdal* corpus the word *kapitalista* often appears in the context of describing a category of people connected with imperialism. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in an article from 1935, the Sakdalista leaders explicitly reject capitalism:

> In the present, the government that should be established here is neither capitalist nor communist but a government that is completely Filipino, that is based on the way of life, feelings, behaviors, and desires of the people here. The capitalist government is precisely that which is the cause of our present poverty, because of how it allows a few citizens to amass increasingly large sums of wealth. The communist government, meanwhile, has not yet passed its period of trial.

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate	Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	330	188	142	3.84703	ang	1	57	40	17	3.49531	ng
2	289	188	101	3.56617	ng	2	57	38	19	3.58478	ang
3	254	153	101	4.38047	mga	3	49	22	27	3.24938	sa
4	251	129	122	3.33504	sa	4	45	32	13	4.15481	mga
5	237	89	148	4.33548	at	5	42	24	18	4.11023	at
6	170	73	97	3.29933	na	6	31	16	15	3.11531	na
7	138	62	76	3.36477	ay	7	26	9	17	3.22786	ay
8	44	13	31	4.44296	lamang	8	7	3	4	4.20629	may
9	39	10	29	4.41316	may	9	5	3	2	3.73819	pa
10	37	15	22	3.10591	hindi	10	5	2	3	6.53094	dayuhan
11	34	17	17	4.17912	lahat	11	5	3	2	3.88987	ating
12	34	26	8	4.97786	kundi	12	4	0	4	5.05462	pilipino
13	32	21	11	8.59589	malalaki	13	4	1	3	4.57787	nila
14	26	4	22	3.02464	kung	14	4	3	1	3.44822	nang
15	23	17	6	6.05443	para	15	4	2	2	7.61596	lupain
16	21	7	14	3.82592	naman	16	4	1	3	2.59537	kung
17	21	14	7	7.31977	dukha	17	4	1	3	2.83754	ito
18	19	10	9	9.35917	marurunong	18	4	2	2	5.39176	iba
19	19	5	14	8.78470	mahihirap	19	4	1	3	5.09541	amerikano
20	18	6	12	5.50381	lalong	20	3	1	2	3.12394	walang

Fig. 2 Top Collocates of *Mayayaman* (left) and *Mayayamang* (right) (*Sakdal* Corpus); Window Span 5:5
Source: Author.

> *Sa kasalukuyan, ang pamahalaang dapat itayo dito ay yaong hindi kapitalista, ni hindi komunista, kundi isang pamahalaang ganap na pilipino, na nababatay sa pamumuhay, damdamin, ugali at hilig ng bayang ito. Ang pamahalaang kapitalista ay siya ngayong nagdudulot ng kasalukuyang paghihikahos, dahil sa kaniyang kaparaanang nagpapahintulot na malikom ng ilang mamamayan ang lalong malaking kayamanan. Ang pamahalaang komunista naman, hangga ngayon, ay hindi pa lumalampas sa panahon ng pagsubok.* (Anonymous 1935)

Keyword Analysis III: Inclusive Nationalism and Divisions among the People

As it would be impossible to analyze every CKI in the lists, the subsequent pages will focus on a single keyword that exhibits the aforementioned dual dynamic of discursive similarities and differences. This CKI is *bayang* (people/community/nation/country [+modifier]). There is both a quantitative and a qualitative reason for this choice. First, in terms of raw frequency, *bayang* is one of the top keywords of similarity, appearing 318 times in the SD corpus and 236 times in the CE corpus. This greater quantity means there are several examples of *bayang* to analyze across both corpora, which will permit more nuanced analyses of its patterns. The second reason is the well-known importance of the root word *bayan* in Tagalog political thought. The flexibility of *bayan* in referring to a people, community, nation, or country leads to interesting variations in its usage.

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	82	49	bayang ito
2	28	20	bayang pilipino
3	14	8	bayang api
4	13	8	bayang alipin
5	13	10	bayang ito'y
6	12	11	bayang sakop
7	6	6	bayang iyan
8	5	3	bayang maralita
9	4	4	bayang dukha
10	4	4	bayang malaya
11	4	3	bayang maliliit
12	4	4	bayang may
13	4	4	bayang walang
14	3	3	bayang itong
15	3	3	bayang makapangyarihan
16	3	3	bayang nagdaralita
17	3	3	bayang nagsasarili
18	3	3	bayang sakdalista
19	3	3	bayang tinubuan
20	3	1	bayang tumututol
21	2	2	bayang ito
22	2	2	bayang amerikano
23	2	1	bayang demokratiko
24	2	2	bayang hindi
25	2	2	bayang kayumanggi

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	25	11	bayang pilipino
2	14	7	bayang ito
3	17	7	bayang manggagawa
4	7	5	bayang iyan
5	6	4	bayang amerikano
6	5	4	bayang kapitalista
7	23	4	bayang sakop
8	3	3	bayang anak-pawis
9	4	3	bayang api
10	3	3	bayang magsasaka
11	5	3	bayang nagpapatulo
12	4	2	bayang alipin
13	2	2	bayang amerika
14	2	2	bayang anakpawis
15	2	2	bayang ang
16	3	2	bayang insik
17	2	2	bayang kapitalista'y
18	3	2	bayang kastila
19	3	2	bayang maliit
20	3	2	bayang maralita
21	2	2	bayang may
22	3	2	bayang nasasakop
23	2	2	bayang nasasakupan
24	2	2	bayang ruso
25	2	2	bayang sinakop

Fig. 3 Clusters of *Bayang* in the SD Corpus (left) and the CE Corpus (right)
Source: Author.

Thus, as one of the more commonly lemmatized variants of *bayan*, *bayang* can also be assumed to have close associations with political themes, topics, and arguments in both corpora. As it turns out, the data shows that the *bayang* clusters reveal overlapping usages in the corpora of two political languages in tension: a discourse of inclusive nationalism and a discourse of division among the people (*bayan*).

Fig. 3 shows the most frequently used clusters of *bayang* from both corpora, arranged according to "range" (the number of articles per corpus in which these clusters appear). The first general observation that can be made is the presence of a few similar clusters at the top of both lists, viz., *bayang pilipino* (Filipino people) and *bayang sakop* (conquered people). This is not surprising since, according to their concordances, these clusters are generally used to either call for independence or criticize colonialism. Meanwhile, the concordances of *bayang ito* (this people) and *bayang iyan* (that people) reflect to some degree the mixture of similarity and difference described earlier with *maliliit*. In the SD corpus, both clusters tend to refer to either the Philippines or the entire Filipino community, again in the context of colonial oppression. In the CE corpus, meanwhile, they

refer at times to the Philippines under colonial oppression, at times to "the workers in this country" (*anakpawis sa bayang ito* and *manggagawa sa bayang ito*), and at times to more abstract conceptualizations of *bayan* that are used to explain processes of exploitation (Evangelista 1930c; 1930d).

These clusters reinforce the aforementioned differences between the CE and SD corpora vis-à-vis their conceptualization of Philippine society. These differences also manifest in other clusters from Fig. 3. In the CE corpus, many clusters of *bayang* point again to specific classes: *bayang manggagawa*, *bayang kapitalista*, *bayang anakpawis*, *bayang magsasaka*, and *bayang nagpapatulo* [*ng pawis*]. Once again, no clusters of this sort appear in the SD corpus. Even in the larger *Sakdal* corpus, the last three clusters above do not appear even once.

Nevertheless, there are also *bayang* clusters from both corpora that seem to point to a more general concept of oppressed peoples. In both the CE and SD corpora, the clusters *bayang api* (oppressed people/nation) and *bayang alipin* (enslaved people/nation) are used to describe the Philippines under colonialism. More interestingly, in the CE corpus, two of the four uses of *bayang api* and three of the four uses of *bayang alipin* appear in an article from 1940 that explains why the Communists have joined the United Front (Pagkakaisa ng Bayan):

> Why Was the United Front Formed?
>
> There is one more truth that needs to be kept in mind in the current state of the nation. Here in our country only one political party controls the government. Because of this singular and unopposed strength, because of the fragmentation of the groups and small forces opposed to the party in control of the government, this singular party can get away with any vulgarity, dereliction, depravity, or rottenness in governance that hurts the welfare of the people, especially the oppressed [*bayang api*] and the small.
>
> *Bakit Natayo ang Pagkakaisa ng Bayan?*
>
> *May isa pang katotohanan na dapat isaalang-alang sa kalagayan ngayon ng bayan. Dito sa ati'y iisa ang lapiang politiko na mayhawak ng pamahalaan. Dahil sa iisa at walang tagasalungat na malakas at kinaaalang-alanganan, dahil sa watak-watak ang mga pangkat at maliliit na kalaban ng lapiang may hawak ng pamahalaan, ay nagagawa ng iisang lapiang ito ang lahat ng kasagwaan, kapabayaan, kasalaulaan o kabulukan sa pamamahala na siyang ikinapipinsala ng mga kapakanan ng bayan, lalong-lalo na ng bayang api at maliit.* (Evangelista 1940, 56)

Two observations may be made from this example. First, the word *api* (oppress/ed) here functions ambiguously to describe both the exploited in general, but also specific oppressed classes (workers and peasants). In other words, *bayang api* in the CE corpus can still be said to refer to the working class specifically. Simultaneously, however, the use of *lalong-lalo* (especially) not only emphasizes the working class as oppressed but

also gestures toward a larger unity with forces beyond them. Thus, according to the same article:

> . . . it is clear that the United Front cannot be said to be [made up solely of] Communists, socialists, workers, farmers, intellectuals, small capitalists and landowners or progressive bourgeoisie but rather a UNITED FRONT with a singular conviction, goal and drive of the Filipino people. Because of this, there is space in the womb of the United Front for any kind of person who supports and promises to defend the nationalist, pro-independence, pro-freedom, pro-peace beliefs and aspirations of all.
>
> *. . . maliwanag na ang Pagkakaisa ng Bayan ay hindi masasabing komunista, sosialista, manggagawa, magbubukid, intelektual, maliit na mamumuhunan at maylupa o progresibong burges kundi PAGKAKAISA NG BAYAN sa isang pananalig, layunin at adhikain ngayon ng bayang Pilipino. Dahil diyan ay may puwang na sinapupunan ng Pagkakaisa ng Bayan ang lahat ng uri ng tao na kumakatig at nangangakong magtanggol sa kaniyang mga pananalig at adhikaing pangbayan, pangkasarinlan, pangkalayaan at pangkapayapaan ng lahat.* (Evangelista 1940, 57–58)

Similarly, *bayang alipin* appears in the *Sakdal* corpus as a cluster referring to a broader community of all Filipinos. For example, in the "Sariling Diwa" from December 27, 1930, it is written that wealthy Filipinos and powerful politicians like Quezon, Osmeña, and Roxas remain "children of an enslaved nation" (*anak ng Bayang alipin*), regardless of their wealth and power. This sentiment is repeated in the "Sariling Diwa" a few weeks later (*Sakdal*, January 17, 1931): "NEVER forget that even if you become a millionaire or high-ranking leader, you are still a slave because you are a child of an enslaved nation" (*HUWAG mong lilimutin kailan man na maging milyonario ka man o mataas na pinuno ay alipin ka pa rin pagka't ikaw ay anak ng bayang alipin*).

As for *bayang api*, while it does not appear in this context in the SD corpus, there is one relevant instance of its appearance in "Ano Ang Sakdalismo." In the manifesto, *bayang api* is used twice in a section that both (1) argues that Philippine land should be reserved for Filipinos and (2) promotes the ideal of a unified Filipino nation. This latter ideal is emphasized again later in the manifesto when it is declared, "The People/Nation is created by all. The poor and the rich, the small and the large, the weak and the powerful. All are part of the People/Nation. All will be able to vote" (*Ang Bayan nga ay bubuoin ng lahat. Nang mga dukha at mayayaman, ng maliliit at malalaki, ng mahihina at malalakas. Ang lahat ay magiging bahagi ng Bayan. Ang lahat ay makabuboto*) (Rubio 1935).

In other words, there circulated among both the Sakdalistas and the Communists a discourse for the defense of a broader community of Filipinos—i.e., a more "inclusive" conceptualization of *bayan*. Perhaps it may be said that such a discourse is more prominent and consistent in the SD and *Sakdal* corpora, while it appears more strongly in the CE corpus only after their tactical shift in 1935. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, that shift must be understood in the context of a consistent anti-imperialist discourse among the

Communists, and the consistent presence of certain nationalist tropes in the CE corpus.

At the same time, in the *Sakdal*, the cluster *bayang api* gestures not solely toward national unity but also sometimes toward the presence of conflict between different groups of Filipinos. While more prevalent in the CE corpus, where class struggle is emphasized, the theme of divisions among the people also appears in the SD corpus. After all, there are "traitors" (*taksil*), imperialist agents, and other "selfish" (*nagsasarili*) elements that not only hurt the *bayan* but also enrich themselves by exploiting it. In other words, even while promoting a discourse of inclusive nationalism, Sakdalista writers write frequently about deep conflict and division. This can be seen even more in *bayang* clusters that refer to the poor: *bayang dukha*, *bayang maralita*, and *bayang nagdaralita*.

The cluster *bayang dukha* (poor people/community/nation/country) first appears in the editorial from September 13, 1930, in the title "Poor Nation: Your Leader Is Among You" (*Bayang Dukha: Ang Lider Mo Ay Nasa Piling Mo Rin*). This editorial criticizes those who only seek wealth, especially through government. It says that the wealthy have no experience of poverty, so "the People are not in their thoughts. The fate of the poor is not something they are concerned with. The lives of the oppressed workers are not in their hearts" (*ang Bayan ay wala na sa kanilang isip. Ang palad ng mga dukha ay wala sa kanilang kalooban. Ang buhay ng mga aping manggagawa ay wala sa kanilang puso*). Furthermore, the wealthy actively make the lives of the poor harder through taxes, rents, fees, etc. Therefore, the people need to boycott the 1931 election, because the government has become just another means of accumulating wealth. This call to boycott the election appears in another use of *bayang dukha* from the editorial of March 14, 1931, which criticizes how politicians use labels like "Communist" (*komunista*) and "Sakdal" as catch-all terms for allegedly dangerous radicals. Meanwhile, these same politicians cheat in elections, seize lands, and steal from the poor. Thus, the poor (*bayang dukha*) must wake up, realize they are being exploited, and boycott all elections until independence is achieved.

The same themes surface even more prominently with *bayang maralita* (poor people/community/nation/country), which appears in three different articles in the SD corpus. These articles connect the suffering of the poor not only to colonialism but to the rule of the rich. In the very first "Sariling Diwa," under the heading "Poor Nation, Mobilize!" (*BAYANG MARALITA, KUMILOS KA!*), the editors write:

> Which is why we are calling to bring down [the politicians]. Their staying [in power] is a continuation of the reign among us of Big Interests, of the Large Cartels, of the Trusts, of the Rich, and of the Politicians, and it is a continuation as well the rising of taxes, the impoverishment of life, the loss of livelihood, the beggaring of the entire people . . .

> *Kaya hinihingi naming ibagsak na sila. Ang kanilang pananatili ay pagpapatuloy ng paghahari rito sa atin ng mga Grandes Intereses, ng Malalaking Samahan, ng mga Trust, ng Mayayaman, ng mga Politiko, at pagpapatuloy rin naman ng pagtaas ng mga buwis, ng paghihirap ng kabuhayan, ng pagkawala ng mga hanap-buhay, ng pamumulubi ng sambayanan . . .* (*Sakdal*, August 30, 1930)

Although imperialism plays a central role, this passage focuses more on divisions between rich/powerful and ordinary Filipinos. Similarly, in the editorial from September 27, 1930, the *Sakdal* criticizes how political dynasties enrich themselves off the people ("From the blood of the people, so many are getting wealthy!" [*Sa dugo ng bayan, kay rami ng nagsiyaman!*]), whom they then proceed to ignore ("The political dynasties serve no one but wealth and power. They have placed the poor in oblivion . . ." [*Ang dinastiya ng mga Politiko ay walang pinaglingkuran kundi ang kayamanan at kapangyarihan. Nilimot nila ang bayang maralita . . .*]). In the "Sariling Diwa" from December 5, 1931, the editors write that the politicians and the government have turned their backs on "true democracy" (*tunay na demokrasia*), evidenced by their oppression of organizations such as the "Tanggulan and the Communist groups and above all our mouth of the poor, the Sakdal" (*kapisanang Tanggulan at Komunista at higit sa lahat ay itong ating bibig ng bayang maralita, itong "Sakdal"*). In fact, this article argues that greedy Filipino politicians are not only agents of imperialism but are, paradoxically, worse than the colonizers themselves.[9)]

The cluster *bayang nagdaralita* (impoverished people/community/nation/country) also appears in three articles in the SD corpus. In these articles, once again, there is not just a critique of imperialism but an argument that some Filipinos are benefiting from the current system while their countrymen suffer in poverty. For example, again from the first "Sariling Diwa," under the section "The Full and the Hungry" (*Ang Busog at Ang Gutom*):

> Increasingly we are distracted by the election and the candidates, and in our distraction Independence disappears from our thoughts. Money is heaped upon us to be used for roads and public works. We are being surprised by the number of typewriters in the offices and how every [government] employee has their own towel and fan, spittoon, and rocking chair. All of this is bringing death to the poor, to those who can barely eat, to those who at times do not have even a single handkerchief or anything else that they can use to wipe their sweat.
>
> *Unti-unti tayong nalilibang sa mga halalan at sa mga kandidato, at sa pagkalibang na ito ay nawawala na sa ating isip ang Pagsasarili. Binubuntunan tayo ng salapi upang gamitin sa mga lansangan at sa mehoras publikas. Ginugulat tayo sa dami ng makinilya sa mga oficina at bawa't empleado ay may toalya pa at may mga bentilador, may luraan, may silyang uugoy-ugoy. Ang lahat ng ito'y pamatay sa bayang nagdaralita, sa bayang walang makain halos, sa bayang ni isang panyo kung minsan ay wala nang magamit upang pahirin ang kanyang pawis.* (*Sakdal*, August 30, 1930)

9) This argument is repeated in the "Sariling Diwa" from *Sakdal*, January 6, 1934.

The metaphor of "fullness" versus "hunger" is also used to criticize the wealth of specific Filipinos. In the "Sariling Diwa" from March 28, 1931, where the Sakdalistas argue that anyone who supports the 1931 election is an agent of Quezon and American imperialism, it is said:

> The time to acknowledge the capabilities of those from "above" is over. The time for feasting and getting full is over. . . . Our own prudence is instructing us to remove everyone from above and bring everything down to the level of the impoverished. What cannot be attained through voting we shall attain through not voting; what cannot be attained from getting full shall be attained by making ourselves hungry.
>
> *Natapos na ang panahon ng pagpapakilala ng kakayahan sa "itaas". Natapos na ang panahon ng panginginain at pagpapakabusog. . . . Ang sariling bait na rin natin ang nagtuturong magsialis nang lahat ang nasa itaas at magsipanaog ditong lahat sa piling ng bayang nagdaralita. Ang hindi nakuha sa pagboto ay kunin natin sa hindi pagboto, ang hindi nakuha sa pagpapakabusog ay kunin sa pagpapakagutom.* (*Sakdal*, March 28, 1931)

Finally, *bayang nagdaralita* appears in a remarkable editorial from February 9, 1935, which discusses the problem of landownership in the Philippines. Although the instigating example is an American landlord, the comments in the editorial apply to Philippine landlords in general. This editorial first comments on the request of the Manila Archbishop O'Doherty—owner of the Mindoro Sugar Company—to reduce by 4,000 hectares the land that the government will confiscate from his company due to unpaid debts. According to the Sakdalista editors, O'Doherty's request is "far from just" (*labag sa matuid*) and is one more example of the "Problem of Our Land" (*Suliranin ng Ating Lupa*). The article then describes this problem with arguments that would not have been out of place in a Communist pamphlet: (a) the government shows unequal treatment between rich debtors and poor debtors; (b) a few people have "uncommon strength and power that, often, is used to suppress, oppress and enslave the people beneath their power" (*di pangkaraniwang lakas at kapangyarihan na, kadalasan, ginagamit nila sa pagsiil, pagapi at pangbubusabos sa mga tauong napapailalim sa kanilang kapangyarihan*); and (c) these same people become wealthy because "they rely on the labor of people who are desperate and poor, so that just to be able to survive [the poor] are forced to subject themselves to oppressive orders" (*iniaaasa nila ang paggaua sa mga taong gipit at hikahos, na upang makakita ng sukat ikabuhay ay napipilitang paloob o pasakop sa kanilang mapangaping pamamalakad*). Therefore, the thousands of hectares of the Mindoro Sugar Company should be confiscated, divided into small lots, and sold to ordinary farmers to improve "the welfare of the impoverished" (*kapakanan ng bayang nagdaralita*).

In sum, as with *bayang api* and *bayang alipin*, the clusters *bayang dukha*, *bayang maralita*, and *bayang nagdaralita* are also used in the SD corpus to criticize the colonial

system. Against this system, the Sakdalistas invoked a discourse of inclusive nationalism to call for the unity of Filipinos against imperialists. But the articles where these latter three clusters appear also gesture toward another discourse, emphasizing not so much unity but how some Filipinos have become wealthy and powerful through their oppression and exploitation of the poor.

At this point, two further observations can be made that provide important nuance vis-à-vis the interplay of continuity and dynamism of these two discourses among the Sakdalistas and Communists. Both observations concern diachronic shifts in the prominence of inclusive nationalism and divisions among the people over time—the first internally within the *Sakdal*, the second more generally in Philippine society under the Americans.

From Division to Unity: Benigno Ramos as "Messenger of the Oppressed"

With regard to the first, it is interesting to note how most of the editorials quoted above that use *bayang maralita* and *bayang dukha* were written in the early years of the *Sakdal* (especially 1930 and 1931). This pattern is not limited to the editorials. Table 1 shows the annual normalized frequencies per 100,000 words of selected *bayang* clusters in the *Sakdal*. The table shows diverging trajectories for *bayang maralita* and *bayang api*. Interestingly, *bayang maralita* is used more often in the first year of the *Sakdal*, falling behind only *bayang pilipino* (Filipino people/nation) and *bayang sakop* (conquered people/nation). This strong showing (especially if combined with *bayang nagdaralita*) peaks in 1932 but declines subsequently until it is no longer even used by 1937. In contrast, *bayang api* is not used as much as *bayang maralita* in 1930. But a shift occurs from 1932–33, after which *bayang api* dominates all the other clusters except *bayang pilipino* (from 1935 onward).

Table 1 Normalized Frequencies of Selected Clusters of *Bayang* (*Sakdal* Corpus)

Norm Freq (per 100,000 words)	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
bayang maralita	4.41	1.46	6.10	5.24	3.29	0.95	0.36	0.00
bayang nagdaralita	1.26	0.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.32	0.00	0.00
bayang dukha	0.95	0.81	1.22	0.00	1.10	0.32	0.36	0.00
bayang api	2.84	1.46	7.08	36.68	25.76	17.14	9.28	8.44
bayang alipin	2.21	3.72	1.71	7.86	2.74	2.86	6.42	2.41
bayang sakop	9.1	4.7	2.9	3.5	2.2	1.9	2.5	2.8
bayang pilipino	5.7	14.9	16.8	13.1	23.6	37.8	14.3	16.1

Source: Author.

Table 2 Raw Frequencies of Clusters of *Sugo ng Bayang* (*Sakdal* Corpus)

Raw Freq	Oct 1932	Nov 1932	Dec 1932	Jan 1933	Feb 1933	Mar 1933	Apr 1933–Sep 1937
sugo ng bayang inaalipin [messenger of the enslaved]	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
sugo ng bayang uhaw [messenger of the thirsty]	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
sugo ng bayang maka-kalayaan [messenger of those for liberty]	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
***sugo ng bayang maralita* [messenger of the poor]**	0	3	2	1	0	1	0
***sugo ng bayang api* [messenger of the oppressed]**	0	3	3	2	3	3	50
sugo ng bayang wala sa gobierno [messenger of those outside of government]	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
sugo ng bayang malaya [messenger of the free people]	0	0	7	0	1	0	0

Source: Author.

A look at the concordances seems to connect this shift to a 1933 trip that Benigno Ramos made to the United States to fight the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act/Tydings-McDuffie Act. In publicizing this trip, the *Sakdal* portrayed Ramos not only as the leader of the Sakdalistas but as the "Messenger of the Oppressed" (*Sugo ng Bayang Api*). This epithet, originally used to talk about the trip, would continue to be used afterward, even in articles from 1937.

It turns out, however, that the Sakdalistas took some time to choose this epithet. Table 2 shows the raw frequency of every word the Sakdalistas thought to combine with *sugo ng bayang* (messenger of the people). Between October 1932 and March 1933, the newspaper tested seven candidates. The two most consistently used options were "Messenger of the Poor" (*Sugo ng Bayang Maralita*) and "Messenger of the Oppressed." By the end of 1932, neither was used significantly more than the other. It was only in February–March 1933 that a clear preference for "Messenger of the Oppressed" took hold. Afterward, no other variant except "Messenger of the Oppressed" appeared in the *Sakdal*.

The decision to go with *sugo ng bayang api* matches the data from Table 1. After 1932, the use of *bayang api* on its own, even without *sugo ng*, skyrockets in the *Sakdal*. Simultaneously, nearly all other *bayang* clusters decline. Of all the *bayang* clusters mentioned earlier in the essay, only *bayang api* and *bayang Pilipino* appear in the "Ano Ang Sakdalismo" manifesto (along with the very rare *bayang bihasa* [developed/experienced country]).

What does this mean for our understanding of the *Sakdal*? The decision to use *sugo*

ng bayang api over *sugo ng bayang maralita*, and the subsequent decline of *bayang maralita*, seems to indicate a conscious choice vis-à-vis the balance of discourses that the Sakdalista leaders wished to promote. While continuing to criticize the greed and abuses of rich and powerful Filipinos (as in the previously mentioned 1935 article on the "Problem of our Land"), the Sakdalistas affirmed that a greater emphasis must be placed on inclusive nationalism. The *Sakdal*, the self-proclaimed voice of the poor (*ang bibig ng bayang maralita*), nevertheless did not fight solely for the poor, but for all Filipinos.

Ironically, this leads us to another similarity between the Sakdalistas and the Communists. For both movements, as the 1930s progressed, a greater emphasis would eventually be placed on discourses of inclusive nationalism over discourses of divisions among the people. The reasons were different for both movements, and in any case inclusive nationalism had always been and would always be more heavily emphasized among the Sakdalistas. Nevertheless, this parallel shift in emphasis in the writings of the two most prominent mass movements of the era affirms the importance that the concept of a unified *bayan* held across Philippine society, whether in the halls of congress or out in the fields and streets.

From Unity to Division: Politics since the Katipunan

But once again, and at the risk of belaboring the point, we must remember that the discourse of divisions among the people never disappeared from either the *Sakdal* or the writings of the Communists. The significance of this becomes clearer when we compare the Sakdalistas with the Katipunan, the secret society that launched the 1896 Philippine Revolution. Terami-Wada (2014, 156–163) argues convincingly that the *Sakdal* writers drew inspiration from the Katipunan and other heroes of the 1896 revolution. In contrast with the *Sakdal*, however, "Katipunan Literature never discusses the redistribution of land, or any other specific measures to tackle rural inequality and injustice" (Richardson 2013, 455). Interestingly, to promote national unity, Katipunan writings tended to "sidestep or downplay economic, social, and ethnolinguistic divisions" (Richardson 2013, 462). In contrast, as we have seen, social and economic divisions among Filipinos were frequently discussed in the *Sakdal*. A striking example of this divergence is the article "Rules for Those Who Love the Principles of the 'Sakdal'" (*Ang Tuntunin ng Umiibig sa Simulain ng 'Sakdal'*) ("Gunitain Ninyo Kami"), which lists ten guidelines for how Sakdalistas should live and act. Terami-Wada (2014, 160) notes that this list is influenced by the decalogue of Andres Bonifacio, the founder of the Katipunan, which listed ten duties for Katipuneros. Unlike its predecessor, however, the Sakdalista list explicitly

discusses socioeconomic inequality three times:

> 4. Treat as sacred and noble your fellow poor, and do not ever enrich yourself through ill means . . .
> [. . .]
> 6. . . . if you should ever be a coward, remember that you are losing yourself in the darkness and straying from reason. The word coward[ice] here should be understood to refer to the rape of the life and rights of the small, the lowly, and the poor . . .
> [. . .]
> 9. Before you follow foreigners, you should first follow those of your own skin; before you serve the rich, you should first serve the poor; before you love the powerful, you should first love those with whom you share the same life [*kaisang-bahay*] . . .
>
> *4.—Ituring mong banal at dakila ang kapwa mo dukha, at kailan ma'y huwag kang magpapayaman sa masamang paraan . . .*
> *[. . .]*
> *6. . . . Kailan ma't ikaw'y naging duwag ay gunitain mong napapalaot ka sa kadiliman at nawawala ka sa katuwiran. Ang salitang duwag dito ay dapat alaming nauukol sa panggagahasa sa buhay at karapatan ng maliliit, ng mahihina at ng mga dukha . . .*
> *[. . .]*
> *9.—Bago ka sumunod sa dayuhan ay sa iyo munang kabalat; bago ka maglingkod sa mayaman ay sa dukha muna; bago ka magmahal sa may kapangyarihan ay sa iyo munang kaisang-buhay . . .*
> ("Gunitain Ninyo Kami")

In contrast, the only comparable line in Bonifacio's decalogue is the injunction to "8. Share what you can with those who are impoverished" [*8. Bahaginan ng makakaya ang alin mang nagdaralita*] (Richardson 2013, 128). Even Emilio Jacinto's *Kartilya*, the most famous Katipunan text, simply says: "all men are equal; it may be that one is greater in knowledge or wealth or beauty . . . but [one is] never greater in humanity" [*lahat ng tao'y magkakapantay; mangyayaring ang isa'y higtan sa dunong, sayaman, sa ganda . . . ngunit di mahihigyan sa pagkatao*] (Richardson 2013, 133).

In comparing the Katipunan and the Sakdalistas, Terami-Wada (2014, 161–163) does not mention the greater emphasis that the latter placed on economic inequality. She mentions instead the prominence of anti-foreign sentiment among the Sakdalistas—a sentiment that she roots in both (1) the "heightened racial tensions" of the 1930s, and (2) the belief that foreign/American wealth and culture had led Filipino elites to betray their poorer countrymen (Terami-Wada 2014, 161). Meanwhile, Sakdalista criticisms of the rich and belief in the goodness of the poor are rooted in "Christ's teachings on pre-occupation with material wealth, which made one a slave to it, and said that the poor would ultimately be the fortunate ones because they would be saved" (Terami-Wada 2014, 156).

Alongside the influence of Christian teachings, however, this emphasis on the divi-

sions between the rich and the poor was also a manifestation of larger structural changes during the American period. By the 1930s, over three decades had passed since the revolution. During that time, the alleged "progress" of American rule had led to increasing desperation among the poorest of society. Central Luzon, for example, saw a massive increase in tenancy rates among farmers due to factors such as population growth, the increasing concentration of landownership, and the rapid development of capitalist relations (Kerkvliet 2014, 1–28). Within a few decades, increasingly absentee landlords abandoned traditional feudal obligations, such as giving food rations and loans at little to no interest rates. These obligations had helped peasants survive difficult and unpredictable seasons. By the 1930s, however, "by imposing strict rules and contracts, denying rations and other loans, hiking rents, and doing other manipulations, landlords extracted more from the peasantry, gave less in return, and passed down to their tenants and laborers losses they encountered" (Kerkvliet 2014, 17–18).

Thus, tenants who expected to serve a single landlord their entire lives began to move around frequently, searching for landlords who might adhere to traditional obligations or at least charge better interest rates. As the futility of this search became clear, tenants realized that they could no longer rely on negotiating individually with landlords to improve their lot. The latter had become a culturally distinct group, with different interests and the political and economic resources to defend them (with police/constabulary violence if necessary). As a result, peasants learned that only through organized collective action—through solidarity with other peasants, in associations devoted to their collective welfare—could they bring about better conditions for themselves (Kerkvliet 2014, 39–67).

Meanwhile, by the 1930s, the labor movement had also developed significantly. Just a few years after the revolution, local writers had produced socialist texts like *Banaag at Sikat* (Glimmer and radiance) (Santos 1970) and *Bagong Cristo* (New Christ) (Tolentino 1975). In the beginning, as discussed earlier, the labor movement focused on promoting charity, moral virtue, and good relations between laborers and employers (Richardson 2011, 16–18). Eventually, though, more radical and militant sectors of the movement emerged, the most notable being the Communists.

As already mentioned, the Communists were like the Sakdalistas in seeing themselves as continuing the tradition of the Katipunan. But their interpretation of the Katipunan was different. For the Communists, the 1896 revolution had been led by a "true worker" (*tunay na manggagawa*), Bonifacio, who showed that "even the poorest of workers can rise up and establish a noble movement that will redeem an oppressed people and the slaves of other nations" (*at kahit magpakahirap-hirap na manggagawa ay maaring magbangon at magtaguyod ng isang dakilang kilusang pantubos sa isang bayang*

api at alipin ng kapwa bayan) (Congreso Obrero de Filipinas 1928). Evangelista (1930b) goes even further and describes "Bonifacismo" not just as a revolution against oppressors but as a revolution "led by the workers" (*sa mapatnugot ng mga anak-pawis*). Unfortunately, this worker-led revolution was betrayed by "bourgeois leaders and imperialist enemies of our independence" (*mga lider na burges at ng mga imperyalistang kaaway ng ating pagsasarili*) (Congreso Obrero de Filipinas 1928), while Bonifacio himself was killed by supposedly nationalistic Filipinos (Evangelista 1929).

The Sakdalistas never characterized the Katipunan as a worker-led revolution. But the persistent presence in the *Sakdal* of themes such as the greed of the rich, post-revolution elite betrayal, and the aforementioned connections between capitalism and imperialism are more understandable given the changing structural contexts described above. As already stated, the immediate effect that capitalism had on many Filipinos was further impoverishment. And while capitalist relations had begun entering the archipelago during the Spanish era, they developed much more rapidly thanks to new laws and policies under the Americans (Kerkvliet 2014, 20–25; Delupio 2016, 3–11). Naturally, resistance against economic exploitation was not unknown in the region beforehand. Nevertheless, as Richardson succinctly put it, "American rule widened rather than healed the social breach. Technological progress, improving communications, expanding markets, and wider opportunities [for the elite] all increased the economic and attitudinal distance between rich and poor and further diminished their day-to-day interaction" (Richardson 2013, 48).

In the environment of the 1930s, therefore, though the Katipunan call for national unity remained powerful, there was too much recent history that could not be set aside. While inclusive nationalism remained the central feature of Sakdalista ideology, it was impossible to build a radical mass movement at the time while ignoring either the increasing desperation of the poor or the discourses of economic injustice and elite betrayal that were circulating among laborers and peasants, among the *dukha* and the *maralita*. Such circumstances may explain why the *Sakdal*, from the very beginning, would claim that it fought for the rights of all Filipinos, for both the poor and the wealthy, while also occasionally printing articles like "The Coming of the Reign of the Poor" (*Ang Pagdating Ng Paghahari Ng Mga Dukha*), with ambiguously worded declarations like the following:

> The world simply turns and turns. . . . The rich who used to ride atop the wheel will soon be trampled under it, and that is why we are saying that we need to already fix this life so that the rich and the powerful will not shed tears upon the coming of the kingdom of the poor, which will come by force . . .
>
> *Ang mundo ay painog-inog lamang. . . . Ang mayayamang dati'y nakagugulong ay siya namang magugulungan kaya ang sinasabi namin ay kailangang ayusin na natin ang buhay na ito upang hindi*

magsiluha ang mayayaman at mga dambul kung dumating na ang kaharian ng mga dukha, na sapilitang darating . . . (Anonymous 1930a)

Conclusion

This study began with the problem of classifying social movements in Philippine and Southeast Asian history, and the corresponding need to account for the interplay of continuity and dynamism, and also sameness and difference, between different social movements. To do so, this study proposed a new method that may help in accounting for these factors: the use of computer-aided discourse analysis to compare the discursive patterns of movements.

With that in mind, the study analyzed the relative prominence (and absence) of various keywords in the documents of the Lapiang Sakdalista and the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas. A keyword analysis of selected writings from 1925 to 1941 revealed distinct differences but also important overlaps between the two groups. On the one hand, the Sakdalistas deployed a language that was more moralistic in nature, while the Communists (following the Marxist theory of class struggle) deployed a language that was more economistic. On the other hand, both movements shared an anti-imperialist critique of the colonial government, and an awareness that imperialism was linked with capitalism.

More interestingly, a close analysis of the keyword *bayang* revealed shifting presences in the writings of the two movements of what may be called a discourse of inclusive nationalism and a discourse of division among the people. In general, the first was always stronger in Sakdalista writings while the second was always stronger in Communist writings. Nevertheless, both discourses manifested in both movements. On the one hand, due to structural changes under American colonialism (e.g., the intensification of capitalist relations, the growing economic and cultural divergence between the rich and the poor, and the increasing desperation of the latter), it was impossible to ignore divisions among the people (*bayan*) when organizing the masses, even for a movement like the Sakdalistas that consistently argued for a united Filipino nation. At the same time, for different reasons, discourses of inclusive nationalism became more heavily emphasized in both movements as the years went by. For the Communists, this occurred primarily after 1935, following a shift in strategy to focus on building national unity against fascism. Among the Sakdalistas, evidence of a conscious decision to (further) emphasize inclusive nationalism can be seen in the early months of 1933, with the adoption for Ramos of the epithet "Messenger of the Oppressed" (*Sugo ng Bayang Api*) over "Messenger of the Poor" (*Sugo ng Bayang Maralita*).

To conclude, this study has shown how the use of computer tools and corpus linguistic techniques, in combination with close qualitative reading, can be useful to account for both continuity and dynamism, as well as sameness and difference, between social movements. Through the identification of discursive overlaps, divergences, and shifts of emphasis, comparative keyword analysis can both confirm the findings of previous scholars and permit even more nuanced understandings of how movements can use similar languages and ideas while also carving their own distinct identities. Further studies can build on the present research in a number of ways. More comprehensive corpora can be constructed for both the Sakdalistas and the Communists by including texts that the author was unable to gather. Similar projects can also be undertaken by building corpora of political texts for other movements and languages, both in the Philippines and across Southeast Asia. In either case, it is the hope of the author that the present study can contribute to creating "even more empirical, rigorous, and encompassing [analyses] of political and moral-ethical discourses" (Guillermo 2014, 24), both in the Philippines and in other regions.

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References

Primary

The SD Corpus

The SD corpus is composed of all copies of the "Sariling Diwa," the main editorial of the newspaper. Of the 157 issues of the *Sakdal* that survive in the National Library of the Philippines, only the special issue containing the "Ano Ang Sakdalismo" manifesto did not feature an editorial. Unfortunately, many editorials had no other titles that could be used to differentiate them. Thus, in lieu of listing the date of every *Sakdal* issue, the issue dates are included in the paper whenever a specific "Sariling Diwa" is referenced.

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————. 1931b. Hinulaan na ni Ora na siya'y mamamatay [Ora predicted that he would die]. *Sakdal*. January 24, pp. 1–4.

————. 1931c. Ang mga martir ng bayang dukha sa harap ni Hukom Albert [Martyrs of the poor before Judge Albert]. *Sakdal*. September 26, p. 3.

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Mount Bromo Will Take Care of Us: Tenggerese Religious-Ecological Knowledge, Challenge of Modern Reason, and Disaster Mitigation in Postcolonial Times

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This article aims to discuss the religious-ecological knowledge of the Tenggerese community on the slope of Mount Bromo, Probolinggo (East Java, Indonesia) and its contribution to disaster mitigation. Within the framework of traditional ecological knowledge, we will analyze field data from 2011 until 2016. The results of this study show that many Tenggerese people believe Mount Bromo to be the axis of religion and its surrounding area to be a sacred place. They also believe in and practice several religious-ecological customs in understanding volcanic eruptions and various natural signs. For them, an eruption is a supernatural process involving gods and goddesses that takes place to improve living conditions. However, living in postcolonial times with modern cultures and capitalistic agricultural practices has made some Tenggerese people question and challenge religious authorities when they experience the economic damage caused by volcanic eruptions. Religious authorities can handle the challenge by invoking the concept of communal harmony. Further, we argue, government agencies may incorporate Tenggerese religious-ecological knowledge into disaster mitigation practices. They can combine modern mitigation mechanisms with such wisdom. This hybrid mitigation model may facilitate the coordination of government agencies with traditional leaders to prepare strategically before a disaster strikes as well as implement tactical actions when a disaster occurs.

Keywords: religious-ecological knowledge, Tenggerese, Mount Bromo, postcolonial times, disaster mitigation

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Introduction

When Mount Bromo—an active volcano and a popular tourist destination in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia—erupted for nine months from October 2010 to July 2011, the governmental disaster agency asked Tenggerese people—in local terms, *wong Tengger*—to evacuate to a shelter in order to avoid disastrous impacts. Not all of them accepted the evacuation process, and many chose to remain in their homes. The displaced residents did not stay in the shelter tents for long either; they chose to return to their homes to clean up the volcanic ash and check on their livestock—such as cows and goats—in the *tegal* (farming fields). These decisions were not in accordance with the principles of disaster mitigation, which prioritize the safety of residents. However, it would be wrong to blame the Tenggerese people, because they based their decisions on religious beliefs passed down through the generations. They also needed to visit their homes to save their livestock and clean their houses of volcanic ash. Therefore, as Judith Schlehe (2011) argues, to understand disasters and their impacts, we must be able to read the dynamics that arise as a result of the existence of a religious/traditional perspective in the midst of modernity. It is important to reread about Tenggerese religious beliefs regarding Mount Bromo as the source of religious-ecological knowledge. Such knowledge plays a strategic role in communal life and can be a part of the disaster mitigation process.

The significance of understanding Indonesian people's cosmological beliefs regarding volcanic eruptions, even though most are well versed in modern culture and knowledge, has received serious attention from several scholars. Some studies of the eruption in Java show the complexity and dynamics of local residents' perceptions of cosmological beliefs based on their respected spiritual leaders' words and natural signs. On the one hand these perceptions can be beneficial, but on the other they can cause serious problems in disaster mitigation efforts, especially with regard to the evacuation process. Katherine Donovan *et al.* (2012) argue that local beliefs among residents around Mount Merapi could create problems in disaster mitigation if the public is not given a comprehensive explanation. Therefore, people in disaster-affected areas need to get disaster education. In addition, government agencies need to improve facilities for disaster mitigation, including evacuating affected residents. Taking a more positive tone, Edi Widodo and Hastuti (2019) believe that the government should incorporate local community knowledge about the Merapi eruption into disaster mitigation efforts so that residents can be more receptive to evacuation activities. Learning from Mount Kelud and Mount Merapi, Eko Hariyono and Solaiman Liliasari (2018) propose the integration of local knowledge into policy and the modern mechanisms of disaster mitigation in dealing with eruptions, because residents are more familiar with local terms. Ernesto Schwartz-Marin

et al. (2020) believe that what is needed in disaster mitigation during Mount Merapi eruptions is not only modern management but also good communication and synchronization of various knowledge, government officials, and NGOs as well as practical actions to protect residents. With the hope of enriching studies related to local knowledge about mountains and the possibility of integrating them into disaster mitigation, this paper aims to discuss Tenggerese religious-ecological knowledge related to Mount Bromo and its surrounding area that is manifested in various rituals. We argue that the religious-ecological knowledge of Tenggerese, including knowledge of natural disasters and sacred areas, comes from their ancestors' religious belief in the cosmological relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural power. Such knowledge needs to be disseminated to the public, so that the disaster mitigation actions carried out by the government when Mount Bromo erupts will not create resistance among the Tenggerese people. Public participation is needed for the success of disaster mitigation and management (Berke *et al.* 1993; Reddy 2000; Winchester 2000; Luna 2001; Lindsay 2003; Pearce 2003; Doberstein 2009). One of the factors in effective disaster mitigation is knowing what people in a community understand about disasters based on their religious beliefs and empirical views. For this reason, this study will analyze Tenggerese knowledge about Bromo eruptions and the natural environment. In addition, we will discuss some possible shifts in knowledge in the context of modern life.

Some theoretical perspectives on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) have contributed significantly to this study. TEK is a body of knowledge based on cosmological beliefs in local or non-industrial societies—many of them indigenous and tribal communities—which emphasizes human relations with the environment and other living things derived from experience. It functions as: (a) a source of management systems for agricultural, livestock, natural resource, conservation, and climate change work used in the past and transmitted verbally into the present; (b) a system of values and ethics that underlie human actions related to the environment and all its contents; and (c) encapsulating the important aspects that contribute to shaping cultural identity (da Cunha and de Almeida 2000; Menzies and Butler 2006, 2; Houde 2007; Berkes 2008; Vinyeta and Lynn 2013; Whyte 2013). What is interesting about this understanding is the recognition of the inseparable relationship between humans and other living beings as well as the environment that shapes culture.

Nonetheless, we need to position TEK contextually, particularly in responding to various political, economic, cultural, and ecological changes. Over the past few decades there has been a change in the perspective of local communities as a result of the expansion in the market economy, which encourages them to somewhat ignore TEK (Gómez-Baggethun *et al.* 2013; Ikeke 2015). On the other hand, market capitalism, which drives

massive exploitation of natural resources, accelerates the probability of an ecological crisis (Leigh 2005; Zhang 2013; Tilzey 2016; Moore 2017). Recognizing this destructive threat, many indigenous communities have organized social movements to resist the exploitation of their natural environment (Takeshita 2001; Todd 2003; Albro 2005; Merlan 2005; Powell 2006; Fischer 2007; Fenelon and Hall 2008; Ryan 2008; Murillo 2009; Wane 2009; Horst 2010; Jones 2010; Walter 2010; Theriault 2011; Powless 2012; Mistry *et al.* 2015; Morden 2015; Tekayak 2016; Bessant and Watts 2017). There are also growing efforts to integrate TEK and new knowledge and technology in responding to climate change (Nyong *et al.* 2007; Green and Raygorodetsky 2010; Lauer and Aswani 2010; Orlove *et al.* 2010; Speranza *et al.* 2010), mapping and classifying natural resources (Hernandez-Stefanoni *et al.* 2006; Naidoo and Hill 2006; Halme and Bodmer 2007; Lauer and Aswani 2008), managing natural resources (Kaschula *et al.* 2005; Rist and Dahdouh-Guebas 2006; Ulluwishewa *et al.* 2008), enriching biodiversity for medicinal plants (Dahlberg and Trygger 2009), conserving the natural environment (Critchley *et al.* 1994; Adoukonou-Sagbadja *et al.* 2006; Herrmann 2006; Marie *et al.* 2009), improving agriculture (Gladwin 1989; den Biggelaar 1991; Chandler 1991; Groenfeldt 1991; Browder 1995), planning natural disaster mitigation (McAdoo *et al.* 2009; Mercer and Kelman 2010; Mercer *et al.* 2010), and ensuring the success of development projects (Woodley 1991; Laurie *et al.* 2005; Sen 2005).

Researchers have discussed Tenggerese environmental knowledge from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Jati Batoro (2012) argues that Tenggerese residents use land functionally, including areas for dwelling, agriculture, conservation, ecotourism, and sacred sites. TEK is applied for environmental conservation in *terasiring* (sloping terraces), a traditional agricultural system combined with plant borders, stall locations separated from houses, and Casuarina trees planted in traditional arrangements. Tenggerese residents depend on plant resources for their livelihood, and they have good knowledge about the plant diversity surrounding them. Sony Sukmawan *et al.* (2017) found some Tenggerese ecological knowledge in the form of ideas, attitudes, and actions, including (i) the simultaneous effort of time and space in harmonious conditions; (ii) the presence of multi-vocal time and space representing the physical and psychological realm which needs to be invited, entertained, and glorified; and (iii) efforts to harmonize time-humans-space mediated by *slametan*, a traditional rite that holds the traditional knowledge system for the prevention of, protection from, and recovery from imbalance in natural conditions. Tenggerese mythology also contains various forms of environmental knowledge values such as respect, compassion, and concern for nature; cosmic solidarity; responsibility for nature; not harming others; and leading a simple life in harmony with the environment (Sony Sukmawan and M. Andhy Nurmansyah 2012).

Taking a different angle, in this study we will focus on the religious-ecological knowledge that is believed in and implemented by many Tenggerese people in the context of their encounter with modern cultures. Historically, since the Dutch colonial era Tenggerese communities have engaged in commercial vegetable agriculture, which has brought them financial profits and enabled the consumption of modern industrial products (Hefner 1990). Indeed, Mount Bromo is the center of Tenggerese rituals, and the land around it is called *hila-hila*, or sacred land. Tenggerese people practice ancestral rituals. However, they also engage in market-oriented agriculture, receive a modern education, and are involved in Bromo tourism. For this reason, we also use the theory of postcolonialism (Bhabha 1994), which views postcolonial societies as having a complicated process of mimicry and mockery of modern cultures because they do not passively mimic but rather appropriate modern culture to fit into local frameworks and interests. They also do not completely abandon their belief in their ancestral religion. This dynamic process of mimicry and mockery produces a hybridity in which local communities bring modern cultures into their imagination, beliefs, and practices but still negotiate local cultures. However, the cultural in-betweenness and ambivalence experienced by Tenggerese residents also enable them to challenge the establishment of religious-ecological knowledge.

We will use the above theoretical framework to analyze primary data from our field research in the Tengger region, especially Sukapura District, Probolinggo Regency, in 2011–12 and 2015–16. Data collection was carried out by conducting in-depth interviews and participatory observation. We analyzed the collected data by applying the theoretical framework with the aim of revealing the position of Mount Bromo in the axis of Tenggerese cosmological belief. First, we will explain Bromo's cosmological position in the religious system and social life of the communities. This analysis is important to understand how ecological knowledge is not only believed in but also manifested in cultural activities. Second, we will uncover the Tenggerese worldview on the volcanic process in Mount Bromo, especially related to the economic losses and disruption that must be suffered when commercial crops are damaged by eruptions. Third, in the midst of such problems, it is important to understand the Tenggerese mechanism for maintaining harmony with nature. Fourth, we will criticize the challenge of modern reason against Tenggerese ecological-religious knowledge in the midst of the market capitalism that has penetrated the heart of mountain life. In the final section, we will explore the possibility of incorporating Tenggerese ecological-religious knowledge into disaster mitigation. In the midst of modernity and postcoloniality, the Tenggerese local culture can be a signifier for a dynamic collaboration of ancestral beliefs and modern knowledge when dealing with disasters.

Mount Bromo as the Axis of the Tenggerese Religion

Tenggerese communities—in Probolinggo, Pasuruan, Malang, and Lumajang—believe in the concept of *sakketurunan*, "one descendant" of Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger. The term "Tengger" comes from Rara Anteng (*Teng-*) and Jaka Seger (*-ger*). Tenggerese mythology contains a story about Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger, who inhabited the Bromo area, where they prayed to God in *segara wedi* (the sea or the place of sand before Mount Bromo) to be given descendants. Because of their promise to sacrifice their last son, Hong Pukulun (a local term for the god who controls all parts of the universe, including human life) gifted Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger 25 children. Based on this myth, we can see the religious relationships between humans, the natural environment, and Hong Pukulun as the basis of Tenggerese life from the past to the present. Such relationships have formed the life principles of Tenggerese people and have allowed them to survive despite the various problems they face in their mountainous environment. They have positioned nature as an integral part of life as well as an intermediary between them and Hong Pukulun. According to local beliefs, the gods in Bromo are supernatural agents that can help to grant the Tenggerese people's pleas after purifying them of all wrong and sin. Meanwhile, humans must work and carry out rituals in the hope that God will provide them with prosperity. Tenggerese people believe that when humans fulfill their oaths or commitments, everything will run smoothly.

Kusumo, the 25th child of Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger, was a beloved figure, so the courage of his parents to sacrifice him was a very tough test. Their love for their child made Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger deny the oath that had been pledged in *segara wedi*. They refused to sacrifice Kusumo. Feeling betrayed, the gods of Bromo spilled anger: the volcano erupted, lightning struck, lava raged like a burst of fire from a dragon's head, and there were floods and landslides. Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger's betrayal of their oath to a supernatural power was proof of the courage of humans to ignore sacred agreements for the sake of worldly love. Knowing the oath of his parents and because he did not want to see his family destroyed, Kusumo sacrificed himself by throwing himself into the Bromo crater. His sacrifice affirms that all forms of supernatural power must be manifested in concrete actions such as ritual offerings and a willingness to share in the fortunes of fellow Tenggerese residents and fellow humans. This story about Kusumo is believed to underlie the birth of Kasada, an annual ritual of offering crops and livestock to the crater of Mount Bromo (Sutarto 2002).

Interestingly, the old inscription *Prameswara Pura*, found in 2002 in Sapikerep Village, Sukapura Subdistrict, Probolinggo, mentions that Sri Maharaja Kertanegara (King of Singasari, 1254–92) gave a community that lived on the slope of Mount Bromo land

with *perdikan* status. This land was exempt from tax due to the community's religion being different from Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the residents were given some religious tasks of conducting prayers and rituals to defend Bromo and its surroundings as a sacred area, *hila-hila*. If they neglected these tasks, they would be cursed with being eaten by wild animals and hit by floods, thunder, or volcanic eruption. *Prameswara Pura* was similar to the messages in the myth of Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger. Thus, it can be said that the myth was a symbolic creation related to the life order that must be obeyed by Tenggerese communities in the four regencies. In this context, the forces of nature become punishers for non-compliance or religious betrayal by Tenggerese individuals or communities.

We have our own interpretation of the Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger myth. The early members of the Tenggerese communities were special humans who had spiritual strength (*anteng*, inward calm) as well as physical prowess (*seger*, healthy and energetic). They had an excellent understanding of the supernatural power that controlled the universe. They saw Mount Bromo as the representation of this power on Earth because it could support a variety of forest vegetation, soil fertility, and abundance of clean air as well as destroy when it erupted. Bromo became a cosmological axis in their efforts to communicate with Hong Pukulun in order to live safely and prosperously. Communication could be facilitated when humans had an inner calm, a quality that was attached to a female figure. This spiritual quality could enable early Tenggerese residents to read various natural signs and create rituals as a form of vertical obedience to supernatural authority. Physical conditions were quite extreme, with cold temperatures and steep slopes as well as various kinds of natural threats, encouraging early Tenggerese people to develop skills and physical strength. Following this interpretation, the term "Tengger" is a meeting point between spirituality and the physical cultures of humans, both of which are required to live in the Bromo area.

In this conception, Bromo is an intermediary that bridges the gap between humans and the natural environment and gods. It is Tenggerese people's way of understanding their relationship with the natural environment and gods that gives rise to symbolic creativity with religious content in the form of prayers/mantras, rituals, and oral traditions. Adopting the ideas of Clifford Geertz (1973), symbolic creativity in the form of rituals, offerings, and mantras that respect the existence of Bromo is a human way to concretize abstract beliefs so they can be more easily understood by community members. The myth of Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger was the result of narrative-symbolic creativity to emphasize the primacy of the Bromo region and the relations between humans as well as the human-nature-supernatural axis in Tenggerese life. The cosmological belief constructs local knowledge about the primacy of Bromo and the surrounding area as *hila-hila*,

which must be maintained and cared for, for the sake of the lives of Tenggerese communities as well as all humans. The "dialogue" with Bromo through ritual becomes an important cultural process to negotiate Tenggerese people's needs.

According to Tenggerese religious beliefs, Mount Bromo plays several important roles. First, it is the home of *leluhur ngaluhur*—the spirits of predecessors who have transformed into gods—who guard the life and region of Tengger. Based on this belief, Mount Bromo is a glorified holy palace because it is a cosmic space where the power of gods becomes represented by Hong Pukulun in *hila-hila*. Therefore, Tenggerese people do not dare to say or do bad things on this mountain and its surrounding area. Even though an eruption is dangerous, they will not blame Bromo. The belief in the existence of gods leads Tenggerese people to practice rituals at Bromo. Second, Mount Bromo's crater is a place for the purification of sins of the Tenggerese people who have died. It is believed that the spirits will be purified in the crater and then delivered to the summit of Mount Semeru and flown to heaven. Third, Bromo is a place of purification for the mistakes made by mankind throughout the earth, not just Tenggerese communities—a reflection of a universal cosmological awareness. Bromo plays a strategic role for all human beings and other creatures, *sak lumahe bumi sak kurepe langit* (for all creatures on the earth and under the sky). Kusumo's sacrifice is symbolic of his effort to purify and improve the order of human life. Fourth, Bromo and the surrounding area are *hila-hila*, which require good behavior, attitudes, and outlook of life on the part of their inhabitants. Tenggerese people believe that the sanctity of the land can be felt to this day. When Tenggerese residents engage in a taboo act, such as premarital sex or adultery, it is believed that the community where the act took place will suffer an epidemic. So, as long as they are still undergoing Kasada and other rituals, Bromo will always protect Tenggerese people and bring happiness and prosperity. The belief in the sanctity of Mount Bromo as one of the cosmological centers is a manifestation of Tenggerese religious belief, which emphasizes good relations with all creatures on Earth, with nature, and with supernatural powers, including Hong Pukulun. The religious practice, as mentioned in the *Prameswara Pura* inscription, is a manifestation of the *Shiva-Sugata* teachings, which are believed by *dhukun pandita*—religious and cultural leaders in Tenggerese villages—to be the early religion of Tenggerese people. This syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism was a hallmark from the Singasari era to Majapahit. This means that in the kingdom era, Tenggerese people had the creative intelligence to read and synthesize some major religions to serve as their religious identity. Belief in Mount Bromo became a religious identity that distinguished Tenggerese people from other residents in the era of the Singasari and Majapahit kingdoms. When in the seventeenth century the Islamic Mataram army began to expand into East Java, Tenggerese com-

munities were still loyal to *Shiva-Sugata*.

This does not mean that there were no efforts to proselytize Islam in the Tenggerese community. There is an oral story passed down from generation to generation about the people of Grinting Village (now Wonokerto Village), Sukapura, who became the target of proselytization. It tells of the efforts of Ki Dadap Putih, a Muslim preacher, to teach Islam in this village. Due to opposition from Tenggerese *dhukun pandita*, which resulted in the death of Ki Dadap Putih and his followers, the Islamic mission did not continue beyond Wonokerto; it did not reach the upper villages, such as Ngadas and Ngadisari (Kosim *et al.* 2013, 67). In the second stage, the Islamic mission was carried out by Raden Samino and Raden Saminndro, both from Kediri. They advocated for Islam through marriage and traditional arts. Raden Samino married a daughter of the Wonokerto village head and founded a traditional art group consisting of local residents (Kosim *et al.* 2013, 68). However, not all Tenggerese residents wanted to convert to Islam. One such person was Keti, a *dhukun pandita* who decided to move to Ngadas Village, Malang. Before moving, he made an agreement with Raden Samino that the Islamic mission could reach only Wonokerto and not the Tengger villages above it, namely, Ngadas, Jetak, Wonoroto, and Ngadisari in Sukapura District, Probolinggo. However, there were some teachings of Islam that were adopted by the Tenggerese tradition, such as circumcision, and burying the body rather than cremating it (the head of the dead body points toward Mount Bromo, not toward the north as in the Islamic tradition).

When the majority of Tenggerese people converted to Hinduism in 1973, they did not give up their faith in Mount Bromo. Historically, the process of converting the majority of the Tenggerese community to Hinduism cannot be separated from the regulation of the New Order regime, which required every citizen or community to believe in and practice one of the country's official religions: Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The state did not consider Tenggerese religious beliefs to be an official religion, so the Tenggerese people had to choose one of the five official religions. The idea behind this regulation was to remove Communist ideology from Indonesia. When the people did not believe in one of the official religions, they were labeled as non-religious, atheist, or Communist. The label of Communism would certainly cause deep trauma, because of the 1965 bloody tragedy—which was also experienced by many Tenggerese people who were accused of being members or sympathizers of Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party). The trauma of the 1965 tragedy, in which many Tenggerese were killed by civilian troops at the direction of the military apparatus, forced people to choose one of the official religions required and recognized by the New Order regime. Initially many of them turned to Buddhism, since it had similarities with Tenggerese religious beliefs in terms of the relationship between

humans and God, fellow living beings, and nature. However, the majority of Tenggerese people came to believe that Buddhism was incompatible with their religious beliefs. So, in 1973, in a meeting of *dhukun pandita*, it was agreed that Tenggerese people would convert to Hinduism. This decision was based on the similarity of Hindu rituals and mantras with those conducted and chanted by *dhukun pandita*. Again, this agreement was a political choice in that Tenggerese people chose to become Hindus based on concerns over the next generation: the Communist stigma for citizens who did not believe in one of the official religions could endanger their lives.

When Mount Bromo Erupts: *The Ancestors Are Having Sacred Celebrations*

Local knowledge and scientific knowledge are different when it comes to interpreting a truth. In the case of scientific knowledge, a truth requires empirical research that can be widely accepted by the academic community. Meanwhile, local knowledge originates from the empirical experiences of people who position the relationship between humans, the universe, and God as the truth. The discrepancy also highlights differences in the ways of looking at a problem. The Tenggerese belief in the sanctity of Bromo and the surrounding area, and its implementation in rituals and mantras passed down through the generations, have led Tenggerese people to develop local knowledge about volcanic eruptions that is different from scientific knowledge. In other words, we cannot say that Tenggerese knowledge is not a truth simply because it cannot be measured by modern epistemic logic. Instead, we must place this knowledge in an ontological turn (Heywood 2017), which emphasizes that the world and knowledge about it may vary beyond the understanding of modern Western logic.

For Tenggerese communities, Bromo's eruptions are routine activities that need not be feared. Information from previous generations about Bromo's eruptions and the absence of records about victims during ancient eruptions have led to this lack of worry. In fact, most local residents did not want to evacuate during Bromo's eruption in 2010–11. Such decisions in disaster mitigation management are considered dangerous because unexpected events can occur. Before discussing how we should treat Tenggerese knowledge, it is important to understand some of the Tenggerese knowledge related to Bromo.

First, Mount Bromo's eruptions are natural events; they are viewed as *leluhur ngaluhur duwe gawe* ("the gods are having sacred celebrations" or "building or repairing their holy palace"). This ecological belief creates a positive attitude toward the volcano, since sacred celebrations or building a palace have implications of goodness. It means

that *leluhur ngaluhur* (spirits of ancestors that have transformed into gods) have an interest not only in maintaining the palace in good condition, but also in the life of Tenggerese people, who always send prayers and offerings. It is impossible for *leluhur ngaluhur* to let disasters have a tragic impact on people's lives. Therefore, at the beginning of a Bromo eruption, *dhukun pandita* conduct a ritual to reject *bala* (disaster), as a request to prevent events that will destroy life in this region.

Second, Mount Bromo is viewed as the protector of Tenggerese communities in the four regencies. People believe that their ancestors who transformed into gods live on Bromo, so it is impossible for an eruption to injure or kill Tenggerese residents, who always give offerings. For them, an eruption of Bromo seems frenetic externally—with government agencies and media present in full force—while they themselves are calm. While Tenggerese communities still carry out Kasada and other rituals, they believe that Bromo's eruption will not endanger their lives. Of course, this belief cannot be explained by scientific reason. Following Vladimir Propp (1984), we do not need to find truth in local knowledge that is based on modern scientific reason, because society has its own worldview.

Third, it is believed that the gods at Bromo will provide guidance to the coordinator of *dhukun pandita*[1] regarding an eruption, including its severity, because he is capable of dealing with supernatural powers. When facing an eruption that is estimated to last a long time, the coordinator of *dhukun pandita* will conduct *semedi*, a sacred meditation, after fulfilling several requirements, such as offering certain prayers. In his *semedi*, he will ask for instructions from the gods at Bromo about the eruption and what to do. After getting instructions, the coordinator will communicate and discuss with all *dhukun pandita* and village officials in the Tengger region to immediately conduct rituals as ordered by the gods. The ability to communicate with this supernatural power confirms that the chosen Tenggerese individuals are able to transform the ability of their predecessors to appeal to the gods. Usually, after the *dhukun pandita*'s instructions, residents and village officials do what the gods have ordered and the eruption slowly stops. Thus, *dhukun pandita* actually may become agents of disaster mitigation. This means that *dhukun pandita* can instruct Tenggerese residents because their words are trusted. If the coordinator of *dhukun pandita* asks the residents to evacuate, they will flee; otherwise they will stay at home.

Fourth, Tenggerese people believe in the concept of *dilironi*. This means "Hong

1) The coordinator of *dhukun pandita* is the leader of all *dhukun pandita* from Tenggerese villages in Probolinggo, Pasuruan, Malang, and Lumajang. A communal process is carried out by all *dhukun pandita* to elect one of them based on his capacity to understand religious teachings and traditional customs as well as his ability to recite mantras without reading the text.

Pukulun will compensate them for all losses after the eruption." During the nine-month eruption in 2010–11 they suffered considerable material losses, because the vegetables they had planted were damaged due to volcanic materials. However, most chose to stay at home; they lived on their savings, ate corn as a substitute for rice, and sold livestock. The eruption was viewed as a natural event and the will of Hong Pukulun, so Tenggerese communities accepted that they had to patiently suffer through the difficulties caused by it. A *dhukun pandita* of Ngadisari Village symbolically compared the nine-month eruption to a pregnant woman:

> This long eruption has taught us quite a valuable lesson. Like a nine-month pregnant woman, Bromo was born again with a 'new face.' For us, this is a 'new birth.' We must be able to maintain this new birth so that Bromo can provide good and useful things to the community. Indeed, our noble ancestors were building palaces or having big celebrations, so we could not carry out many rituals at that time. When the celebrations were done, the eruption stopped by itself. The important thing is that there were no casualties.[2)]

Indeed, in the past, Tenggerese residents have suffered no casualties due to an eruption. Not even a chicken has died. According to the ancients, before they ate rice and when they still planted corn without vegetables, every time after a Bromo eruption the harvest of taro and corn was abundant. In other words, *Hong Pukulun njaluk sak usum* (God does not give crops during one planting season). After an eruption residents usually benefit financially, from both upland agricultural products and tourism. The proof is that after an eruption, more and more foreign and domestic tourists come. Even though they have not been able to grow potatoes and carrots with much success, farmers have started planting onions, and those are doing well. In fact, many caterpillar pests that were found before the eruption are no longer there.[3)]

Such a belief is a form of religious-ecological knowledge based on the experiences and oral utterances of ancestors. With the concept of *dilironi*, at least, Tenggerese people feel calm and optimistic that the disaster will end with happiness. From an agricultural perspective, this is natural because the volcanic ash that covers the land (fields) brings fertility to the soil, in addition to killing pests such as caterpillars. For Tenggerese people, such experiences are viewed as "hidden blessings" from the eruption, so it is natural that they remain patient. In terms of tourism, based on our observations in the last week of July 2011, there were many foreign tourists who came, in addition to domestic

2) Interview with Sutomo, *dhukun pandita* of Ngadisari Village, Sukapura Subdistrict, Probolinggo Regency, July 29, 2011.
3) Interview with Sutomo, *dhukun pandita* of Ngadisari Village, Sukapura Subdistrict, Probolinggo Regency, July 29, 2011.

tourists. Most of them used jeep transportation services managed by Tenggerese operators to enjoy Bromo after the eruption. All hotels in the Bromo area were full. This was a reasonable situation, because July to August 2011 is peak season, when many foreign and domestic tourists visit. However, locals still saw the tourism boom as a form of prosperity gifted by Hong Pukulun after the hardship of the long eruption. The attitude of always accepting whatever is given by Bromo indicates that Tenggerese people are able to integrate their thoughts and actions with their surroundings.

Maintaining Inter-Cosmos Relationships through Rituals

There are many rituals in Tenggerese tradition, from private-/family-oriented to communal ones. Among the prominent rituals are Entas-entas, Walagara, Unan-unan, and Kasada. Entas-entas, the final death ceremony carried out by the family, involves burning a doll made of shrubs as a symbol of the dead body. The actual dead body is not burned, as in Hindu tradition. Even though Tenggerese believe in Hinduism, their funerals are similar to the Islamic tradition. What distinguishes Tenggerese from Islamic burial tradition is the position of the head of the dead body, which points toward the sacred Mount Bromo. Walagara is a marriage ritual. Unan-unan is a ritual held every five years, a kind of purification and salvation ritual for the village and the earth. Kasada is an annual ritual where people give offerings to Bromo's crater to invoke safety and prosperity.

For Tenggerese people, rituals are a medium for developing relations between humans and Hong Pukulun, humans and gods, humans and fellow humans, as well as humans and nature. This inter-cosmos relationship is at the core of Tenggerese religious tradition. In Tenggerese belief, there are three things that can make humans happy: (1) always having a harmonious relationship with the Creator, Hong Pukulun; (2) fostering harmonious relations with fellow beings, human and otherwise; and (3) maintaining a balance with nature. If humans can believe in and carry out all three in their daily lives, they will become truly human beings. The name of God should not be used to hurt nature, other humans, or other creatures. Also, the creatures that live in *pedanyangan*—lands overgrown with large trees and sacred for rituals in a village—are well prayed for. The creatures in *pedanyangan*, the ancestral spirits, are believed to guard the residents and deliver their prayers to the gods at Bromo and Hong Pukulun. Therefore, once a month, especially on Friday night, Tenggerese people give *sesajen*—sacred offerings—to their ancestors in their homes. In the morning they go to the tomb of their parents, to *pedanyangan*, or to the *segara wedi* (sea of sand; a large sandy area near Mount Bromo) to conduct rituals. In addition, in every ritual, both personal and communal, Tenggerese

people pray for the good of nature.

What is interesting to explore further in Tenggerese belief is the primacy of relations between humans, nature, and supernatural powers, like the Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger myth. In other words, we find similarities of teachings in Tenggerese legends and religions from ancient times until the present. Tenggerese people have been consistent in carrying out the teachings of the Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger myth and religion, especially in respecting the natural environment, non-human beings, gods, and God. They position nature and non-human inhabitants on an equal footing. Harmonious relations with fellow creatures are certainly not like the category of *shirk*, a belief that creatures or objects have the same power as God, a belief that is now widely misunderstood and used as a weapon to overthrow indigenous communities. Tenggerese people have reached a level of understanding where all beings on this earth must be positioned on an equal footing with humans, rather than humans being dominant. The relationship is not anthropocentric; rather, the three entities of humans, nature, and supernatural powers must be able to realize a harmonious relationship. It becomes natural that with regard to supernatural beings—both the ancestors' spirit in *pedanyangan* and the guardian creature of sacred places in the Bromo area—Tenggerese people try to pay their respects by giving prayers and offerings.

Religious belief in the ancestors' spirits in *pedanyangan* is a form of Tenggerese ecological knowledge. In all *pedanyangan*, there are large spruce trees. It is believed that the spirits of the village guardians are located in those trees. When the residents carry out rituals related to village guardians, they do not dare to cut down the trees. The opposite would certainly happen if they no longer believed in the existence of guardian spirits in *pedanyangan*. Likewise, greedy humans with sophisticated tools cut down large trees in Sumatra and Kalimantan Islands to set up oil palm plantations or coal mines. The passing down of beliefs from generation to generation has led Tenggerese communities to always take care of their *pedanyangan* as well as pray for their ancestors' spirit and visit it for rituals. At the very least, they still respect and maintain the presence of large trees in *pedanyangan* and contribute to the availability of water reserves.

The close relationship of Tenggerese people with the natural environment is manifested also in mantras containing prayers to all natural elements that are chanted in every ritual, both for family and the community. *Bumi* (earth), *banyu* (water), *geni* (fire), *bayu* (wind), and *akasa* (atmosphere) are never forgotten by *dhukun pandita*. Tenggerese people practice the values contained in their ancient mantras by respecting nature and all its inhabitants. In fact, to pray to God for Earth's salvation, Tenggerese communities have Unan-unan. The ritual is also a way of purifying people and villages so they can avoid temptations and woes as well as get an abundance of sustenance. Religious beliefs

and their implementation, thus, are not centered on humans with all their economic and political interests. Instead, the oneness of humans, nature, and the supernatural is what makes people happy. Their willingness to merge themselves into this axis encourages Tenggerese people not to ignore various natural signs in their daily lives.

Reading Natural Signs from *Hila-hila*

The existence of land in the Bromo area as *hila-hila* also makes Tenggerese people believe in natural signs related to certain problems or events. Although Tenggerese communities are accustomed to modern education and tourism activities, they continue to believe in the sanctity of Bromo. One local myth is that the land of Bromo does not wish to receive any dead fetus that is a result of adultery committed by Tenggerese or non-Tenggerese people. If such a fetus is buried in the area, the consequences can be severe.

A fetus from adultery should not be buried carelessly. Those who pass by the grave of such a fetus that has been carelessly buried—usually unknowingly—suffer from severe illness, *isuk lara*, *awan mati* (sick in the morning, die during the day), like someone hit by *pagebluk*, a plague. In such conditions, *dhukun pandita* must conduct a ritual to summon the ancestors' spirit to ask for guidance on where the fetal grave is. When the grave is discovered, the person gradually recovers. These signs indicate that *hila-hila* cannot allow behavior by Tenggerese people that violates religious and moral beliefs. Bromo still demands proper treatment; it is not a place for the burial of a fetus without a proper purification ritual. Profane actions followed by savagery will anger the spirits of ancestors in *pedanyangan*, *leluhur ngaluhur*, Bromo, and, of course, Hong Pukulun. In this context, the sanctity of the Bromo area becomes the last fortress for showing the harmful consequences for a human who violates a taboo when *dhukun pandita* and formal leaders are unable to prevent them.

The areas around Mount Bromo always give natural signs when something bad occurs, such as the death of unidentified visitors or residents. When there is a fatality in the Bromo area, the weather in Ngadisari Village and its surroundings changes dramatically. Even though it may not be the rainy season, the weather turns ominous: dark clouds, mist, and rain mixed with thunder and lightning. Tenggerese inhabitants call the condition *timbreng*. They soon realize that someone has died in the Bromo area. National park officials who have an awareness of local knowledge act immediately, looking for the dead body. In this way, we can see the existence of strategic cooperation between Tenggerese people and national park officials through *timbreng*. The belief in natural

signs gives *dhukun pandita* opportunities to offer religious and ecological wisdom for the management of the Bromo-Tengger-Semeru National Park. Meanwhile, the national park officials can easily detect accidents experienced by tourists and residents. This proves that religious-ecological knowledge can contribute to modern work activities in terms of environment and tourism. With the acceptance of religious-ecological knowledge, at least *dhukun pandita*—even though they no longer have the right to manage the national park in the Mount Bromo area—still have a significant position. National park officials can adopt Tenggerese religious-ecological knowledge in managing Mount Bromo for environmental and tourism activities. They also need to offer local residents opportunities to participate in tourism activities, such as jeep rental, horse rental, food shops, and homestays.

In addition, in the area near the stairs where tourists go up and down to enjoy the Bromo crater, there is a sacred place where it is believed nobody should say anything bad because their words will return to harm them. For example, if there are tourists who curse the difficult terrain to reach the holy mountain, they will get "direct punishment" in the form of an accident. Modern logic would view this event as a myth or an accident that has nothing to do with the sanctity of the Bromo area. However, Tenggerese people view it as payback for their harsh words. As more tourists come to Bromo with a variety of motivations, there is space for supernatural powers to provide a valuable lesson: the mountain environment still has destructive power for those who say or do something bad. Through this natural mechanism, Tenggerese people send a message to tourists and the government that the Bromo area is still *hila-hila* with supernatural power that must be respected, even though in their view it is merely treated as a natural attraction that brings in money. The willingness of Tenggerese communities to continue giving offerings and prayers to areas considered sacred cosmologically indicates that they do not want to simply ignore the will of the earth, which is still full of mysteries, because of the potential destructive consequences. Nature is positioned as an integral aspect of human life and hope.

Religious-Ecological Knowledge in Postcolonial Times: *The Challenge of Modern Reason*

The majority of studies position Tenggerese people as traditional mountainous Javanese people who still faithfully maintain and carry out their ancestors' religious teachings, believe in the harmony of the macrocosm and microcosm, and prioritize local wisdom about positive values (Sutarto 2003). However, in our opinion, research on Tenggerese

culture should also pay attention to the economic realities of agriculture and modernity, from colonial times to the present. Robert Hefner (1990), for example, critically examines the effect of implementing a market-oriented vegetable farming system in the Tengger region on the sociocultural life of the community, focusing on the post-1965 political tragedy. According to him, since the European colonial era Tenggerese people have cultivated vegetable plants. With the Green Revolution, Tenggerese farmers planted vegetable crops on a large scale during the New Order era, which provided them with an abundant income. The success of agriculture has made it easier for the Tenggerese community to access the modernity that has occurred on a national and regional scale. The community is getting used to consumer goods—from household appliances to televisions, motorcycles, and Japanese-made cars. In addition, the Green Revolution has changed some agrarian traditions: for instance, work in the fields that was originally done by relatives has turned into paid work. The practice of rituals, which in the past was intended only to carry out ancestral duties, has become a source of social pride, with rich people celebrating traditional rituals in a lavish way.

It is the acceptance of aspects of modernity into local life that makes Tenggerese people live in a cultural in-betweenness and hybridity. Cultural hybridity enables Tenggerese people to adopt modernity—but not completely, because they still believe in local customs. With this "in-between subjectivity," Tenggerese communities are able to live in a dynamic world that is colored by modernity and ancestral tradition. This subjectivity applies also to Tenggerese youth. Despite their consumerism and the modern culture that they pick up from school and media narratives, the majority of Tenggerese youth still believe in and practice ancestral teachings, in the form of rituals as well as the wisdom of everyday life. However, this postcolonial condition has also given rise to several social actions that are contrary to religious beliefs. Some young people are daring to break taboos such as having premarital sex. It would be interesting to examine the influence of modern reasoning, especially reasoning related to agricultural economic interests, on the Tenggerese community's belief in ecological-religious knowledge.

Indeed, the 2010–11 eruption has not changed their belief in the sacredness of Mount Bromo as the cosmological axis. However, there are a small number of residents who feel disturbed by the material losses they have had to bear: they are no longer able to grow potatoes, cabbage, or carrots. Those who usually enjoyed abundant blessings from vegetable farming had to *urip prihatin* (live in apprehension) for the nine months of the eruption, and they used up their savings that should have gone toward shopping in the city or for ritual preparation. When we talked with some villagers in Ngadas Village, Sukapura Subdistrict, Probolinggo, they said that during the eruption of Bromo the major-

ity of Tenggerese people suffered losses in some form. Many Tenggerese farmers had planted potatoes that were growing well. Suddenly the plants were covered by ash and sand. Then the farmers planted potatoes again, and again the same thing happened. Many residents lamented their losses, but they still tried to survive, even if they had to borrow money from their relatives or neighbors. In Ngadirejo Village, which was worst affected by the eruption, there were some residents who moved to Jurang Kuwali in Malang Regency and Sempol in Bondowoso Regency to cultivate potatoes. This affirms the anxiety over finances caused by the nine-month eruption of Bromo. Tenggerese residents are used to gaining economic sustenance by selling potato, cabbage, onion, or carrot crops. With the proceeds, they can build city-style walled houses with furnishings—sofas, cupboards, and gas stoves, for example—as well as Japanese motorcycles and cars. They can also pay for school or college for their children in Probolinggo or other cities such as Malang, Jember, and Surabaya. In fact, an abundant harvest is cause for joy for Tenggerese people because it provides funds for rituals such as Entas-entas, Walagara, Unan-unan, and Kasada. Furthermore, the case of Ngadirejo residents planting vegetables in Jurang Kuwali Malang and Sempol Bondowoso shows that economic considerations and the need to fulfill life's necessities are urgent and ongoing; they cannot wait for the eruption to end. Tenggerese people are no longer traditional farmers who plant white corn as a staple food, as their ancestors did before Europeans introduced vegetables. Today's Tenggerese are used to enjoying white rice with side dishes of fish, chicken, and meat that are sold by *mlijo* (peddlers) from the lower regions. Of course, they need enough money to buy these commodities.

During the Mount Bromo eruption, vegetable farmers were not the only ones to experience losses. Another group that suffered was the jeep drivers serving the Penanjakan-Bromo route for foreign and domestic tourists who wanted to enjoy the sunrise. Jeep owners had to park their vehicles in their yards while cleaning up volcanic sand and ash every day. The amount of volcanic dust and sand on the slopes of Bromo reflected the feelings of those who were forced to wait patiently for the end of the eruption.

Tenggerese people need to engage in modern agriculture as well as tourism in order to meet their economic needs, while obeying their religious teachings and cooperating with the *dhukun pandita*. During the 2010–11 eruption this led to an inner turmoil and dissonance, because they had obeyed and carried out the religious teachings as instructed by *dhukun pandita* but still suffered economically. The disaster required them to postpone the satisfaction of their economic needs. Their suffering and anger due to material losses led a small number of Tenggerese people to blame the religious authorities. In Wonokerso Village, Sumber Subdistrict, Probolinggo, one resident experienced a trance

in which he asked a *dhukun pandita* to conduct a ritual to call the spirits of the ancestors at Bromo and ask them to stop the eruption.[4] At the insistence of the residents, a *dhukun pandita* performed a ritual—but the sand and ash continued to fall. The residents blamed the *dhukun pandita* to such an extent that he was afraid to leave his house for eight days. Then the coordinator of *dhukun pandita* came to Wonokerso, met the residents, and assured them there was nothing wrong with the rituals, mantras, and timing of Tenggerese rituals. He showed them the traditional way to determine the dates of Kasada, Unan-unan, and Karo—a ritual thanking Hong Pukulun for the creation of Jaka Seger, Rara Anteng, and their 25 children—in accordance with the Tenggerese calendar. He also emphasized that the community should be patient. He added that all losses would be compensated.

The resentment of Wonokerso residents makes sense from an economic perspective, because the villagers had spent a lot of money to grow the vegetables. They were not happy about losing money, even though it was due to a natural disaster. They demanded practical action to mitigate the damage from the Bromo eruption. When a Tenggerese who was in a trance said that Tenggerese people in Wonokerso should ask *dhukun pandita* to hold a ritual to invite the spirits of their ancestors to Bromo as a way to stop the volcanic ash and sand, they did so. Based on scientific logic, it would be impossible to stop the bursts of lava and volcanic ash through rituals of spirit calling. However, modern reasoning was displaced by the villagers' traditional belief in the sanctity and supernatural powers of the gods of Bromo, who could be asked for help when people were going through difficult times. In the context of a society that is familiar with Bromo-related teachings, this reasoning becomes rational.

Although Tenggerese residents in Wonokerso are used to watching television and have a modern education, they cannot abandon their religious beliefs completely because they do not want to take the chance of inviting tragedy and disaster into their lives. Their resentment toward *dhukun pandhita* was unprecedented in Tenggerese life; *dhukun pandita* have always been highly respected. Furthermore, the embarrassing incident in Wonokerso—where the ash and sand continued despite the rituals—may be viewed as interference with religious authority. There was a fear that if the dissatisfaction and anger toward *dhukun pandita* was left unchecked, it could spread to other Tengger villages.

4) We got this story from an interview with Mujono, the coordinator of *dhukun pandita* in the Tengger area, on July 28, 2011. In mid-February 2014, Mujono passed away. All *dhukun pandita* in the Tengger area (Probolinggo, Pasuruan, Malang, and Lumajang) held a meeting in Senduro Subdistrict, Lumajang, on March 23, 2014. Based on the results of the deliberation, Sutomo—the *dhukun pandita* from Ngadisari Village, Sukapura Subdistrict, Probolinggo—became the new coordinator of *dhukun pandita*, a position he continues to hold as of this writing.

Therefore, the coordinator of *dhukun pandita* had to go to Wonokerso to clarify common misunderstandings and restore order as well as religious authority.

Indeed, the coordinator and all *dhukun pandita* carried a heavy burden and responsibility. Logically, the nine-month eruption was a natural consequence of the activity in the crater. The presence of officers from the Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation (Pusat Vulkanologi dan Mitigasi Bencana Geologis, PVMBG) in the Bromo area to monitor the eruption was a signal that the eruption of the holy mountain would indeed be long. However, *dhukun pandita* knew that the Tenggerese people needed a cultural explanation for the eruption that could be accepted by communal reasoning. This understanding guided the coordinator of *dhukun pandita* in performing rituals to communicate with the ancestral spirits, from whom he claimed to receive a holy whisper that all Tenggerese people should be "patient, cooperative, and harmonious." To be patient was a cultural-normative request that was psychologically expected to quell people's anger, even though the *dhukun pandita* could not provide a religious answer about the cause of the long eruption and the way to overcome it. It was also the most reasonable request, because when facing natural disasters the only thing humans can do is to be patient without blaming each other.

However, we have some critical understandings about the mobilization of the need to be patient in the Tengger region. First, by using the statement, all *dhukun pandita* and village heads throughout the region could be freed from blame; residents would not be able to blame the authorities for not providing appropriate answers for their material losses due to the long eruption. The anger of the people based on the logic of the modern economy was again controlled by traditional reasoning. Moreover, culturally, people are already accustomed to the discourse of inter-community harmony because they still feel like a big family, descendants of Rara Anteng and Jaka Seger. Second, by mobilizing the discourse of patience among all Tenggerese people in four regencies, the religious authorities tried to reorganize or reorder cultural chaos or uncertainty toward religious authority. The state of disorder caused by natural disasters and the ideology of economic progress was reordered through the dissemination of a discourse that touched on the religious beliefs of residents as fellow brothers and sisters. The effort succeeded in controlling the minds of Tenggerese people who suffered extraordinary economic losses and minimized public anger. Accordingly, public resistance against the establishment of religion did not expand into a massive movement that could cause the destruction of people's belief in ancestral teachings. Moreover, the return of Tenggerese people into an orderly condition—of social harmony and religious faith—also affirmed the return of religious authority into the lives of residents.

From the 2010–11 eruption, at least, we get some descriptions related to the mixing

of the perspectives of modernism—in this case of the economy—and religious-ecological knowledge in the lives of Tenggerese people. For market-oriented vegetable farmers who are used to living in the midst of economic prosperity and modernity, a natural disaster with long-term disruptive effects is a threat, although for religious reasons it is a kind of sacred activity. Anger at having to bear the economic burden is a form of modern reasoning that has developed in the minds of Tenggerese people. In the perspective of a modern economy, capital invested should yield the maximum profit and not a loss. Although only a temporary disappointment against *dhukun pandita*, this anger clearly shows a shift in religious thinking as a result of commercial considerations and the market economy in local life.

Transforming Tenggerese Religious-Ecological Knowledge into Disaster Mitigation Works

Although in particular conditions cultural in-betweenness creates a challenge to religious authority, it also indicates that the communities are able to accept modern knowledge and practices without completely abandoning their traditional culture. They still need religious-ecological knowledge to handle life in the midst of modernity. In a more constructive understanding, adopting the concept of postcolonial transformation (Ashcroft 2001), such local knowledge can be transformed into modern activities that are advantageous for Tenggerese communities, particularly in handling common problems such as the disastrous effects of a long eruption. Tenggerese religious-ecological knowledge can be applied to volcanology and disaster mitigation knowledge since Tenggerese communities have absorbed and practiced modernity in daily life. An absolute belief in religious-ecological knowledge can also have a negative impact, such as a distrust of the power of *dhukun pandita* that can lead to horizontal conflicts if the eruption is truly devastating. The ability and willingness to dynamically transform and negotiate local culture are key factors that can help indigenous communities survive in changing times (Smith 2006). Of course, for Tenggerese people this transformation principle requires dialogic openness between PVMBG, the National Disaster Management Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, BNPB), and the Local Disaster Management Agency (Badan Penanggulangan Bencana Daerah, BPBD), where each party cannot insist on its respective truth.

Adopting the ideas of Mercer *et al.* (2010), officials from volcanology and disaster mitigation must go beyond the dichotomy of local/traditional knowledge vs. modern knowledge so that religious leaders do not feel marginalized—even though they have

public trust. Marginalization of local knowledge, in many cases, only engenders problems in disaster mitigation because religious leaders and communities who have been living side by side with the mountain do not provide full support (Mercer and Kelman 2010). A willingness to go beyond the dichotomy is the initial step for conducting a dialogue aimed at involving *dhukun pandita* in disaster mitigation strategic work. Indeed, Tenggerese religious-ecological knowledge requires a special strategy because knowledge related to the eruption is not in the form of certain techniques that can be widely applied to disaster management. In the past, Tenggerese people had a technique of placing stones under the main pillar of the house to withstand volcanic earthquake shocks. However, this traditional technology-based architectural technique has been rarely applied since the economic prosperity from modern vegetable farming and tourism activities led to Tenggerese people building houses with walls and a solid foundation made of cement, sand, and stone.

Nevertheless, PVMBG, BNPB, and BPBD can develop constructive dialogue with *dhukun pandita*, village heads, and community leaders regarding volcanic activities and disaster mitigation. The dialogue should be directed toward understanding local people, with the aim of involving them in technical preparations to face an eruption. Concepts such as *duwe gawe*, "having a celebration or particular sacred activity," for example, can be connected with the eruption activities recorded by a seismograph. *Dhukun pandita* can be asked for their opinions regarding the level of *duwe gawe* that is happening in Bromo as instructions from the gods. The results of the dialogue between religious-ecological knowledge and tremor records can be a starting point to set up early warning systems that can be socialized to the community through *dhukun pandita* in each village, including announcements of evacuation. Openness is key. If an eruption does not require Tenggerese residents to be evacuated to government facilities, the disaster agencies do not have to force them to leave their homes.

In addition, in the future, disaster mitigation institutions can collaborate with *dhukun pandita*, village officials, community leaders, and schoolteachers to document natural signs recorded in the memories of Tenggerese people to predict when Mount Bromo will erupt. Natural signs can be used as a reference for preparing the community early and measuring what will be needed during the period of evacuation. No less important is the use of mitigation discourse that does not contain destructive statements, because most Tenggerese people do not consider Bromo eruptions to be life threatening. Thus, the use of more acceptable and understandable terms in accordance with the Tenggerese worldview will facilitate socialization and instruction in disaster mitigation. A willingness to adopt local terms or concepts for disaster management and mitigation during eruptions will make the Tenggerese people feel cared for. Hopefully, they will also be willing to

transform their Bromo-related beliefs and knowledge in a flexible and dynamic manner in accordance with volcanic knowledge and disaster mitigation.

Conclusion

Learning from the nine-month eruption and its relationship with the temporary resistance against religious authority, we can find the transgression of dualism in the cultural mind of Tenggerese people. What we mean by cultural mind is the concept of regarding something as "ideal" or "not ideal" in connection with particular problems. On the one hand, the people are accustomed to a modern mindset in terms of agricultural economy, education, and tourism, without abandoning their local cultures. One of the implementations of their economic desire is their use of extremely sloping dry land for planting various vegetables. On the other hand, they do not completely apply modern reasoning in interpreting beliefs and carrying out ancestral traditions. The dualism of thought shows that Tenggerese people cannot be called either a completely traditional society or a completely modern society.

The implication is that Tenggerese religious-ecological knowledge related to Mount Bromo can no longer be seen as stagnant. Tenggerese people believe in the sanctity and sacredness of Mount Bromo and carry out rituals related to respect for supernatural powers and all creatures on Earth. However, their adoption of the market economy through vegetable harvesting and tourism gives Tenggerese people a new understanding of ecological knowledge. Cultural in-betweenness—practicing both traditional and modern cultures—at a constructive level can indeed facilitate the implementation of disaster mitigation mechanisms or natural resource management that combines modern and traditional work. The involvement of *dhukun pandita* as well as other local voices, on a practical level, can reduce the potential for misunderstanding and conflict, especially in times of disaster.

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Semi-archives and Interim Archives: A History of the National Wages Council in Singapore*

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The National Wages Council (NWC) was the orchestra of Singapore's wage policy in the 1970s and 1980s. Our paper explores two key episodes in its history: its formation in February 1972 and its adoption of a high wage policy between 1979 and 1981 as part of Singapore's economic restructuring. We were able to draw upon partially declassified government records held at the National Archives of Singapore. Yet these records are incomplete and lacking in certain aspects as archival sources. We complemented them with other archival and published sources, including the oral history and writings of the NWC's longtime chairman, Lim Chong Yah. Our research urged us to conceptualize a pair of ideas, "semi-archives" and "interim archives," acknowledging the partiality of both archival and published sources in Singapore. The history of the NWC suggests a rethinking of the centrality of the documentary archive in the Western academic tradition. In Asian contexts like Singapore, a multi-archival approach is necessary for the writing of recent history. Singapore historians can work both modestly and imaginatively with a wider range of available historical sources, including archival, oral, and published sources.

Keywords: Singapore, history, economics, archive, oral history, wages

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Our paper is a meditation on the writing of contemporary history[1] in a Southeast Asian country where government archives remain classified. We consider the case of the National Wages Council (NWC) in Singapore in the 1970s and 1980s. Though the subject is specific to the economic history of a city-state, the methodological questions it raises are pertinent to research on contemporary pasts in non-Western contexts.

Historians typically hold the documentary archive, and specifically government records, to be a central primary source. These sources are valued for opening windows into policy decisions, discussions, or developments otherwise veiled from the public eye. In Western countries, they are often declassified after political leaders and senior civil servants have left office, when policies have receded from public interest. This entails an interim of two to three decades before government records are made public. It is worth noting that some archives, such as security files, are never made public in the West, though in the United States the Freedom of Information Act allows easier access to official records. In Rankean fashion, the government archive occupies a high place in the methodologies of historians of modern politics, economics, diplomacy, and military history trained in the Western academic tradition (Tosh 2015). Likewise, political historians of colonial Singapore have often relied on the British archives at Kew or the British Library (Yeo 1973; Turnbull 1977).

The archival method is, however, less applicable to contemporary history in non-Western countries and former colonies such as Singapore. For the post-independence period, colonial records are no longer available and the government archive is usually not open to historians. A situation may arise where the scholar of late-colonial Singapore is able to utilize the colonial records but cannot apply the archival methodology when crossing a political boundary to research the postcolonial period after 1965, when the city-state became independent.

Our response to these issues is to approach history writing in context. The research method will depend on the subject, period, available sources, and circumstances that determine the availability. For contemporary history, we suggest a multi-archival approach that expands the concept of the archive to include published and non-documentary sources that are available and useful. This approach is, of course, not new. Historians of social, cultural, and public history have often gone beyond the government archive to explore other sources. In the Southeast Asian context, historians and academics in other fields have looked not only at photographs, maps, and paintings, but also at social media posts in recent years (Ha Thuc 2019; Lee and Chua 2020; Veal 2020; Loh *et al.* 2021; Zackari 2021). In our view, these alternative sources are also relevant for writing eco-

1) By contemporary history, we mean the period within living memory from the 1930s to the 1990s.

nomic, political, diplomatic, and military history when government records are not yet available.

In adapting the concept of the archive, we propose the terms "semi-archives" and "interim archives." These terms include such non-documentary sources as oral history, which is a primary source but still regarded in some circles as being tainted by bias or unreliable memory (Thompson and Bornat 2017). The terms also refer to a range of published sources—also called "gray literature"—from the government, organizations, and individuals, such as official reports, newspapers and other periodicals, biographies, and commemorative volumes. In this paper, we are especially interested in oral history and biographies.

The idea of the terms "semi-archives" and "interim archives" denotes the nature of the sources and type of historical account based on them. These sources are partial and tentative, while the historical account lacks a certain depth or nuance without the use of archival records. We may not be able to discern the making of policy decisions or debates between government leaders or departments. At the same time, we do not regard the government archive as necessarily superior or definitive. We argue that it is itself a type of semi-archive and interim archive, perhaps because not all of its holdings have been made public, or it is still to be used in conjunction with other sources. In our research, we were able to utilize official documents and deepen our understanding of the NWC but also had to use them together with oral, biographical, and newspaper sources.

A counterargument may be made that it is better to leave out the contemporary past altogether and wait till the archival records are fully open. In our view, this is not feasible because of the context of historical research in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Even without archival sources, contemporary historians can still bring their research method and skills to bear on subjects that throw new light on present-day developments. A historical dimension enriches our understanding of events that—to generalize—is usually framed in synchronic or theoretical terms by social scientists, policy analysts, and journalists. Equally, even a partial and tentative account helps clarify and deepen the public record of events and policies. In Southeast Asia, where government archives of the contemporary past are typically closed, such pragmatism enables historians to work both modestly and imaginatively—to "make do"—with a wide range of available sources (Loh 2020; Benzaquen-Gautier 2021). This allows them to fulfill their academic and social roles.

Archives in Southeast Asia and Beyond

Debates over historical sources have long been part of Southeast Asian history. The advent of the autonomous way as a response to the colonialist and nationalist schools in the 1960s and 1970s was largely predicated on the use of what were considered to be indigenous sources. Calls by pioneers such as John Smail (1961) and J. C. van Leur (1955) to turn the historical perspective a hundred and eighty degrees from Westerners to locals entailed either reading colonial sources against the grain or using indigenous sources in creative ways. Utilizing local Catholic epics, Reynaldo Ileto (1979) made a groundbreaking interpretation of the popular roots of the Philippine Revolution. In the case of colonial Malaya and Singapore, Anthony Milner (1987) and Yeo Kim Wah (1987) engaged in a debate in the 1980s over the reliance on British colonial records. James Warren's (2003a; 2003b) discovery of coroners' inquests, which are court records that contain testimonies of the Singapore working class, suggests that the divide between colonial and indigenous sources may not be so clear-cut.

Nevertheless, these efforts and debates have in the main been limited to precolonial or colonial history before World War II. Little discussion has been made with regard to the decolonization and postcolonial periods. As we arrive in the third decade of the new millennium, it is timely to consider the research method and sources for Southeast Asia's contemporary pasts, especially from the post-independence years to the 1990s. The Southeast Asian literature highlights two key questions for this research: whether there are contemporary equivalents of indigenous sources, and how useful the archives of the postcolonial government are.

In the region and beyond, there are insightful ruminations about the nature of the government archive, especially its association with ideology and power. The government archive has variously been seen as a historical artifact of the modern state (Burns 2010), a form of governmentality aiding the creation of the nation-state and disciplining of the working class (Joyce 1999), or a technology of colonial governance (Stoler 2002). As Gyanendra Pandey observes, the creation of archives separates the sayable from the unsayable, reason from unreason, creating marginalized groups with "unarchived histories" (Pandey 2014). A government archive is a set of sources with its own political history to be read carefully. To these issues, we may add the difficulty of gaining access to government archives in non-Western contexts. While it does not fully resolve them, a multi-archival approach addresses the issues to some degree in utilizing a variety of partial and tentative sources and bringing diverse perspectives and voices to contemporary history.

These issues exist in Singapore, coupled with factors peculiar to the city-state. The

National Archives of Singapore (NAS) is the custodian of the records of the postcolonial government as well as those of defunct colonial agencies. These records are deposited at the NAS 25 years after their closure, becoming public records. However, they remain mostly classified and have restrictions on their use. Requests to read, reproduce, or cite from the records often require the approval of the creating or depositing agency—a process that takes 10 to 12 weeks for each request.[2] It often takes longer because the documents have not been reviewed and the officials tasked with the work have to do so while discharging their main responsibilities (Loh 2010).

What is unique to Singapore is the continuity of the People's Action Party (PAP) government from 1959 to the present. The government is largely responsible for the socioeconomic success of this period (Sandhu and Wheatley 1989). In the official narrative called the Singapore Story, the city-state made the remarkable leap from "Third World to First" under an enlightened and capable leadership after independence (Loh 1998; Hong and Huang 2008). The issue of historical legacy for the government is akin to that of an elderly political leader or businessman concerned about theirs. In reviewing requests for archival access, government agencies thus play the role of gatekeepers of the contemporary history of Singapore. This has led many scholars of the period's political, economic, social, and cultural histories to rely on a combination of foreign archives, gray literature, oral history, newspapers, and other non-archival sources (Loh 2010).

The National Wages Council and Its Archives

With this review of archival access in Singapore, our paper considers an understudied case of economic history after the island's independence. This is the National Wages Council, an important tripartite institution in the 1970s and 1980s. Formed in 1972, the NWC was the orchestra of the nation's wage policy. It was a non-statutory, advisory body composed of representatives from the government, employers, and trade unions. Reconciling the interests of the three parties—in economic growth, profitability, and adequate incomes—the NWC was a major force for orderly wage rises, industrial peace, and economic restructuring. For the first 29 years, it was headed by an academic: the founding Chairman and economist Lim Chong Yah. As we will see, Lim has been prolific in writings about the NWC. Yet, there has been no proper study of its role in Singapore's economic history. There are certainly none based on archival documents.

The existing literature on the NWC falls into two camps. On the one hand, the

2) See National Archives of Singapore, *FAQs*, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/government_records/faq (accessed September 19, 2022).

official line highlighted how it facilitated Singapore's economic prowess. It was a litmus test for tripartism and the concerted application of reason by the government, employers, and unions alike (Tan 2013). Such a consensual history of the NWC is exemplified in former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs, published in 2000:

> Every year, using facts and figures available to the government, the NWC reached a wide consensus recommendation on wage increases and other terms and conditions of service for the coming year that would be affordable and would promote further economic growth. . . . From its early years, all parties agreed on the principle that wage increases must not exceed productivity increases. (Lee 2000, 88)

This official line has been reiterated and expanded by some. Rosalind Chew and Chew Soon Beng (2003) emphasize the centrality of the government's influence in the acceptance and implementation of the NWC's wage recommendations, and the large increase in the number of employees who benefited from these recommendations. Wu Ying *et al.* (2004) show how steady wage increments reinforced Singapore's exchange rate policy, strengthening its macroeconomic stability and export competitiveness. Going further, Jonathan Cheng (2017) suggests that the NWC has supported the development of Singapore's defense ecosystem by contributing toward domestic stability and attracting foreign direct investment with orderly wage increments.

On the other hand, a number of political scientists, economists, and civil servants, using published sources, have been critical of the government's optimism that planned wage increases could replace the market in propelling Singapore's economic restructuring. W. G. Huff (1994) wonders whether a policy instrument like the NWC could spur the productivity increments needed to forge a capital- and technology-intensive economy, though he acknowledges the council's role in curbing inflationary pressures in the context of full employment. Garry Rodan (1989) agrees that the accelerated industrial leap forward as a whole showed a distrust of market forces. While it had positive outcomes, many of these actually preceded the program. While recognizing the NWC's success in maintaining industrial peace, Linda Lim and Pang Eng Fong (1986) also point out the repercussions: it undermined workers' loyalty to their employers, removed the room for flexible wage increases, and did not sufficiently raise worker productivity or reduce Singapore's reliance on low-wage foreign workers. In his memoirs, former top civil servant Ngiam Tong Dow sounded a rare critical note of the NWC: that its wage hikes, coupled with an inadequate supply of labor, worsened the issue of "job-hopping" and prevented workers from staying in their jobs long enough to pick up skills required for higher-paying jobs (Zhang 2011, 5, 86).

What do the sources—archival and otherwise—tell us? We were able to conduct

research on the NWC as part of a National Heritage Board-supported project on change and continuity in Singapore's economic history after 1945. We gained access to archival documents on the NWC between the early 1970s and early 1990s that had been deposited with the former Ministry of Labour (MOL, presently the Ministry of Manpower, MOM). As part of the government, the MOL was a member of the NWC. Its files were deposited at the NAS under the 25-year rule for the transfer of public records in Singapore. Unlike the bulk of government records at the NAS, they have been declassified by the MOM for reading and reproduction. In many cases, we still had to obtain approval for quotation and publication, which we did.[3)]

Access to the MOL files was undoubtedly useful. Comprising mostly minutes of meetings, they highlight the eventful history of the NWC, going beyond the narrative arc of consensus to offer a more nuanced appreciation of the political and economic forces at play. This helped address a problem for historians researching the NWC: it had adopted the Chatham House rules of non-attribution, so deliberations among the members were not disclosed to the press or the public. With the MOL archive, we were able to gain insights into the inner workings of tripartism in Singapore. The NWC's meetings showed significant differences and debates over wage increases among the government, employers, and unions—sometimes even within each group—before agreement was brokered. The files also throw light on a wide range of related issues, including productivity, economic restructuring, immigration, automation, fringe benefits, and job-hopping. This brought the NWC into social, cultural, and psychological considerations beyond wages.

On the other hand, the MOL files are a good example of a semi-archive and interim archive. They are incomplete, with gaps in the periods covered, such as the meetings of 1981 (the final year of the high wage policy discussed below) and most of 1982. Some minutes are unconfirmed drafts. In many instances, the MOL files do not document how solutions to deadlock or compromises were reached. The NWC's own archive might contain some of this information, but we do not know whether it exists. The MOL files also do not contain political decisions from the government, except at key junctures in

3) The MOL files are labelled declassified according to the MOM's stipulation that they do not contravene Section 102 of the Employment Act. But some of them still require written approval for reproduction, citation, and in some cases access, though many have been approved for reproduction and citation. The exact wording from the NAS online catalog is: "Note from transferring agency: The following file has been declassified. MOM has checked the file, and find that the file does not contain any explicit record that MOM's powers under Part XII of the Employment Act have been invoked in obtaining the information. As such, the bar from publication or disclosure under section 102 of the Employment Act does not apply." Part XII pertains to Registers, Returns and Other Documentary Requirement, while Section 102 covers "Returns Not to Be Published or Disclosed." For instance, see https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/government_records/record-details/8854e730-259b-11e9-b76c-001a4a5ba61b (accessed September 19, 2022).

the early years. This means that the relationship between the government and the NWC was not always clear. Such documentation would be found in cabinet papers and other archival sources, including those of employers and unions. For these reasons, the MOL files are also an interim source that has to await the opening of other archival and published sources.

Albert Winsemius and Genesis of the NWC[4]

Our paper delves into two milestones in the NWC's history. One is the convergence of factors that brought about its formation in February 1972. The other is its implementation of a high wage policy as part of the government's economic restructuring program between 1979 and 1981. This pair of episodes have been chosen because they involve policy-making decisions of the type usually well documented in government sources.

In the public record, the genesis of the NWC is linked mainly to individuals on the one hand and national interests on the other. The commissioned book *The Story of NWC* (Tan 2013) noted broad support for a tripartite wages council at the time from various persons: Minister of Finance Hon Sui Sen; S. F. T. B. Lever, the outgoing Chairman of the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce; and members of the Singapore Employers' Federation (SEF) (Tan 2013).[5] Such a council would be a force for industrial stability, reconciling the interests of employers, labor, and the government. A *Straits Times* article in April 1970 carried a call by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Secretary-General for the government to establish a tripartite wages council and administer wage increases, without which "industrial relations in Singapore could well degenerate into a state of disorder, if not anarchy."[6] As reported in a news article in June 1971, Hon endorsed such a council as a way for wage increases to be "coolly considered in the interest of both employers and workers, and of the public represented by the Government."[7] The commissioned book and newspaper articles emphasize national imperative and reinforce the consensual history of the NWC.

But another public source more usefully pinpoints Albert Winsemius, the government's long-time Dutch economics adviser, as the source of the idea of the NWC. In his 2014 memoirs, *Singapore's National Wages Council: An Insider's View*, Lim Chong Yah,

4) See also Sng Hui Ying, "Albert Winsemius and Wage Policy in Singapore," in *Albert Winsemius: Here, It Is Going to Happen*, edited by Euston Quah (Singapore: World Scientific, 2022).
5) "Question of Wages," *New Nation*, April 13, 1971, p. 2.
6) "Call for a Pay Rise Formula," *Straits Times*, April 12, 1970, p. 8.
7) "Bosses 'Yes' to Pay Council," *Straits Times*, June 20, 1971, p. 1.

who was not privy to discussions to form the NWC, concurred: "I was informed that it was Dr Albert Winsemius who in 1971 suggested the idea of NWC to the then Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew" (Lim 2014, 345). He merely added: "Though Dr Winsemius proposed the concept of tripartism to the Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, he never interfered in its implementation and evolution. He never initiated any talk to me on any aspect of the NWC" (Lim 2014, 344).

While Lim's biography identifies Winsemius, questions about what he did—crucially, what data and arguments he compiled and presented—remain unanswered. For these questions, we have an oral history interview with Winsemius conducted by the Oral History Unit of the NAS in 1982. The interview is open access and has been transcribed in full. In the interview, Winsemius quipped, "NWC was established on my advice." He related how, in a lecture at the University of Singapore titled "Some Pitfalls of Rapid Economic Development," he had emphasized the need for Singapore to raise wages when it attained full employment in the early 1970s.

Winsemius's interview on the formation of the NWC and the high wage policy discussed below is an invaluable historical source. The pros and cons of oral history with political and business elites are well known. On the one hand, candid testimonies can be richly textured, providing insights into underlying power and business relations and changes that are not documented in archival sources. On the other hand, their perspective is limited to the eye of the beholder and may contain subjective interpretations or value judgments; these have to be checked against other sources (Perks 2016; Aharon 2020). Winsemius was candid about his role in the NWC. But he could not offer similarly close recollections for other historical actors and events. Other personal accounts and archival sources are needed to corroborate his interpretation and extend the scope of historical reconstruction.

Another question in the NWC's early history pertains to Lim's claim, made in his memoirs, that it was "a unique institution of Singapore," there being no other comparable institution in the world (Lim 2014, 4). But he also stated that Singapore's tripartism had a Dutch precedent (Lim 2014, 344). Likewise, a *New Nation* article in February 1972 surmised that a Singapore wages council would be part of a post-World War II trend in using such institutions to balance national development and income distribution in Western countries. As it noted, the Dutch experience was particularly worth studying for the difficulties faced and lessons learned.[8] In his oral history interview, Winsemius also recounted that the NWC was "based on Dutch experience" in the early 1950s. He called it a "*stichting voor de arbeid* [foundation for labor]," bringing together the government,

8) "Republic's Move to Set Up a Wages Council," *New Nation*, February 10, 1972, p. 6.

unions, and employer organizations to gradually raise wages. It could not work in perpetuity, as it would eventually have a freezing effect on wages, but it was what Singapore needed at the time. More generally, Winsemius had extensive firsthand knowledge and experience of industrial development and wages policy in his homeland after the war.[9)]

On these questions, the MOL files serve as a classic archive, corroborating public or personal claims and deepening our understanding of the NWC's origins. Various documents flesh out Winsemius's key role in adapting the Dutch precedent to Singapore and furnishing the economic data. In a document written in 1972, Winsemius referred to his earlier report, "Some Guidelines for an Economic Policy under Full Employment," dated February 10, 1970. This report is, unfortunately, missing from the MOL files—something we will see on a number of other occasions. It had ostensibly called for an "active wages policy" with "regular wage increases" when Singapore reached full employment. The aim would be to move workers from low-wage industries and services to the "more modern sector" of export manufacturing and hospitality.[10)] Winsemius added that when the NTUC wanted to popularize the bonus system (a practice prevalent among Chinese employers) in early 1970, he had taken "a rather strong stand" against it. He had sent a memo, dated March 5, 1970, to Finance Minister Hon warning of the adverse effect on productivity.[11)]

Sometime later in 1971, a paper titled "Wage Council" was submitted to the cabinet elaborating on Winsemius's ideas. It is, unfortunately, a draft, unattributed and undated. The draft presented the economic argument for a wage council to be formed—with some urgency, by the end of the year.[12)] It warned about the lack of a "coherent wage system" in Singapore, which could spell adverse consequences such as the loss of investments, and highlighted the need to increase the supply of skilled and semi-skilled workers.[13)] The work of this wage council, the paper stressed, would not be wage restraint but an "orderly wage increase."[14)]

Was Winsemius the author of this cabinet draft? We do not know for sure but consider it likely. The draft also addressed two non-economic issues that could have been raised by a political leader or civil servant. But this does not discount Winsemius's plausible authorship. On his first United Nations Development Programme missions to Singapore in 1960–61, Winsemius had gone beyond his economic terms of reference from

9) Singapore Oral History Unit, Interview with Albert Winsemius, August 30–September 3, 1982, Reel 16.
10) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 1.
11) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 3.
12) MMC 9-24-72, Draft Cabinet Paper, "Wage Council."
13) MMC 9-24-72, Draft Cabinet Paper, "Wage Council," p. 115.
14) MMC 9-24-72, Draft Cabinet Paper, "Wage Council," p. 116.

the UN. He had privately—and convincingly—advised Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on political matters, including suppressing the government's leftist opponents to achieve industrial peace (Loh 2019).

The first non-economic issue raised in the draft was having to deal with political pressure the wage council might face from powerful interest groups. The draft held up the example of wage boards in small countries, namely, the Netherlands and Sweden, as having contributed to economic development, though they became less effective in later years due to political influence. The draft maintained that Singapore had a strong government that was capable of managing the management and unions.[15)]

Second, the draft spelled out the composition of the wage council. It would be an advisory body consisting of a Chairman—appointed by the Minister of Labor—three employer representatives, three representatives from the NTUC, and three representatives from the government; subsequently, the number was expanded to thirty, divided equally among the tripartite partners. The Chairman would be a neutral and independent figure.[16)] Lim's (2014) memoirs tell us that he was chosen after a long search by the government, being a development economist with management and union experience. The draft outlined the criteria. But it was more brief about the modus operandi of the council, which would conduct its discussions via a "valuable educational process."[17)]

Following the cabinet draft, a pair of important papers were tabled. On January 25, 1972 Winsemius submitted a paper, "Labour Market and Wages Policy" (another draft), to Minister Hon. This draft drew upon data compiled in a memorandum by the chief of the Business and Economic Research Division in the Economic Development Board (EDB), "Labour Market, Wages and Productivity Analysis," dated January 26, 1972. The data was based on two sources: a survey of 120-odd companies, each employing over two hundred workers, and a manpower budget for the year, which Winsemius had helped draw up.[18)]

"Labour Market and Wages Policy," jointly authored by Winsemius and the EDB, would prove decisive. Or it could have been a follow-up paper with additional statistics Winsemius said he intended to submit, but this paper is not found in the MOL files. Even without further data, "Labour Market and Wages Policy" showed Winsemius's economic logic in the creation of the NWC. The paper delved into immigration and wages policy. Using the aforementioned EDB manpower budget, Winsemius pointed out that with full employment in mid-1971, Singapore would need to recruit more Malaysian workers—

15) MMC 9-24-72, Draft Cabinet Paper, "Wage Council."
16) MMC 9-24-72, Draft Cabinet Paper, "Wage Council," p. 117.
17) MMC 9-24-72, Draft Cabinet Paper, "Wage Council," p. 117.
18) MMC 9-72, Memo No. B.1/72 "Labour Market, Wages and Productivity Analysis," p. 30.

nearly fifty thousand in 1971 and about sixty-seven thousand in 1972—especially for low-paying industries and construction.[19] This contrasted with only twenty thousand school-leavers entering the labor market between December 1972 and January 1973. The manpower shortage was especially marked in low-paying industries such as textiles and garments, and wood and cork. There was also "a severe shortage of middle and lower management personnel, technicians, and craftsmen."[20] For 1972, about twenty thousand immigrant workers were needed in the manufacturing sector, including three thousand to four thousand managerial, technical, and skilled workers.[21]

For Winsemius, the crux of the issue was wages. Drawing from statistics in the EDB memo, he noted that in the view of manufacturers, wages were rising less than productivity in the sector, even as wage rises in the low-paying sector were pulled up by those in the higher-paying sector. A large majority of firms (84 of 116) expected difficulty in recruitment, especially of skilled workers. This would require in-plant training and substantial wage increases that had not been planned for. It was worsened by high labor turnover arising from full employment, especially among new recruits.[22]

Winsemius urged that for Singapore's economic growth to continue, it was necessary to upgrade labor and develop all the economic sectors. Haste was paramount. He predicted that in five years' time (at the end of 1976), manufacturing would expand to the minimum required size. Wage increases were needed to encourage mechanization and release workers from low-paying to higher-paying industries. This would remove the need for large numbers of Malaysian workers, except for the small numbers to fill jobs unpopular with Singaporeans. Winsemius warned, "There is also a danger in the dependency of economic growth on immigration. The sooner this is over the better."[23] He proposed a national wage increase of 8–10 percent, which would likely work out to between 10–12 percent and 13–15 percent.[24] The increase would apply throughout the industry, enabling workers to move from firm to firm in search of optimal wages.[25]

Citing manufacturers' feedback, Winsemius was confident that the envisaged wage council would succeed. Singaporean workers would respond favorably to such an incentive system, which he urged should be "vigorously promoted."[26] The wage increases had to be pushed through as early as possible, establishing a balanced labor market within

19) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy."
20) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 20.
21) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy."
22) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy."
23) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 19.
24) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 23.
25) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 24.
26) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 24.

five years by the end of 1976. Otherwise, he warned, "there may not remain sufficient elbow room for the inevitable adaptation of the economic structure to the then changed conditions."[27)]

He made two recommendations for immigration policy to go hand in hand with the wage increases. First, he urged the government to set criteria for citizenship for skilled immigrants. He agreed with the Immigration Review Committee that applications for managers, supervisors, skilled technicians, and accountants from Malaysia (all in shortage) should be "treated liberally."[28)] He acknowledged that integrating skilled Malaysians as permanent residents and eventual citizens "may be a time consuming process."[29)] Subsequently, in October 1972, the Ministry of Labour announced that work permits would be given "liberally" to firms that utilized higher technology.[30)]

Second, Winsemius proposed that the government undertake a study (to be completed by early 1973) to limit immigration within five years at the end of 1976. The study would focus on a wages policy to increase productivity through mechanization and reallocation of workers to high-paying industries, and to establish a balance in the demand and supply of labor without the need for excessive immigration.[31)] The aim of the wages policy was to raise productivity. Wage increases would compel employers to regard labor as a scarce factor, raise labor productivity, and turn to automation. Winsemius stressed:

> An essential part of this policy is (1) that the employee gets what he deserves on the basis of work done, and (2) that the employer is forced to pay his employees what the capable employer can afford to pay.[32)]

On the genesis of the NWC, the MOL files largely work as an archive as intended. The Winsemius and EDB documents contain crucial economic data and arguments. They show that the Dutch adviser played a more important role than the other individuals mentioned in the public record. Specifically, by establishing the link between wage increases, immigration, and productivity, they demonstrate that economic restructuring had been in the government's mind since the beginning of the 1970s, instead of a decade later when the reform was implemented. The documents also illustrate the adaptation of Western, and particularly Dutch, wages councils to Singapore's circumstances. The NWC was not unique; what was remarkable was the willingness to modify a foreign idea

27) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 25.
28) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 21.
29) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 19.
30) MMC 9-72 Vol. 3, Singapore Government Press Release, Addendum to the President's Address for the Opening of Parliament, p. 1.
31) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 19.
32) MOL 022-02-0005PT0000VOL000, "Labour Market and Wages Policy," p. 24.

to suit national needs. Winsemius's proposal contained an element of urgency: the NWC would not only spur value-added industries but also prevent the economy's stagnation. It had the benefit of hindsight from Western experiences and knew the Singapore government's ability to manage the interests of management and labor.

Despite this, in some ways the MOL archive is also partial and tentative. It contains drafts instead of final or signed documents. The number of drafts suggests the pressure of time and urgency, and possibly the working culture in the government. The cabinet draft in particular was not attributed, requiring us to speculate on its author(s). There are also missing documents, such as Winsemius's supposed follow-up paper on labor and wages. Little is said about the NWC's methodology, for Winsemius apparently did not propose the Chatham House rules or need for consensus. We have to await a newspaper interview with Lim Chong Yah on February 11, 1972, where he emphasized the "cool, unrestricted, unhindered freedom to deliberate, to exchange views, and to argue if necessary, to arrive at recommendations based on cold solid logic, real hard facts and carefully considered judgment."[33)]

Most crucially, the MOL files lack certain key documents. We do not know whether and how the government discussed and responded to Winsemius's proposal. The most intriguing question perhaps is the role of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. He personally backed the NWC, for it was to him that the council's yearly wage recommendations were submitted. It is only after the NWC was formed that we get a glimpse in the MOL archive of his influence on the council's early work.

As Winsemius's memos make clear, political will was central to the management of wage increases. Published sources are scanty on the matter. In 2011 Lim gave credit to Lee's role, saying, "It was impossible for the NWC to function effectively, including during the crisis years and the restructuring years without his strong support and backing" (Lim 2014, 46). At the same time, in his book on economic restructuring, Lim (1984) maintained that up to that point, the government had directed the NWC's guidelines only once—to propose an interim wage increase in 1974 at the onset of the global oil crisis.

The MOL files shed some light on Lee's considerable influence. Given his background as a lawyer, he intervened on the approach of the NWC. In a meeting with the council in May 1972, he indicated that he had received a paper and two draft bills intended to give the NWC the force of law. These documents are not found in the MOL archive. Lee said he opposed the legislation, as "it would be dangerous to approach the Council's recommendations in such a legalistic way," which would commit employers and unions to fixed wage positions and destabilize industrial relations. This had led to the collapse

33) MMC 9-72, Record of interview with Mr Joseph Yeo of the *Straits Times* and Professor Lim Chong Yah as Chairman of the National Wages Council, February 11, 1972.

of wage councils in the United States, Britain, and even Holland, where it had worked for 10–15 years before failing when the country had attained a level of growth.[34] Lee elaborated:

> Therefore relations between employers and unions should not depend on legislation. The whole idea of the National Wages Council was to find the norm which would guide all employers and employees. Common sense and goodwill were essential to make it work.[35]

At the end of Lee's speech, the NWC's tripartite members expressed their unanimous agreement. Lee's early interventions in the NWC were historically significant.

The High Wage Policy, 1979–81

The second episode we discuss is the origins of the "high wage" policy between 1979 and 1981. As we have seen, this was the original purpose behind the NWC but had been delayed because of the global oil crisis and resulting recession in 1973–74. The policy has thus also been called the "corrective wage" policy, when postponed wage increases were finally implemented. Where the MOL files have demonstrated their utility on the genesis of the NWC, their role in the high wage policy is decidedly different and more ambivalent.

Among the published sources, Lim's memoirs provide a clue that the impetus for the policy came, quite naturally, from the government:

> When the large-scale national-wide training and re-training programme was proposed by the NWC, I remembered discussing the matter with Mr Hon Sui Sen, the then Finance Minister. He said, "I support your proposal for economic restructuring, particularly in the areas of training and re-training and mechanisation. I have independently discussed the proposal with two other economists who shared the same view as you." Although the Minister did not give any hint as to who these two economists were, I had no doubt that they were Mr Ngiam Tong Dow and Dr Albert Winsemius. (Lim 2014, 344)

In both a lecture in 2011 and our oral history interview with him in 2020, Lim elaborated on the origins of the policy. He recounted a visit to China in 1980 by Lee Kuan Yew, accompanied by Winsemius, Ngiam Tong Dow, and Devan Nair. China had just opened up to international trade and economic relations following the end of the Cultural Revolution. The Singaporeans concluded that Singapore could not hope to compete in labor-intensive,

34) MMC 9-72 Vol. 16, "Notes of Meeting at the Istana State Room," May 23, 1972, pp. 3–4.
35) MMC 9-72 Vol. 16, "Notes of Meeting at the Istana State Room," May 23, 1972, p. 4.

low-value-added manufacturing with China, which had an abundant supply of low-wage labor. Lim related that he had also visited China the previous year with a group of younger economists, reaching the same conclusion about Singapore's need to move to value-added manufacturing (Lim 2014).[36] Following the trip, Lim met with Winsemius and Ngiam. The trio agreed to phase out low-value-added and labor-intensive industries from Singapore (Lim 2014). Lim recalled that he had proposed four years of restructuring to Ngiam's two, so a compromise of three years was reached.[37] It appears that China's opening up was the catalyst for revisiting the high wage policy and economic restructuring.

Nevertheless, Lim's recollections were still somewhat speculative on the government's role. Again, Winsemius offers a detailed answer. His involvement was to be expected, as wage increases had been germane to his thinking on the NWC and economic restructuring in 1970. In his 1982 oral history interview, Winsemius recounted writing a two-page report—he called it "the shortest report I have ever written in Singapore"—at the Shangri-La Hotel on a Sunday, likely in 1978. The report advocated a "wage catch-up operation" to compensate for his mistake of having accepted lower-than-optimal wage increases after the oil crisis. Over three years, wages would rise by 20 percent in 1979, 19 percent in 1980, and 19 percent in 1981. This would lead to higher productivity growth and a balanced labor market. From 1981, Singapore could send back roughly six thousand foreign workers per year, reducing its reliance on a low-wage migrant workforce.[38] Unfortunately, Winsemius's report, which he deemed "Probably the best paper I ever wrote," is nowhere to be found in the MOL files.[39] He recounted these recollections in an interview published in the *Singapore Monitor* in 1984, following his retirement from government service.[40]

Unlike the genesis of the NWC, the MOL files do not involve Winsemius or establish how the high wage policy came about. They contain the minutes of the NWC's meetings in the middle of 1979 and are primarily concerned with the discussions of the proposed policy. This can be seen from the fact that it was only in the sixth meeting, on May 16, that the government representative Ngiam made a brief reference to a high wage policy. The previous five meetings had gone about the usual business of considering wage increases without reference to any major change of policy. In the sixth meeting, however,

36) Loh Kah Seng, Sng Hui Ying, and Jeremy Goh, Interview with Lim Chong Yah, December 4, 2020.
37) Loh Kah Seng, Sng Hui Ying, and Jeremy Goh, Interview with Lim Chong Yah, December 4, 2020.
38) Singapore Oral History Unit, Interview with Albert Winsemius, August 30–September 3, 1982, Reel 16.
39) Singapore Oral History Unit, Interview with Albert Winsemius, August 30–September 3, 1982, Reel 16.
40) "Dutchman behind Singapore Inc.," *Singapore Monitor*, February 26, 1984, p. 16.

Ngiam proposed that a high wage policy, alongside the recruitment of foreign workers, would alleviate the tight labor situation and deter locals from job-hopping.[41] As it was Ngiam's initiative, this does support the accounts of Lim and Winsemius that the government, not the NWC, was behind the policy. As in the proposal for the NWC, wage increases and immigration were the two prongs of Singapore's economic restructuring.

But the next meeting did not raise the matter again. Only in the eighth meeting, on May 30, did Ngiam submit an argument for the high wage policy: low wages would raise the demand for low-skilled immigrant labor and slow down productivity growth, leaving Singapore mired in low-value-added industries. He added that the policy would succeed in the civil service "through exogenous forces and through controls by direction," indicating that the government was wholly committed to the policy.[42] The NWC noted that "politically and socially, a large immigrant workforce was undesirable for Singapore."[43]

The meeting duly considered three recommendations for the 1979 quantum. The government (through Ngiam) proposed both a higher lump sum and higher percentage for 1979, while the employers wanted the same formula as the previous year. Lim took the middle ground, proposing a higher lump sum but the same percentage. At this stage the NTUC was hesitant, with Nair cautioning that a high wage policy should be introduced with "the greatest care" as it may precipitate negative publicity and unhappiness among labor-intensive industries.[44] He called for further studies on the proposed policy.

The lines of debate were more clearly drawn in the ninth meeting a week later, on June 6. Lim stated that he remained in favor of a high wage increase, with the public sector slated for a supporting directive from the Prime Minister and Finance Minister. This time he had the support of the government and union representatives, the latter having changed their position. Obviously, Nair had spoken separately with the government and changed his stance, which the MOL files would not document. Ngiam assured that wage increases in Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong since 1976 had been much higher than in Singapore, and that increments would not lead to inflationary pressures or hurt Singapore's balance of payments.[45]

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41) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Confirmed Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, May 16, 1979, p. 131.
42) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Confirmed Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, May 30, 1979, p. 113.
43) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Confirmed Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, May 30, 1979, p. 112.
44) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Confirmed Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, May 30, 1979, p. 116.
45) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Confirmed Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, June 6, 1979.

But the employer representatives remained to be convinced. Stressing "moderation and political presentation," they objected to a very high wage policy, wanting it to be implemented in stages instead. They had conducted confidential discussions with respective groups of employers and found "generally unfavourable reactions." The meeting engaged in a lengthy debate on the quantum (unfortunately not transcribed in the minutes), before agreeing tentatively to a formula of $30 plus 6 percent for 1979.[46)]

The matter was not yet resolved. In the tenth meeting, on June 8, the members deliberated at length on the quantum. Government and union representatives stated the quantum of the national average wage to be $522 and called for an appropriately higher increase than previously agreed. The employer representatives claimed that this was a distorted figure and proposed $382. The three parties finally agreed on the midpoint figure of $450—the classic compromise. This meant a wage increase of $32 plus 7 percent with offsetting for 1979, amounting to a 20 percent hike in national wages, as Winsemius had intimated in his oral history interview.[47)] The recommendations were signed off three days later, during the 11th meeting on June 11, submitted to the Prime Minister on June 23, and accepted by the government.

The MOL minutes of meetings failed to throw light on the origins of the high wage policy. Its utility was to provide a view of tripartism at work. The employers had resisted the policy, but the Chairman, government, and unions had succeeded through persuasion and compromise. Consensus in the NWC was not a given but the result of debate and reconciliation. Lee Kuan Yew (in his memoirs) was correct that the economic interests of Singapore circumscribed the disparate interests of the tripartite members.

However, consensus was partial when it was taken beyond the council to the economy. When the high wage policy was implemented, local newspapers documented what was happening on the ground. Labor-intensive electronics and textile industries were shown to be badly hit by the higher wage increases.[48)] Some German and Japanese MNCs expressed their dismay that their competitiveness was being eroded; one German manufacturer was quoted as saying, "The EDB lured us here and then dropped us like hot potatoes."[49)]

Further, what is missing in the archival records is the personal or individual element. Why did Nair change his stance? Were there varying degrees of consent and dissent among different groups of employers? We may turn to the writings of Lim Chong Yah.

46) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Confirmed Minutes of the 9th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, June 6, 1979, p. 104.
47) MMS 3-2-1-74 Vol. 17, Unconfirmed Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the 8th Session of the National Wages Council, June 8, 1979.
48) "The NWC Hike and the Angry Bosses," *Straits Times*, July 2, 1979, p. 12.
49) "NWC and the Multinationals," *Straits Times*, July 11, 1980, p. 14.

They contain many anecdotes and stories about the NWC, emphasizing the importance of personality and interpersonal relations. Lim (2014) highlighted his excellent relations with the senior civil servant Ngiam; the senior union officials Devan Nair and Govindasamy Kandasamy; and Stephen Lee, President of the SEF. Although his writings did not broach the compromises behind the high wage policy, Lim related the methods he used to obtain agreement from hesitant members of the NWC. He applied peer pressure and made use of fine wine to work the foreigners. On one occasion, by arranging a meeting on a Sunday with representatives of the American Business Council, he was able to break the impasse (Lim 2014).[50)]

The personal resolution efforts that took place outside the NWC meetings are, of course, not documented in the MOL files. What the archive does is to provide the historical context for the stories narrated by Lim and Winsemius. On the high wage policy, it captures the initial resistance of the employers, the shift in the unions' position, the mediating role of Lim as the Chairman, and the brokering of a consensus. We are in a better position to understand how the NWC worked.

Conclusion

Our access to the MOL files reveals the history of the NWC to be interesting, multi-vocal, and eventful. The files make a crucial contribution to understanding the economic history of Singapore in the 1970s and 1980s. As archival records, they peel away the veil that had been put in place by the Chatham House rules to highlight deep tripartite discussions on wage issues. Specifically, they affirm the roles of Winsemius in two milestone events of the NWC, and an early intervention of Lee Kuan Yew. The files also underline the diverse perspectives and means of rapprochement between the government, employers, and unions during discussions of the high wage policy.

The MOL files are also a useful case study on the pursuit of history where government archives are classified or incomplete. The files are a semi-archive, inadequate for a complete history of the NWC. In part this is because they are incomplete; important records on the genesis of the NWC and the high wage policy are missing. But more important, the MOL archive is not truly "tripartite" in the way the NWC was. It comprises the documents kept by one of the government members (albeit a key one) in the NWC. It is telling that most of the MOL documents are minutes of the NWC's meetings, which were circulated to the members. Other archival documents are needed for a more

50) Loh Kah Seng, Sng Hui Ying, and Jeremy Goh, Interview with Lim Chong Yah, December 4, 2020.

complete picture.

Many questions on the NWC cannot be answered without a tripartite set of archival documents. These will have to be obtained from the other branches of government (including, crucially, the cabinet and Ministry of Finance), the employers, and the unions. Conversely, the history of wage policy in Singapore cannot be understood without reference to bigger or related policies on economic restructuring, productivity improvements, skills training, immigration, and labor affairs. To these ends, it is important that other government agencies, with the facilitation of the NAS, continue the crucial work of declassifying their archives as the MOM has done.[51)]

In the broader field of Southeast Asian history, Lim's writings and speeches and Winsemius's 1982 oral history interview with the NAS are arguably the contemporary equivalents of indigenous sources. They are authored by locals or, in Winsemius's case, a knowledgeable foreigner with close involvement in local affairs. In the absence of (but also in conjunction with) the usual indigenous source—government records—they are useful for their personal vantage points and anecdotes. As historical sources, they are partial and incomplete. One might be wary if their authors seek to highlight their historical legacy, as biographies are known to do (Tosh 2015). But as Alessandro Portelli (2016) notes about oral history, it is the very subjectivity of such sources that makes them valuable.

As semi-archives and interim archives, the accounts of Lim and Winsemius relay not only useful historical facts but also the culture of conflict resolution in the NWC and more generally the making of economic policy in Singapore. Interestingly, they present rather countervailing perspectives: Lim used interpersonal means to broker agreements, while Winsemius offered cold economic logic in proposing the NWC and high wage policy. Rather than weakening the narrative, their accounts tell us much about the complex forces at work in Singapore's recent economic history.

Through the terms "semi-" and "interim" archives, we conceive of a history that is incrementally written and progressively mapped in non-Western contexts. In oral history, we have a source that is the joint creation of the interviewer (the historian) and interviewee, and thus one where the historian is able to actively pursue the research (Frisch 1990). Biographies, though different, are quite indispensable in countries where policy decisions are made by a select few in government or business; they have been proven to be particularly informative on the themes of motive and intention (Tosh 2015).

51) To some extent, the views of employers may be gleaned from company records maintained by the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA), a Singapore statutory board, https://www.bizfile.gov.sg/ngbbizfileinternet/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pages/BizfileHomepage.jspx (accessed September 19, 2022). It is unclear, however, how comprehensive these records are.

Government archives, when released, ought to be viewed as new and additional sources that can deepen or clarify the existing narrative rather than as the sole authoritative source. Historians of Singapore and Southeast Asia can fruitfully utilize a wide range of sources and bring their method and expertise to contemporary history.

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Sending Money Back Home: Banking Digitalization, Myanmar Migrant Workers, and the Thailand-Myanmar Border Trade

Akkanut Wantanasombut*

In 2021 Thailand's Ministry of Labour reported that approximately 2.4 million migrant workers had been permitted to work in Thailand, with two-thirds arriving from Myanmar (Samnak Borihan Raeng Ngan Tang Dao Krom Karn Jad Ha Ngan 2021). For decades, this large number of migrant workers from Myanmar has benefited the Thailand-Myanmar border trade, both directly and indirectly, including the remittances that Burmese migrant workers send to their families back home.

This paper studies how the economic activities revolving around border trade developed. It describes how informal remittances from Myanmar migrant workers have become one of the key elements of the massive illicit border trade and introduces the possibility of digital technology replacing traditional informal remittance methods. The data presented here was collected by way of semi-structured interviews with 32 Burmese migrant workers living and working in Samutsakorn Province, nine Thai border traders in Mae Sot, officials, and a Thai financial technology company operating in Myanmar. The interviews revealed that most of the migrant workers had experience using mobile banking and financial applications, they were familiar with the technology, and they were aware of its capacity as an alternative method of sending money back home. However, many still preferred to use informal banking as it benefited them the most. The border traders interviewed for this paper further confirmed that there was still no threat of consequences for payment offsetting. Therefore, the digitalization of banking strengthens the informal banking system as it both hastens and improves the processes of money distribution.

Keywords: Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, Thailand-Myanmar border trade, informal remittance, banking digitalization

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Introduction

The 1990s marked a crucial period for Thailand, as this was when the major exports of agriculture and labor-intensive industries transitioned to medium-tech industries (Pasuk and Baker 1998, 28–38). While the Thai economy was growing faster than ever before, Myanmar was struggling under the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military regime, followed by the State Peace and Development Council military regime. The economic disparity between the two neighboring countries initiated a new wave of migrants from Myanmar to Thailand in search of better opportunities (Castles and Miller 2009, 138). Overall, the number of migrant workers in Thailand increased from the first official record of 400,000 persons in 1994 (Pasuk and Baker 1998, 138) to 2.4 million at the end of September 2021, with 1,554,637 of them arriving from Myanmar (Samnak Borihan Raeng Ngan Tang Dao Krom Karn Jad Ha Ngan 2021). While the United Nations estimated in 2019 that there were 3.9 million documented and undocumented workers from neighboring countries—Myanmar, Laos PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam—and that there were some 480,000 stateless persons and 100,000 asylum seekers in Thailand, the report noted that most came from Myanmar (Harkins 2019, 12). While Thailand officially shelters asylum seekers, the official term that the Thai authorities use is "displaced persons," as Thailand has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not have a policy to give refugee status to anyone. The Thai government provides humanitarian aid and shelter until the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees determines the third country that will accept asylum seekers as refugees. Displaced persons are allowed to travel inside Thailand, but only with permission or a specific reason, such as medical needs or education. Although Thai labor law does not allow undocumented migrants, stateless persons, or displaced persons to work, such people find informal ways to do so. As such, the Thai authorities label them as "illegal migrant workers."[1)]

There is no survey that indicates the exact number of Myanmar migrant laborers in Thailand, nor details of their origin in Myanmar. The late 2013 International Organization for Migration report, for which surveys were conducted mainly in Bangkok and Samutsakorn, found that Burmese migrant workers originated mostly from Mon State, Shan State, Tanintharyi Region, Kayin State, and Bago Region (IOM and Asian Research Center for Migration 2013, 9). However, the director of an NGO in Northern Thailand, the Migrant Assistance Program Foundation, estimated that around 90 percent of the

1) In this paper, the term "Myanmar migrant workers" is used to refer to all types of workers who come from Myanmar regardless of their legal status. "Illegal migrant workers" refers to non-Thai undocumented persons, stateless persons, displaced persons, and asylum seekers, who are not allowed to work in Thailand according to Thai labor law.

more than 100,000 workers in Chiang Mai came from Shan State (Piyapong and Pim 2017). Though most origin-areas are rural, remote villages near the Thailand-Myanmar border, there are also many migrant workers who come from major cities, such as Yangon and Mandalay, since the minimum daily wage in Thailand is triple that in Myanmar (Ayman 2021). While the massive number of Myanmar migrant workers contribute to the development of the Thai economy in many aspects (Martin 2007, 7–21; OECD/ILO 2017, 21–36), they also profoundly benefit the Myanmar economy.

Remittances from migrant workers are regarded as an important source of development for the country, especially with Myanmar being a newly emerging economy. The data from 2016 indicates that 4.25 million Myanmar citizens who lived and worked abroad (Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population 2016, 115) remitted around US$2.5 billion back to Myanmar, which accounted for an estimated 4 percent of the country's GDP (World Bank 2017). The World Bank's figure does not include informal remittances, of which the International Growth Centre estimates a total volume of around US$8 billion, accounting for approximately 13 percent of the GDP (Randall and Kapur 2017, 10). The United Nations Capital Development Fund reported that 68 percent of informal remittances into Myanmar come from Thailand alone since there are millions of Myanmar workers in Thailand (United Nations Capital Development Fund 2020, 1).

Although sending money by way of the formal banking system is more secure, it is also the most expensive method, as there is often a charge of at least 10 percent of the total remittance amount (Pariwat, personal communication, February 11, 2020). This, combined with the insufficient banking networks within Myanmar, poses a significant challenge for migrant workers to send their remittances through formal banking channels. Such constraints limit migrant workers' choices to the following: carrying cash home themselves, asking a trusted friend to carry the money when they return home, or sending the money through the informal banking system. However, recent advancements in digital technology offer migrant workers a new alternative to remit money via the internet banking and mobile banking services provided by commercial banks in Thailand or by using non-banks' financial technology services that are available in both countries. This paper aims to examine whether recent digital transformations in the banking and financial sector will replace informal remittance methods. As many studies have found that informal remittance is a supportive element of the Thailand-Myanmar border trade, this transition may challenge the traditional border economy.

Scope and Methodology of the Study

The first part of this paper deals with the methodology, definition, terminology, and theoretical framework applied to this study. The next part describes the historical context of the Thailand-Myanmar border trade, which revolves around other economic activities, including the influx of Myanmar migrant labor into Thailand. The following part discusses the reformation and digitalization of the banking and financial sector in Myanmar. The last part discusses the major argument of this paper, which is that although new technology has the potential to replace informal remittance methods, migrant workers still tend to prefer traditional methods that offer some social benefits.

This research was conducted between late 2019 and 2021 using qualitative methodology. The author interviewed 32 Burmese migrant workers living and working in Samutsakorn Province, nine Thai border traders in Mae Sot, officials, and a Thai financial technology company operating in Myanmar. Since informal remittances are considered an illegal activity, the author utilized snowball sampling to reach migrant workers, with help from a local NGO working on migrant labor issues. The semi-structured interviews started with the question of how migrant workers send money back home and their opinions on the different methods of remittance that they are familiar with.

Definition and Terminology

There are many studies on migration that use different terms to refer to migrant labor depending on the author's approach. In this paper, the author uses Thai immigration law to identify the status of labor. The term "migrant labor" has a broad scope: it refers to all non-Thai laborers who enter Thailand legally and illegally for jobs, including those who have fled internal conflict and are regarded by Thai authorities as "displaced persons" allowed to live in designated areas in Thailand along the Thailand-Myanmar border. Thus, the term "illegal migrant labor" applies to non-Thai undocumented persons, stateless persons, displaced persons, and asylum seekers, who are not allowed to work in Thailand according to Thai labor law.

For remittances, the term *phoy-kyuwn* in this paper refers to informal remittance; it is a Hokkien dialect term referring to a private banking service formerly used by Chinese migrant workers in Thailand who would send remittances back to China for centuries; it has become a general term in Thailand.

For border trade, the terms in this paper are defined by the author as follows:

1. Illegal border trade refers to the trade in:
   (a) Items that are not allowed by the exporting or importing country across the border according to the laws of both exporting and importing countries, such as narcotics.
   (b) Items that are occasionally banned by the Myanmar government during some periods, such as alcoholic drinks, seasoning powder, etc., or items that require traders to obtain a license from the government to import and export.
   (c) Items that are allowed by the exporting and importing country, but traders avoid declaring them at customs in the exporting or importing country for some reason, such as avoiding import tax or shortening the customs clearance process, which usually takes time.
2. Illicit border trade refers to types (b) and (c) of the illegal border trade defined above. Although it is illegal from the states' perspective, it is widely practiced at the local level.

Theoretical Framework

There are two categories of remittance: formal and informal. The formal channel follows regulations supervised by government agencies, and there are many institutions involved in the process, such as the central bank, anti-money laundering agencies, local and correspondent banks, private financial service providers, postal services, etc. It has a strict process of authentication and is usually more expensive compared to the informal channel. The informal channel offers an alternative for those who prefer to avoid bureaucratic procedures; it has an affordable transaction cost, door-to-door services, and other benefits that are unavailable through the formal channel. For workers from countries that have poor financial infrastructure, the informal channel is probably the only way to send money back home. The solution to the workers' problem may be found in the informal sector's use of technology.

Typical research on remittance usually focuses on three main domains: (i) the typology of remittance mechanisms, (ii) a comparison of transaction costs on different channels, and (iii) the evolution and development of money transfer markets (Rahman *et al.* 2014, 7), mostly using an economic approach at both the microeconomic and macroeconomic levels. However, new studies have pointed out that to understand remittance, the study of social factors cannot be neglected.

Md Mizanur Rahman and Brenda S. A. Yeoh (2014) studied how Bangladeshi workers in East and Southeast Asia remit money back home from Singapore, Malaysia, Japan,

and South Korea. They found that most of the workers prefer informal remittance methods due to social reasons. Workers' motivation relies very much on social factors with regard to family and agents, including mutual trustworthiness, mutual obligation, assurances, and understanding. Although formal remittance methods offer greater security, social ties between migrant workers and informal remittance agents create various advantages that formal institutions cannot compete with. Though Rahman and Yeoh's case study was on Bangladeshi workers, the social factors that influence remittance may be used as a framework to study the Burmese migrant experience in Thailand.

Migrant Labor's Remittance as a Supportive Element of Border Trade

The method of informal remittance is widely known in Thailand as *phoy-kyuwn*, and in Myanmar it is called *hundi* (Turnell *et al.* 2008, 70). Through this informal channel, money is passed to the receiver within one day, and the fee is lower compared to the formal banking system. According to the Bank of Thailand, the transaction fee of a *phoy-kyuwn* agent is less than 2.5 percent of the total sending amount (Somsak 2013). A survey conducted by Sean Turnell *et al.* between 2002 and 2003 revealed that the amounts of money Burmese migrant workers sent home ranged from THB3,000 to THB3 million per annum. The estimated total amount of informal remittances that year was US$300 million, almost five times the amount of official remittances the same year (Turnell *et al.* 2008, 74). A 2009 survey published by the International Labour Organization (Aree and Sirinan 2009, 20) indicated that that year, the average amount of money Burmese workers in Thailand sent home was THB30,000, and the average amount of money sent each time was THB5,300. Considering the large number of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand and the average amount of remittances as determined by the survey, we can roughly estimate the amount of money being circulated within the informal banking system.

As many studies on the informal banking system have observed, actual money rarely crosses states boundaries (Turnell *et al.* 2008; Akkanut 2017; Kubo 2017; Thompson 2019). The Thailand-Myanmar informal remittance case is unique because the majority of money sent through the system instead circulates within the Thailand-Myanmar border trade economy, particularly in illicit trade. With regard to remittances, the informal agents on the Thai side collect the cash that migrant workers intend to send home, then call their Burmese partners in Myanmar to send the equivalent amount, minus their commissions, to the recipient. In a similar vein, when Burmese importers need to pay their Thai suppliers, they send the money to the Burmese remittance agent, who will

then call the Thai partner to pay the supplier. On the Thai side, the agent will collect remittance money from migrant workers and use that money to pay the Thai suppliers. In Myanmar, the agents collect money from importers and use it when there is a demand to send remittances to a migrant worker's family. This method, therefore, enables traders to offset the demand and supply of money by balancing the sending-receiving demands of migrant workers with their goods-purchasing payments. The combined need for balanced trade settlements and alternative remittance methods facilitates a lower transaction cost for both sides, although this symbiotic relationship is not well known.

The democratization of Myanmar after the general election in 2010 accelerated development in many sectors, including banking and financial reform. Following the reform, there was a wave of digital transformation, which shortcut the country's pathway to infrastructure development. People living in Myanmar, in both big cities and rural areas, can easily access the internet and financial services on their smartphones instead of utilizing traditional services. Payment and money transfers are much easier than they were in the last decade. With all these changes, the use of informal remittance methods by millions of migrant workers may decline. Since informal remittances and border trade are linked, any obstacles will impact the Thailand-Myanmar border trade.

The Invisible Hands That Move Border Trade

The shared border between Thailand and Myanmar is more than 2,000 kilometers long. Although modern diplomatic relations between the two countries started in 1948, the interaction of people and the exchange of culture and goods, as indicated in both textual and archeological evidence, has existed since ancient times. While all cross-border trade activities were considered illegal by the Myanmar government prior to the 1996 establishment of the customs house in Tachileik (Myanmar Department of Border Trade n.d.), massive cross-border trade has existed since the 1960s as a result of Ne Win's "Burmese way to socialism" and the failure of his Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) economic reforms (Silverstein 1989; Smith 1999; Taylor 2015). The socialism policy of the nationalization of private-owned businesses and state monopolization of commodity products in the early 1960s resulted in the exodus of 300,000 Indian and 100,000 Chinese merchants who had developed distribution networks (Smith 1999, 98; Khin Maung Kyi *et al.* 2000, 11). After these merchants left, their established trade networks became disconnected. Soldiers were trained for the battlefield, not the market, and the economy started to decline rapidly. Eventually, the government could not even supply normal consumer goods. In response, the black market began to spread throughout Myanmar

and illegal[2] border trade with neighboring countries served as the main channel through which people could fulfill their own basic needs (Silverstein 1989, 42; Smith 1999, 98–99; Khin Maung Kyi *et al.* 2000, 12; Myat Thein 2004, 81).

During this time, border trade activities were still considered illegal due to the government's inability to control or secure trade; only formal trade through sea freight or air cargo shipment was allowed by the government. Myanmar was also in the midst of a civil war, in which the Myanmar Army fought against several of the ethnic armed groups that dominated most of the frontier areas. These groups included the Karen National Union, the New Mon State Party, the Kachin Independent Organization, and the Shan State Army. In addition to armed groups, political organizations, such as the Burma Communist Party and the Kuomintang remnant, also fought against the Myanmar Army. These groups were directly involved in trade themselves, through facilitation, taxation, or provision of security and protection (Smith 1999, 99; Akkanut 2017, 18–20). Profit from cross-border trade activities would be used to buy arms and ammunition or for other political purposes to oppose the government (Smith 1999, 99). According to this author's interview with a Thai border trader who had been conducting business with Burmese traders since the heyday of Thailand-Myanmar border trade between the 1960s and 1980s, and who owned the biggest electrical appliance retailers in Mae Sot—with annual sales of more than THB1 billion—Thai traders preferred Burmese buyers to pay with gold or silver ingots instead of kyat. He recalled the challenges that border traders faced as a result of the Myanmar government's demonetization in 1964, 1985, and 1987 (Saroch, personal communication, February 15, 2020). As part of the last round of demonetization in 1987, the government canceled 25 kyat and 35 kyat banknotes without compensation (Myat Thein 2004, 70).

In addition to gold and silver ingots, Burmese traders usually smuggled gemstones—such as jade, ruby, and sapphire—and other natural resources like teak to sell to Thai buyers. The profit would then be used to purchase the products they wanted. Under these circumstances, border towns like Mae Sot became a destination not only for traders but also for people in jewelry, lumber, and other related businesses. Even today, jewelry markets can be found in Mae Sot. As such, Thailand is considered one of the five major gem locations in the world (Pasuk and Baker 1998, 33).

Official trade balance statistics have affirmed the existence of illicit border trade on

2) In this paper the different types of border trade as defined by Myat Thein (2004) are as follows:

1. Illegal border trade refers to trade in items that are not allowed by the exporting or importing country across its border.
2. Illicit border trade refers to trade in items that are allowed by the exporting and importing countries without declaration in the customs department of the exporting or importing country.

a massive scale. For example, the import of consumer goods decreased from 67.1 percent in the pre-coup fiscal year of 1960–61 to 5.2 percent in fiscal year 1980–81, a change that did not necessarily correlate with a decreased use of consumer goods nor the size of the population. Additionally, the export of agricultural products decreased from 82.4 percent in fiscal year 1960–61 to 28.2 percent in 1990–91. In contrast, the sectors that improved included natural resource extraction, such as forest products, which increased from 9.8 percent in fiscal year 1960–61 to 36.7 percent in fiscal year 1990–91. The export of minerals and gems also increased, from 4.3 percent in fiscal year 1960–61 to 14.5 percent in fiscal year 1980–81 (Myat Thein 2004, 78).

Nevertheless, in 1987, after almost three decades of economic failure, Myanmar applied for the status of "least-developed country" (LDC) with the United Nations in order to receive international aid in accordance with the 1981 Paris Conference (Weiss and Jennings 1983). The subsequent report stated that the debt-service ratio in Myanmar increased from 15.9 percent in 1970 to over 50 percent in 1987, and that the GDP per capita was historically low, with the manufacturing portion accounting for less than 10 percent (United Nations Committee for Development Planning 1987, 20). With the status of LDC, Myanmar was able to negotiate its public debt, particularly foreign loans, which had skyrocketed from US$319.9 million in 1975 to US$3.4 billion in 1984 (Steinberg 1990, 66).

Another major event that occurred in Myanmar in 1987, as previously mentioned, was the government's third demonetization. This led people to rise in their opposition to Ne Win, resulting in nationwide political unrest for months and leading to the massacre on August 8, 1988, that became known as the 8888 Uprising. Such circumstances led to the resignation of Ne Win in July 1988, and a new group of generals, the State Law and Order Restoration Council, stepped in.

The SLORC economic policy was different from that of the BSPP era. Having learned from the past, SLORC made the quick decision to align with the trend of market-oriented economic liberalization, just as other former socialist-minded countries were doing. It is believed that China's Open Door Policy of 1978, the Soviet Union's Perestroika policy of 1985, the Jintanakarn Mai policy of Lao PDR, and Vietnam's implementation of the socialist-oriented Doi Moi policy in 1986 (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2004) shaped SLORC's economic vision, further leading to major economic policy reforms (Myat Thein and Mya Than 1995, 215).

Immediately after assuming power, SLORC implemented a number of new policies. Private enterprises, domestic trade, and import-export activities were promoted after a long period of stagnation during the BSPP regime. A new foreign investment law was enacted in late November 1988, removing many restrictions on private foreign trade. As

a result, the number of private enterprises increased significantly—from 130 firms in fiscal year 1988–89 to 38,782 firms by fiscal year 1999–2000 (Myat Thein 2004, 154).

Other reforms included the normalization of border trade in December 1988 (Mya Maung 1997, 504; Fujita *et al.* 2009, 5) and the introduction of the Central Bank of Myanmar Law, Financial Institutions Law, and Commercial Tax Law in 1990. While it appeared that there was a major shift in economic policy, some conventional practices remained. The government retained its monopoly on the export of 16 items, including rice, teak, petroleum, natural gas, gems, and jade. In 1991 this list increased to 23 items and again in 1994 to 28 items (Mya Maung 1997, 504). In the case of imports, the government banned ten items in 1998 and added another five in 1999 (Akkanut 2015). The banned items included MSG powder, soft drinks, biscuits, chewing gum, cakes, wafers, chocolate, canned foods, noodles, liquor, beer, cigarettes, fresh fruit, and plastic products. As the ban was imposed upon necessary consumer items, illicit border trade in these items continued.

As Myanmar had lacked a sufficient manufacturing sector for decades, demand for imports was far higher than that for exports, resulting in a foreign trade deficit (Myat Thein 2004, 156). To counter this, the SLORC government implemented a strange rule: "export first, import later," allowing traders to import goods only by using the income they earned from export (Kubo 2012, 148). Other regulations caused further difficulty for traders, including the requirement of a license for each import or export shipment. This license lasted for only three months, and the fees to obtain it were expensive. Additionally, foreign trade transactions could be made only through state-owned banks, which at the time were the Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank and Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank. The government also imposed a standard taxable value for import duty charges, which was not based on the actual value from the shipping invoice. This meant that traders were typically overcharged for the import duty, and commercial tax was collected when applying for the license rather than after goods were sold. These regulations continued until 2012, and some remain even today. Therefore, the SLORC legalization of border trade in 1988 resulted in increased costs and challenges for traders, who ended up resorting to smuggling.

The fishing sector was also important, as the government's objective was to increase production for domestic consumption, increase exports, and share surplus marine resources with neighboring countries through the establishment of joint ventures (Myat Thein 2004, 191–192). Since the 1970s, Thai fishery boats have exploited the Myanmar marine ecosystem, both legally and illegally (Ahmed *et al.* 2007). As a response, in 1980 Thailand and Myanmar agreed on a maritime boundary of 141.2 nautical miles. However, Thai fishing boats were better equipped and therefore could easily evade Myanmar

authorities. In 1990 SLORC enacted the Fishing Right Law, which allowed licensed overseas companies, mostly from Thailand, to operate outside of a 12-mile radius from the Myanmar shoreline. As a result, foreign investment in the fishing sector reached US$300 million. It was reported that three hundred Burmese fishing boats took part in fishery operations and approximately six hundred foreign boats joined illegally (Khin Maung Kyi *et al.* 2000, 86). The productivity of all kinds of fishery increased: for instance, the official record of total fishery production rose from 700,000 tons in 1988–89 to 2.5 million tons in 2005–6 (Fujita *et al.* 2009, 204). Between 1888–89 and 1999–2000, offshore fisheries reportedly increased production from 50,000 tons to 570,000 tons, and marine fisheries increased production from 570,000 tons to 1,171,000 tons. Export earnings rose from US$51 million in 1992–93 to US$183.7 million in 1999–2000, with exports from the fishing sector accounting for 10 percent of the total amount (Myat Thein 2004, 192–193).

Myanmar fishermen took advantage of this situation by entering themselves into the supply chain; though their ships were not well equipped, they managed to sell their fish to larger fish carriers. From an interview with an employee of the Fish Marketing Organization (under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand), who witnessed the booming fish supply from Myanmar to Thailand in major ports of Ranong, it was confirmed that Myanmar fishermen typically sold their fish and received payment through the *phoy-kyuwn* system. The fishermen preferred this method, as cash payment would increase their risk of being robbed and could serve as evidence for arrest if they were caught by the authorities. The booming fishing industry under SLORC facilitated further illicit trade, establishing this sector as another economic activity to utilize informal banking systems.

As described, the failures of socialist economic policy, the civil war among ethnic groups, and SLORC's newly implemented regulations resulted in increased illicit cross-border trade between Myanmar and Thailand. Such illicit trade does not require actual money as a means of exchange but rather allows consumer goods to be "purchased" with ruby, jade, teak, and other products. While the value of the exchange is determined in a unit of currency, either kyat or baht, actual cash rarely crosses the border. Therefore, the process of offsetting transactions on either side of the border is actually a matter of offsetting information rather than money. All of these elements combined have acted as an invisible hand in Thailand-Myanmar border trade for decades.

Myanmar Migrant Workers in Thailand: The Latest Invisible Hand

In 1988 Thai Prime Minister General Chatichai Choonhavan announced a policy to "change the battlefield to the marketplace" in order to strengthen economic cooperation within the region. Chatichai's government initiated "constructive engagement" with Myanmar despite the international community's calls for sanctions for Myanmar's use of violence against its own people during the 8888 Uprising. The late 1980s economic boom inspired Thailand's dream of becoming the fifth Tiger of Asia, following Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Foreign direct investment—mostly from Japan and Taiwan—increased from 60 percent in 1986 to 360 percent in 1987 (Somboon 2012, 36). The Thai economy grew rapidly due to an export-oriented policy, which resulted in the increase of medium-tech manufactured exports such as electrical appliances and automotive supplies (Pasuk and Baker 1998, 28–38; Somboon 2012, 34). As Thailand moved forward, the demand for high-skilled workers began to increase; but the country still relied on low-skilled workers for certain sectors, including construction, agriculture, and labor-intensive manufacturing. This labor deficit initiated migration from neighboring countries into Thailand (Castles and Miller 2009, 138). As of 2021, there were almost 1.6 million migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand (Samnak Borihan Raeng Ngan Tang Dao Krom Karn Jad Ha Ngan 2021).

Many studies have observed that Myanmar migrant workers mostly send remittances through the informal banking system. In 2009 Aree Jampaklay and Sirinan Kittisuksathit detailed the various factors that motivated migrant workers to send their remittances through informal channels; one of the factors was that informal methods were more cost-effective as well as convenient, as an agent would collect the money at the workers' job site or somewhere nearby. Additionally, more than two-thirds of Burmese migrant workers from this study were not even aware of other methods by which to send their remittances (Aree and Sirinan 2009, 29–30), and those who worked illegally had to use the informal system as they could not open a bank account in Thailand (Aree and Sirinan 2009, 64). The study further observed that the longer migrant workers remained in Thailand, the higher their possibility of using informal methods of sending remittances. For example, migrant workers living in Thailand for more than ten years were more likely to use an agent than those who had been in Thailand for less than ten years (Aree and Sirinan 2009, 32). Another reason migrant workers chose not to send their remittances through the formal banking system was that many of them did not have a bank account in their home country; the above study demonstrated that only 12 percent of Burmese informants had a bank account in Myanmar.

The operators of the informal banking system range from small individual shop

owners to small-scale traders, and the operation becomes massive when these small operators join together to form a network. The operation is simple: when a migrant worker living in Thailand would like to send money home to his family, he gives the agent the amount he wants to send in Thai baht. The agent then calls their counterpart in Myanmar, who pays the worker's family in kyat equal to the value of Thai baht minus the fees of the agents on both sides. For the migrant worker, the transaction is considered complete. The agents usually offset the balance through economic activity, such as Thai agents using the money collected from the migrant worker to buy goods that the agent in Myanmar requires, and delivering it across the border. Considering that the demand to send money grows along with the number of migrant workers, these small fees collected by the agents can add up to satisfy the needs of both sides. Profit comes not only from the collection of service fees, but also from the exchange rate, liquidity of money, and ability to buy goods from Thailand at a lower transaction cost.

The total amount of money circulating in the informal banking system is unknown. Supang Chantavanich and Premjai Vungsiriphisal estimated the figure by calculating the average amount of remittances from two previously mentioned studies, Sean Turnell *et al.* (2008) and Aree Jampaklay and Sirinan Kittisuksathit (2009), multiplied by the total number of registered Burmese migrant workers in Thailand in 2012. They concluded the figure to be between US$248 million and US$1.248 billion. They further suggested that the actual amount may be even higher when also taking into consideration unregistered migrant workers (Supang and Premjai 2012, 226).

If the assumption that remittances are circulated in the illicit border trade is true, then the total amount of illicit border trade can, more or less, reflect the total amount of money sent back to Myanmar. Although the exact volume of illicit border trade is unknown, there is a method that could help to estimate this figure. Kubo Koji (2012, 150–157) suggests that after the legalization of border trade, many traders did not transition to adhering to the new customs regulations of each country, which resulted in the continuing trade being considered as illicit. Therefore, the total volume of illicit trade, though difficult to determine accurately, may be roughly calculated by comparing the customs records of the two countries. This method of calculation is based on the fact that the illicit trade is, for the most part, considered legal in Thai customs law, as most of the goods being exported to Myanmar are legally declared at Thai customs checkpoints in order to reimburse the paid value-added tax. After the goods are released from the Thai customs checkpoint, traders choose to transport their goods across the border in one of two ways: first, by crossing the border over the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge and going through the Myanmar customs process, which makes the trade fully legal; or second, by crossing the border over the Moei River, circumventing the Myanmar customs

process. This second method of transport is more common and is considered to be illicit trade. By comparing the Thai customs records for export with the Myanmar customs records for import, the gap can be determined as the amount of illicit trade. This method of calculation was used also by other studies, including the World Bank as included in the Myanmar Economic Monitor Report (Rab *et al.* 2016, 49–55), and another study (Akkanut 2017, 9) that found the volume of illicit trade increased from US$118.48 million in 2001–2 to US$1.6 billion in 2011–12. The number stated here is surprisingly close to the estimated amount of migrant workers' remittances as determined by Supang and Premjai (2012).

The existence of millions of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand can be viewed as another invisible hand in the Thailand-Myanmar border trade and is perhaps the most recently determined one. The higher the demand for methods of remittance, the greater the potential for the trade of goods across the border. While state regulations on foreign trade only recognize transactions through the formal banking system, the invisible hands of migrant workers have facilitated the continuation of illicit trade across the Thailand-Myanmar border through their utilization of the informal banking system.

From Banking and Financial Reforms to Digital Transformation

Difficulty in accessing formal banking systems in Myanmar, as evidenced in the International Monetary Fund (2018b) report on financial access, is one of the factors motivating migrant workers to remit funds informally. The report states that the ratio of bank branches in Myanmar was 5.09 per 100,000 people, while the world's average was 12.73 per 100,000 people. Furthermore, access to automated teller machines in Myanmar was reported at 5.63 per 100,000 people, while the world's average was 41.64. However, recent groundbreaking developments in both institutional and regulatory reforms in Myanmar, combined with the advancement of digital technology, have shortcut the conventional development of banking systems and financial services. Today, through internet access and smartphone applications, migrant workers have more choices for sending their remittances, including both bank and non-bank service providers.

The poor development of banking systems in Myanmar was a consequence of the failure of the socialist economy implemented after the 1962 coup. Myanmar banks were nationalized in 1963, and private commercial banks did not appear until the establishment of the Financial Institutions of Myanmar Law in 1990. The first private bank under SLORC, Myanmar Citizens Bank, was established in 1992.

In the past, the only method of international remittance was through telegraphic

transfer between members of the international banking network, or Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, better known by its acronym of SWIFT. In Myanmar, the only members of SWIFT were the state-owned banks: the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM), Myanma Foreign Trade Bank, Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank, and Myanma Economic Bank. The transfer fee was expensive, and it was almost impossible for migrant workers to utilize this method of funds transfer. Only big firms could execute transfers using SWIFT, and the government offered no other transfer options.

Following Myanmar's 2010 general election, the newly elected government initiated various political and economic reforms, including reforms in the banking and financial sector. In 2012 the Foreign Exchange Management Law was enacted, further liberalizing the foreign exchange market. All restrictions on transactions were lifted, and for the first time private banks could send and receive foreign currencies. The new government also allowed private banks to open foreign exchange counters in October 2011. Additionally, private, non-bank money changers were legalized in December 2012 (Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ] GmbH 2018, 22–26), and in 2013 the CBM was decentralized by the promulgation of a new Central Bank of Myanmar Law, establishing the institution as an independent organization and granting its governor and board of directors increased authority. Payment systems were also reformed, demonstrated by the establishment of a new platform for the interbank settlement system, called the Myanmar Payment Union, in cooperation with 17 banks (Thu Rein Hlaing *et al.* 2012). For the first time, ATMs were being fully utilized, along with debit and credit cards. The CBM further eliminated the previous regulation of stand-alone capital, as well as the need to receive special approval to open new branches. This encouraged banks to expand their networks nationwide by setting up new branches all over the country (Turnell 2014, 228–230). In 2012 the ratio of bank branches per 100,000 people in Myanmar was 1.86, while in Thailand the ratio was 11.69. However, rapid expansion following the 2012 reforms increased Myanmar's ratio almost threefold to 5.09 per 100,000 people in 2018, while Thailand's ratio remained the same (International Monetary Fund 2018b).

As of August 2022,[3)] there are four state-owned banks, 27 private banks, 17 foreign licensed banks, and 44 representative offices of foreign banks and finance companies in Myanmar (Central Bank of Myanmar 2022). Of the foreign licensed banks, there is only one from Thailand: Bangkok Bank. While Bangkok Bank is allowed to operate fully as a local bank, it has limited its services to business firms and has only one branch in Yangon.

3) Though this paper was accepted in May 2022, the author updated the latest information during his final format editing in August.

Another five Thai banks have their representative offices in Myanmar: Siam Commercial Bank, Krungthai Bank, Kasikornbank, Bank of Ayudhya, and Export-Import Bank of Thailand. These banks are not allowed to operate with full services, but instead help facilitate business with customers and other correspondent banks within Myanmar.

The continually growing number of migrant workers from Myanmar have attracted the attention of Thai banks and foreign remittance companies. In response, these companies now offer several services and products specifically targeted toward migrant workers' needs. Western Union, the US-based non-bank cash-transferring giant started operations in Myanmar in September 2012 (Thwe Khin Myo 2012), right after the US eased economic sanctions on Myanmar. In the provinces bordering Myanmar, and in those with high populations of migrant workers, Thai banks provide a menu option in the Burmese language. Many Thai banks have also started collaborative campaigns with Myanmar banks, pairing themselves together as correspondent banks in order to bypass the intermediary and reduce costs. For instance, Kasikornbank was the first to cooperate with Myanmar's Asia Green Development Bank (AGD Bank), and later with its Co-Operative Bank, in May 2013. This cooperative campaign enabled senders to transfer money at 880 Kasikornbank ATMs using a Burmese-language menu. The maximum transfer amount was limited to THB100,000 per day, and the recipient would receive the funds within 24 hours if the transaction was made before 2 p.m. In April 2013 Siam Commercial Bank (SCB) initiated cooperation with Kanbawza Bank (KBZ Bank), allowing the sender in Thailand to transfer money directly to the recipient's KBZ account using SCB ATMs. This agreement also permitted the recipient to collect the transferred funds at KBZ branches rather than receiving the money in an account, due to the low rate of formal bank accounts within Myanmar (142 per 1,000 adults) (World Bank 2022). While both SCB and Kasikornbank announced that the ATM transfer fee was THB200 per transaction, interviews with Burmese migrant workers revealed that the correspondent bank also charged the recipient and that the exchange rate was worse than that of informal channels. Another pain point for migrant workers when remitting their money through a bank was the Thai regulators, the Bank of Thailand and the Anti-Money Laundering Office, who set strict rules to protect against money laundering and terrorist financing. These rules require migrant workers to show at least three different identification documents in order to process their remittance, which is also known as the Know Your Customer (KYC) rule. This rule makes it impossible for illegal migrant workers to send money home using this method.

Today, Thai banks are putting more effort into financial services within Myanmar. SCB has signed a memorandum of understanding with Ayeyarwady Bank (AYA Bank) (Siam Commercial Bank 2020), while Kasikornbank has expanded its ATM transfer coop-

eration with AYA Bank, Myawaddy Bank, and KBZ Bank, in addition to its two former partners. Furthermore, in 2020 Kasikornbank was approved by the CBM to invest in one of Myanmar's private banks. As such, Kasikornbank holds a 35 percent share of Ayeyarwady Farmers Development Bank (Somruedi and Nuntawun 2020).

In early 2016 Myanmar enacted the Financial Institutions Law, developing the nation's financial services even further. Under this law, financial institutions are classified as one of the following: (a) banks, (b) development banks, (c) non-bank financial institutions, and (d) schedule institutions (Internationale Zusammenabeit [GIZ] GmbH 2018, 23). The promulgation of the Financial Institutions Law paved the way for the CBM to regulate mobile financial services, a first step toward the legalization of non-bank financial service providers. Consequently, sending remittances through mobile applications became another competitor to the *phoy-kyuwn* system.

Having been under a military dictatorship for decades, Myanmar also lacked development in telecommunications. In the mid-2000s a SIM card alone could cost US$2,500 (Simpson *et al.* 2018, 92), yet after the reforms Myanmar jumped straight into utilizing smartphones and 4G technology. The number of people with access to mobile phone subscriptions surged from 590,000 in 2010 to 61.14 million at the end of 2018[4] (Statista n.d.). Four telecommunication companies (telcos)—Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), Ooredoo Myanmar Limited (Ooredoo), Telenor Myanmar Limited (Telenor), and Telecom International Myanmar Co., Ltd. (MyTel)—also offer mobile payments and other financial services in addition to their core business.

The first mobile financial service license was granted in 2016 to Wave Money, a joint-venture company in which Telenor is the major shareholder. Starting with its network of mobile service providers, Wave Money expanded throughout the country with more than 56,000 agents across 294 of the 330 townships nationwide (Chern 2020). In 2017 Ooredoo launched its "M-Pitesan" mobile financial service, and in 2019 MyTel and MPT launched MytelPay and MPT Money, respectively.

Since more people are now able to access mobile communications, the frequency of mobile financial transactions has surpassed that of traditional banking services. As such, non-bank financial service providers have mushroomed. Myanmar banks, too, now offer internet banking and mobile banking services for their customers, and some banks have partnered with financial technology companies. For example, AGD Bank has partnered with TrueMoney, which operates in six countries across Southeast Asia, making it possible to transfer money overseas through a mobile application.

4) The number of mobile phone subscriptions is higher than Myanmar's total population because many people have more than one mobile phone. This phenomenon is seen also in many other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

The nationwide network of telco-owned mobile financial services provides these companies with an advantage, as their agents serve as de facto bank tellers. However, their experience with high-level regulations and processes is considered limited compared to that of formal banks. While banks have no choice but to develop their internet and mobile banking offerings, competition forces them to also cooperate closely with telco-owned and non-bank financial service providers. Mobile financial access enables users to make payments to a merchant or transfer funds to other users. Money can also be stored digitally in an "e-wallet" by transferring funds from a bank account, adding funds via ATMs and internet banking, or giving cash to service providers' agents, which can be found in every township. For those in Myanmar, this evolution has broken down the historical barriers to financial access.

Non-bank financial service providers are now able to facilitate cross-border transfers. TrueMoney was the first to receive this permission from the Bank of Thailand and the Ministry of Finance, and it is the only non-bank service provider that holds licenses to operate in both Thailand and Myanmar. Launched in 2016, TrueMoney offers money transfer via a mobile application; however, even though TrueMoney is considered a non-bank service provider, the KYC procedure is still required. The company must collect the required documents for registration at the service points prior to a customer's first transaction. After the first transaction, transfers may be made at service points or within the mobile application. TrueMoney planned to initiate a fixed service fee of THB50 for every THB5,000 sent, with a maximum limit of THB30,000 per transaction and THB200,000 per day, and it would take only a few minutes for the recipient to receive the funds from a TrueMoney agent in Myanmar. However, TrueMoney's mobile application discontinued this transfer service in April 2019, rendering service points as the only method of transfer. This decision was in response to the difficulties presented by the KYC requirements, since most migrant workers tend to avoid processes that require many forms of identification (Jatupron, personal communication, November 19, 2022). The KYC rule is one reason why even the world's biggest remittance firm, Western Union, has struggled to succeed in Thailand.

A Brief Survey: The Alternative Choice Is Not Always the Better Choice

Today, migrant workers have more choices in how to send their remittances than ever before. The options range from the costly formal method of international transfer to the ATM transfer services provided by cooperation between Thai and Myanmar banks, the use of an informal *phoy-kyuwn* agent, and the newest option of non-bank service pro-

viders. The digitalization of banking services offers even more alternative choices. According to the World Bank, the new methods of remittance charge fees as low as 1.72 percent to send US$200, or 1.6 percent to send US$500 (World Bank n.d.). The fees to send money are a significant factor that migrant workers must consider, which further impacts illicit border trade activity.

Based on the data collected through interviews, 24 of the 32 migrant workers were familiar with digital technology and used mobile applications for payments and to send money to their family regularly while living in Thailand. Sometimes they needed to use a Myanmar SIM card to manage their payments and transfers, but this incurred a data roaming charge.

Interestingly, 22 of the 32 migrant workers told me that they still preferred sending money through the *phoy-kyuwn* system. Regardless of the increased accessibility to bank branches and financial services on mobile applications, sending remittances through the *phoy-kyuwn* system remains cheaper and faster. Six informants explained that they did not send remittances since they visited home every year during the Thingyan festival, which occurs during the long Songkran holiday in Thailand. Another five informants had some experience with sending money through ATMs and with TrueMoney.

Those who prefer the *phoy-kyuwn* system can now ask their agent for more options than before, including sending cash like earlier or transferring the funds into a bank account in Myanmar. They can also ask the agent to add the funds into an e-wallet. Those without a bank account normally keep their cash at home; however, this creates concerns regarding security, as Maung Kyaw explained: "keeping the amount in e-wallet is safer than keep money under my wife's bed at home" (Maung Kyaw, personal communication, December 24, 2019).

Having remittances deposited into an e-wallet by the agent provides more flexibility, as the migrant worker's family can withdraw the amount in cash later. An e-wallet can also be used for payments, or to top up friends' mobile phone balances and receive cash in return. This means that the *phoy-kyuwn* agents now use a mix of remittance methods. The improvement in mobile financial services in Myanmar has actually helped the agents to cut down their costs, and as such, they are able to offer choices that better satisfy their customers' needs.

When the informants who still preferred the *phoy-kyuwn* system were asked to explain their reasoning, most said that this system was less formal than other methods. Therefore, migrant workers feel they can negotiate with the *phoy-kyuwn* agents for a better exchange rate or a lower fee. Typically, migrant workers will call two or three agents to compare their exchange rates before making a decision, while they cannot negotiate when using formal channels. Furthermore, the *phoy-kyuwn* system does not

require any documents from either the sender or the recipient. Therefore, this system remains vital for migrant workers who do not have a legal status, as this is the only option available for them.

Interviews with migrant workers revealed further that the main reason ATM and international bank transfers are not preferred is the number of documents required by banks for such processes. Additionally, a bank account must be opened in order to use an ATM, and many migrant workers are not able to communicate well in Thai or English. While the cost for an ATM transfer is THB200 deducted from the sender's account, the recipient also has to pay a fee and receives a less favorable exchange rate, which remains uncalculated until the money is collected. Traveling to collect remittances from the bank, particularly for families living in rural areas, is considered an additional cost. Thus, the World Bank (n.d.) statistic does not accurately reflect the true total cost of sending and receiving remittances.

When interviewed, Zaw Aung, a factory worker in Samutsakorn, explained:

> I sent money from ATM to my family so that they can pay debts. I roughly calculate the amount and thought it was enough. When my brother collected it, he found that the exchange rate was high. After the bank deducted service fees, what he got was not enough for what the family needed. Sending with an agent, you know right away how much your family will get in kyat. (Zaw Aung, personal communication, December 24, 2019)

As Zaw Aung illustrates, migrant workers tend to be more concerned about the recipient's costs in Myanmar than their own. This is another key factor. The *phoy-kyuwn* system, then, can better satisfy migrant workers' needs as it does not require the recipient to travel in order to receive the funds directly from the bank. They also know the exact fees and exchange rates to expect, which helps them to calculate their remittance amount accurately. It is simple—the amount of money received in Myanmar is equal to the number of Thai baht given to the agent. Another informant, who worked in the frozen food industry in Samutsakorn, explained, "My parents never go to the bank. In our village we have around 80 households. There are only four neighbors that have bank accounts. It is difficult for my parents to collect money at the bank branch" (Ma Sin Win, personal communication, December 23, 2019).

Sending money through the *phoy-kyuwn* system is also faster. Social media platforms help to facilitate immediate confirmation of the transfer, and the recipient can collect the funds within one or two hours.

Ten of the 32 informants had tried sending their remittances using TrueMoney. They admitted that it was convenient, except that they had to go to the service point to complete the registration process. However, one informant encountered a problem when

their family went to collect the remitted funds from TrueMoney's agent. The agent did not have enough cash and asked them to come back later. Although the informant understood it was the agent's fault and not the company's, he never used the service again after that experience.

It appears that the digitalization of banking services in Myanmar has actually strengthened the informal banking sector, as it enables agents to send money faster and more easily than before. They no longer need to rely on an expansive network, operation costs are reduced by technology, and agents can now provide a variety of services.

To further assess the impact of the digital revolution, border traders must be consulted as well. Border traders can more easily recognize changes in migrant workers' financial behavior, as offsetting trade would become more expensive due to decreased liquidity. The Thailand-Myanmar border trade, both legal and illicit, continues to grow, though the growth rate is lower than that of the last decade. Such growth rates were maintained even during times of high inflation and weak exchange rates. In 2018 the Myanmar kyat rate of inflation was 6.9 percent, while the Thai baht was at 1.1 percent and the world average was 2.44 percent (International Monetary Fund 2018a). Similarly, the Myanmar kyat exchange rate doubled from 750 kyat per dollar in 2012 to 1,500 kyat per dollar in 2019, while in contrast the Thai baht grew stronger against the US dollar (CEIC Data n.d.). This created an almost 20 percent change in the exchange rate between the kyat and baht in just one year, from 42 Thai baht per kyat in 2018 to 50 Thai baht per kyat in late 2019. This situation was challenging for Thai border traders, as the kyat's purchasing power was significantly decreased.

Interviews further revealed that most border traders understand the *phoy-kyuwn* system as the backbone of the Thailand-Myanmar illicit border trade, which in turn empowers Burmese migrant workers in Thailand:

> [W]e know Myanmar workers are important not [only] because many sectors in the Thai economy rely on them—manufacturing, agriculture, service sector, construction, you name it. They are also important for border trade, because of the Thai and Myanmar traders are able to trade. Traders at Mae Sot control the informal exchange rate, people from Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Ranong, Rayong, Maha Chai [Samutsakorn] will have to call us and ask. Mae Sot is the capital of Thailand-Myanmar trade. (Maung Kyaw, personal communication, December 25, 2019)

A Thai border trader also admitted that it would be a bit worrisome if migrant workers started to transfer their remittances through formal channels more often, as it would increase their costs:

> [B]oth the Thai and Myanmar governments will be very happy with that because it means they can monitor every single trade transaction. Governments may be able to reduce activity like drug

> trafficking, but I think it's not easy and it's not going to happen immediately, it's not like tomorrow all two or three million workers will stop sending money through *phoy-kyuwn* and go to banks. If this will happen, it will take time. It's not only cost, but money is all about trust. To change behavior, you will have to change perception first, and that is the most difficult part. (Krish, personal communication, January 18, 2020)

All of the interviewed border traders agreed that if every migrant worker changed their remittance method to a formal one, that would significantly impact the Thailand-Myanmar border trade. Nevertheless, such a large-scale transition has yet to occur, even with the major developments in the digitalization of financial services over the past few years. After all, "Money, like water, flows through the most convenient path" (Sa-nga, personal communication, August 14, 2019).

Conclusion

The recent digitalization of banking and financial services offers more choices for migrant workers to send their remittances home through formal channels. However, most migrant workers continue to use the same informal channels as before, because they are still the most convenient. The *phoy-kyuwn* system remains the fastest, least formal, easiest to access, and most predictable. Social ties between migrant workers and informal remittance agents are built through references from their trusted friends. Workers appreciate the informal remittance method since it does not require any documentation, and they feel as though they have more negotiation power since they can ask about the rates and the method by which they prefer the agent to send the money to their family. These social factors heavily influence workers' decisions. Digitalization has actually reinforced the informal banking system by making it more effective and reducing costs for both the sender and the *phoy-kyuwn* agents.

The consensus among interviewed border traders is that if a majority of migrant workers change their preferred method of remittance to the formal channel, their costs will subsequently increase, and the Thailand-Myanmar border trade will be significantly impacted. However, this is not yet the case.

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Media Representation of China in Malaysia: Television News Coverage of Najib Razak's Visit in 2016

Ng Hooi-Sean*

The increasing prominence of China on the world stage has sparked scholarly interest in studying the country's representation in the media. Also driving the enthusiasm is the global expansion of Chinese state media, which some refer to as an attempt to export Chinese propaganda. Research on the topic in Southeast Asia remains lacking despite the region's being in China's backyard. This qualitative study aims to narrow the knowledge gap by looking at China's representation in Malaysia. Using content analysis and in-depth interviews, it examines specifically the coverage of former Prime Minister Najib Razak's 2016 visit to China by the Malay, Mandarin, and English bulletins on public and private television. The results show that China's portrayal in the coverage is positive, notwithstanding the stories indicating concerns about the implications of China's rise. The outcome points to the dominance of the state narrative, with instances of the press breaking the authorities' restrictions to inform the audience. It appears that the reportage was not much impacted by Chinese media's efforts to go global. Drawing on the Hierarchy of Influences model, the study demonstrates that the representation of China in Malaysian media coverage is a product shaped by intertwined social, cultural, and political factors as complex as Malaysian society.

Keywords: Malaysia, China, representation, media, Southeast Asia, Najib Razak

Introduction

Being a one-party Communist state with the world's largest population, the second-largest economy, and a growing influence on the world stage, China has always been an "exotic" topic regularly featured in international news coverage. In the West, media coverage of China surged significantly after the end of the Cold War (Goodman 1999; Stone and Xiao 2007). The trend became stronger as China rose to power over the years (Okuda 2016). This triggered scholarly interest in finding out how this Far East country is represented in the media.

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While research on the representation of China is nothing new, as with other studies seeking to investigate media bias when representing the "Other" (Parenti 1986), the enthusiasm appears to have gained new momentum in recent years following the global expansion of Chinese media. The endeavor, which started as part of Beijing's Go Out Policy (走出去战略, also known as the Go Global Policy), sees Chinese state media outlets such as China Central Television (CCTV) and Xinhua News Agency expanding their operations abroad to boost the presence of Chinese content worldwide (Wu 2012; Sun 2014). Unsurprisingly, the move is a controversial one, given China's poor record in press freedom. Some equate it to the export of Chinese propaganda: "For the party, propaganda is not a degraded form of information—it is information," writes Nicholas Bequelin (2009), referring to the initiative as being "not about informing the foreign public" but about "channeling a specific view of China to the rest of the world."

Concerns about biased media representation and the potential implications of Chinese media expansion have resulted in a growing body of literature on the representation of China (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad 2000; Peng 2004; Seib and Powers 2010; Willnat and Luo 2011; Feng *et al.* 2012; Zhang *et al.* 2016). Despite attention from the international academic community, few studies on the topic have been carried out in the context of Southeast Asia. This is notwithstanding the region's being in the backyard of China, where the impact of China's rise can be directly felt and experienced. Southeast Asia is a strategically crucial region to China and one of the critical areas for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Gong 2019). As Chinese media strive to expand their presence across the globe, initiatives also appear to be taking place in the region. This can be seen from the various regional-level and government-to-government partnerships and agreements that signify Beijing's efforts in engaging media players in the region, such as the ASEAN-China Media Cooperation Forum and the collaboration between CCTV and Malaysia's national broadcaster, Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) (*Malay Mail* 2014; Sun 2014; ASEAN-China Centre 2021; CCTV+ 2021).

Nonetheless, relationships between Southeast Asian countries and China have been rather complicated. Economically relying on and benefiting from China's rise, some of these countries remain wary about the implications of China's growing clout on the region, be they political, economic, strategic, or geopolitical (Acharya 2009; Gong 2019). Territorial disputes between China and its neighbors—such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia—over competing claims in the South China Sea continue to play out. There is also concern over China's attempts to influence and interfere with other nations' domestic affairs through ethnic Chinese minorities, whose "allegiance" is often doubted by local leaders and communities (Elina and T.N. 2017; Liu and Lim 2019).

Given all these scenarios, it would be interesting to find out how China is repre-

sented by the media in the region. The present study offers a Malaysian perspective on the topic by looking at the representation of China in the television news coverage of former Prime Minister Najib Razak's visit to China in 2016. It is framed by two research questions:

1. How is China represented in television news coverage of Najib's visit to China?
2. What are the factors that played a role in shaping the coverage and subsequently China's representation in the reportage of the visit?

Background

Taking place in early November 2016, the official visit raised eyebrows following Malaysia's inking of trade and investment deals worth a record RM144 billion with China. It was said to be an event marking Kuala Lumpur's pivot to Beijing despite Malaysia's ongoing territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea. It came amidst Najib's attempt to boost the economy ahead of the elections, as well as strained ties with Washington after the US Department of Justice implicated him in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) money laundering scandal (Mustafa 2016; Sipalan 2016). Critics equated the deals to selling off the country, arguing that some of the items, such as the RM55 billion East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project, could lead to mounting debt and jeopardize Malaysia's sovereignty. They also highlighted the possible link between these projects and the intention to bail out 1MDB's debt (Lakshana 2016; Gunasegaram 2017).

Technocratic reasoning aside, there is a more communal explanation for the controversy surrounding the visit that stems from the interethnic relations in the country. Malaysia is a multiethnic, multireligious society represented mainly by Malays, Chinese, Indians, and the Orang Asal indigenous peoples. Its political culture is fundamentally defined by ethnicity. Political parties, regardless of ruling or opposition coalition, are mostly divided along ethnic lines (Lee 2010; Segawa 2017). Plans and policies, apart from the larger goals of economic growth and development, are often drafted with the intention to win electoral support and secure political legitimacy (Liu and Lim 2019; Camba *et al.* 2021). The high-profile ECRL, which connects the less developed, Malay-heavy states of Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan on the peninsular east coast with the wealthier, more developed regions on the west, for instance, is said to be Najib's attempt to woo voters in the rural Malay constituencies following the loss of popularity of his party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), in the more urban seats (Liu and Lim 2019; Lim *et al.* 2021). Similarly, it is not uncommon for a development agenda to get

spun into an issue of race and religion to rally support. In the case of Najib's visit, as far as China was concerned, the prospect of increased Chinese presence and the potential of being dragged into a Chinese-dominated order were destined to sound the alarm for Malay leaders who were apprehensive about "Chinese" (Mustafa 2016; Sipalan 2016). This points to the fact that despite Malaysia having been independent for over half a century, internal differences between ethnic groups remain problematic (Shamsul 1997).

A case in point is Forest City, a residential development by the Chinese firm Country Garden in collaboration with the Sultan of Johor. The project was criticized by Najib's predecessor, Mahathir Mohamad, who claimed it would result in an influx of Chinese immigrants and subsequently alter the demographics and status of Malays in the country. Tapping into the fears of conservative Malays, who often see the Chinese, Malaysian or not, as a threat to Malay-Muslim interests, the move was Mahathir's tactic to garner support for his newly formed Parti Pribumi Bersatu (Malaysian United Indigenous Party, commonly known as Bersatu) in Johor, where it competed for the Malay votes with UMNO, the largest party in the National Front (Barisan Nasional or BN) ruling coalition (Liu and Lim 2019). The strategy worked: UMNO lost Johor to Bersatu in the 2018 general election, an event that saw the unprecedented defeat of BN after reigning Malaysia for decades since the country's independence in 1957 (Malhi 2018).

Much like the country's social and political construct, the media outlets in Malaysia are also largely divided along racial and linguistic lines. Despite the diversity, press freedom in the country is restricted. Under BN—led mainly by UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian Indian Congress—the mainstream media outlets are consolidated in the hands of a small number of companies, parties, and individuals aligned with the government (Abbott and Givens 2015; Yang and Md. Sidin 2015). The national broadcaster, RTM, is a government department (RTM 2020). The country's largest media conglomerate, Media Prima—which owns the Malay dailies *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*, the English daily *New Straits Times*, and all the free-to-air private television channels—was an investment arm of UMNO until the party disposed of its majority stake after the 2018 election (Yang and Md. Sidin 2015; *Edge Markets* 2019). The country's leading English-language newspaper, the *Star*, was published by Star Media Group, a cash cow for MCA (Tan and Tay 2018). The Chinese market was dominated by tycoon Tiong Hiew King's Media Chinese International, which took up 89 percent of the share with the top four Chinese-language newspapers: *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *China Press*, *Guang Ming Daily*, and *Nanyang Siang Pau* (Abbott 2011). Furthermore, the media was bound by a set of laws, including the Printing Presses and Publications Act, Sedition Act, Official Secrets Act, and Communications and Multimedia Act, that

penalized the publication of "offensive" content and effectively fostered a culture of self-censorship among media practitioners (Wong 2000; Abbott 2011; Yang and Md. Sidin 2016; Hector 2018).

Although there were positive developments in the media landscape, among them the purported freer environment under the fifth prime minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Pepinsky 2007; Tang 2018), as well as the emergence and proliferation of online media—which was seen as a game changer in Malaysian politics (Liow 2012; Abbott and Givens 2015; Yang and Md. Sidin 2015)—the truth is media continued to be shackled and press freedom stifled under the BN government (Pepinsky 2007; Teoh 2018). Scholars and journalists have generally regarded the control on the media as a feature of BN's being a quasi-democracy—a hybrid regime treading the line between democracy and authoritarianism (Wong 2000; Abbott and Givens 2015; Yang and Md. Sidin 2015).

While one might argue that studying the representation of China in the Malaysian media would be futile given the government's control of the media, research is still necessary. This is because the perspectives of the media outlets are different, with each focusing on issues that concern their respective audiences (Wong 2000). Jason Abbott and John Givens (2015) examined three separate efforts at coding political bias in the Malaysian media and concluded that significant pro-government bias was present in the Malay- and English-language media, while the Chinese-language and online media were much more balanced and independent in their reporting. Yang Lai Fong and Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak (2016) analyzed the coverage of the controversy involving banning of the use of the word "Allah" by a Catholic weekly, and they found that the Chinese-language *Sin Chew Daily* was vocal, with the greatest number of voices criticizing the ban and condemning the ruling parties for fanning the sensitivities of the people. The English-language *Star* was moderate, with voices supporting and criticizing the use of "Allah" by non-Muslims; but none of the opinions were critical of the government. And the Malay-language *Utusan Malaysia* presented only the government's view and was strongly supportive of the status quo. Furthermore, *Utusan Malaysia* downplayed negative topics, excluded dissenting views, and explicitly described non-Muslims as challenging and threatening the status of Islam and Malays.

Given the different angles and emphases of the media outlets in their coverage, it is believed that interesting differences can also be observed in how they report a rising China, hence the worth of such research in the context of Malaysia.

Culture, Power, and Media Representation

Media representation is the practice of giving meaning to the subjects depicted in the media (Hall 2005). It involves using signs and symbols such as words, images, and body language to create and communicate meaning to the audience (Hall 1997; 2005). Media representation is more than a mere re-presentation or re-depiction of someone or something. It can never be separated from politics, as those who wield power in society will seek to influence what gets to be represented in the media and the meaning associated with it (Hall 2005). Culture also plays a vital role, because representation is a process taking place between members of a culture that share the same conceptual map (Hall 1997; 2005). Nick Lacey (1998) defines media representation as a product of institutions, which inevitably have an influence on what they produce.

In that sense, representation appears to share some commonalities with framing. Framing is a practice whereby the media guide the audience's understanding of a news event by regulating the amount and prominence of details in a story (Entman 1991). It is an essential tool in the political process, used to influence public opinion by making "one basic interpretation more readily discernible, comprehensible, and memorable than others" (Entman 1991, 7). This bears a resemblance with the fixing practice in representation, whereby the authorities fix meanings associated with certain events or topics so that they become the only definitions emerging in people's minds when they think about the terms (Hall 2005). Also, framing often appears very natural, without the audience noticing it. According to Baldwin Van Gorp, this is due to the "repertoire of frames in culture" shared between journalists and audiences (Van Gorp 2007, 61). This shows that framing, just like representation, is a communication process involving the communicators creating messages meaningful to the receivers using the conceptual maps both parties share.

Factors Shaping Representation of China

The media is powerful because it can shape our opinions and attitudes. This power extends beyond international boundaries. With international news coverage, the media can shape our perceptions of a country (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Griffiths 2013) or even a government's foreign policy toward it (Goodman 1999; Johnston 2013). This is because most people rely on the media to learn about other countries (Brewer *et al.* 2003). The same applies also to China.

The outcome of representation can look and mean different as it moves across

individuals, groups, and societies (Hall 2005). A review of the literature on the representation of China shows a divide between the Western/US and Chinese media: researchers have found that China is often painted in a negative light in the Western media and exclusively positive in the Chinese media. For instance, Feng Miao *et al.* (2012) compared how China's Xinhua News Agency and the United States' Associated Press (AP) framed the 2008 baby formula scandal in China. They discovered that Xinhua portrayed the Chinese government positively as open, well prepared, and swift in handling the incident, whereas AP depicted Beijing negatively as dishonest and inadequate in dealing with the scandal. Similarly, in their analysis of American and Chinese newspaper coverage of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in China, Catherine Luther and Zhou Xiang (2005) found that the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* focused on negative aspects of the outbreak, such as the negative consequences on the economy, responsibility of the Chinese leaders for the spread, and failed struggles of individuals fighting the disease. This reporting was in contrast to *China Daily* and *People's Daily*, which focused on positive aspects such as initiatives undertaken by Beijing to curtail the impact on the economy, as well as success stories of individuals and families in overcoming the disease.

Several scholarly works have suggested that the ideological and political system is the main cause of the telling differences in China coverage by the Western and Chinese media. Wang Xiuli and Pamela Shoemaker (2011), for example, claimed that the persistent negative tone in US media coverage of China was driven by the "China as challenger" sentiment engendered by the fundamental differences between the two countries' cultural, ideological, and political systems. Peng Zengjun noted that the US press coverage of China was highly critical when certain aspects of the Chinese domestic environment conflicted with the American values of individual liberty, democracy, and human rights, reflecting "the dominant political agenda of the US government and the ideological framework of the American media" (Peng 2004, 58). Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2002) highlighted that the US media coverage of Communist countries such as China and Russia was driven by the intent of maintaining the status quo of American society and securing the interests of the political and business elites who regarded Communism as a threat to the United States' capitalist democratic system and ultimately their powers, properties, and privileges. As such, propaganda against Communism is orchestrated, leading to persistent negative portrayal of these countries in the US media.

In China, on the contrary, the positive representation comes from the fact that the news media, including CCTV, *People's Daily*, and Xinhua News Agency, are state owned and run by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda arm (Hearns-Branaman 2009). In China, propaganda is deemed a legitimate tool for building the society sought

by the authorities (Shambaugh 2007). This makes the content on Chinese media outlets information from the Party and the state. To illustrate, Alex Chan (2002) discovered that *Jiaodian Fangtan*, a CCTV current affairs program said to be breaking Chinese media convention with exposé and sharp criticism of government misconduct, was hardly "revolutionary" as the voice of the Party still dominated the content, sensitive issues related to the grassroots were rarely discussed, and the so-called criticism was never directed at the central administration. It also reflected the Chinese journalistic norm of "covering good news while avoiding the bad," whereby the press would focus on reporting the positive aspects of a story in order to reduce the negative impact of news and give publicity to the government. This contrasts with the Western-style watchdog journalism, whereby the media report "bad news" supposedly to keep the authorities in check (Gans 2004; Farah and Mosher 2010).

Aside from ideological and political systems, the representation of China can also be shaped by other factors. Huang Yu and Christine Leung (2005) asserted that China's negative portrayal in the Western coverage of the SARS epidemic was caused by China's poor handling of the crisis rather than being a deliberately biased and inaccurate representation of the "Other" by the Western media. Lars Willnat and Luo Yunjuan (2011) argued that the lack of representation and comprehensiveness in global television news coverage of China—which accounted for only a small percentage, with little variation in the topics reported—could be due to the nature of broadcast news, where airtime is limited. Zhu Yicheng and Wang Longxing (2017) found that the attitudes of the ruling class, geopolitical factors, relationships with China, national differences, and political stances of media outlets were the major factors shaping the local newspaper coverage of China's outward foreign direct investment in Latin American countries.

Chinese Media's Globalization and Local Media Coverage

When studying the representation of China in the global media landscape, one trend to note is the global expansion of Chinese media outlets under the Go Out Policy. Referred to as the "global propaganda campaign" by the *Guardian*, the initiative sees Beijing employing various strategies to boost the presence of CCP-sanctioned content worldwide, such as establishing overseas bureaus and offices for its state media outlets, placing China-friendly advertorials in international media, and securing content deals with foreign media organizations (Farah and Mosher 2010; Sun 2014; Lim and Bergin 2018). The aim is to "tell China's story well" (Lim and Bergin 2018). With that, it reportedly seeks to reclaim storytelling rights from the "biased and negative" West (Sun 2014,

1906), improve international public opinion and create a pro-China global environment (Brady 2009), redraw the global information order dominated by the Western media (Lim and Bergin 2018), and even establish some form of cultural imperialism (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2018).

It is worth paying attention to the possible changes in media coverage of China following the endeavor. Zhang Xiaoling (2013), for instance, examined the content of *Africa Live*, a program on CCTV's sister station CCTV Africa and observed that it painted only a positive image of China while being highly critical of the West. Zhang Xiaoling *et al.* (2016) looked at press coverage of China in South Africa and Zimbabwe and found that in South Africa, where journalists are more independent minded, the media generally painted a balanced picture of China, with neutral reports dominating the coverage; in Zimbabwe, where China's involvement had been long with a government-to-government approach, the reportage was torn between public and private media: China had greater exposure with mostly positive coverage in the former, as opposed to the latter, where the reports were fewer and much more critical due to the more Western, liberal stand adopted.

Back in Southeast Asia, few studies have suggested the role of ruling elites in shaping local media coverage of China. Bui Nhung (2017), for example, demonstrated that Vietnam tried to keep a lid on anti-Chinese sentiment in the coverage of the 2014 Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig crisis, noting domestic stability and policy flexibility could be the reasons prompting Hanoi to adopt such a strategy in reporting what was referred to as one of the most severe clashes between the two countries in recent history. Lupita Wijaya and Cheryl Bensa (2017) concluded that the coverage of the South China Sea dispute by Indonesian media outlets was predominantly neutral and corresponded to President Joko Widodo's policy of conflict resolution via diplomacy when they asserted that neither China nor other claimant states should claim ownership of the waters and called for peaceful resolution of the dispute.

In Malaysia, Ch'ng Huck Ying (2016) studied the ways in which Malaysian newspapers framed foreign news events and issues and learned that the Malay-language *Utusan Malaysia* presented a highly positive view of the Malaysia-China relationship, the Chinese-language *Sin Chew Daily* presented a positive frame of China's rise as a political and economic superpower, and the English-language *New Straits Times* cast China's rising influence on regional economic development in a remarkably positive light. The positive portrayals showed not just Malaysia's intention of strengthening economic ties with China, but also the close connection between mainstream media and political leadership as well as the restrictive laws that compel media compliance.

Teoh Yong Chia *et al.* (2016) compared the coverage of Najib's 2014 visit to China

by Malaysia's *Star* and China's *People's Daily* and found that although the friendly relationship between the two countries was the most highlighted aspect in both papers' coverage, the *Star* appeared to focus more on the visit's economic consequences, while *People's Daily* underlined the need for further action on the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 with two-thirds of Chinese nationals aboard. The authors attribute the varied framing patterns to the papers' ownership and the political cultures in which they operate, as government control results in their coverage being informed by the respective states' viewpoints and interests.

Yang Lai Fong and Ramachandran Ponnan (2019) examined the coverage of MH370 by newspapers in Malaysia and China and found that Malaysian newspapers gave much more attention to the incident and Malaysia-China bilateral relations than did their Chinese counterparts. This indicates that maintaining a good relationship with Beijing is vital for Kuala Lumpur as it seeks to maximize benefits from China's vast and growing economy—not just for commercial or strategic reasons but also for the political legitimacy and survival of the administration.

A review of the literature on the representation of China reveals several gaps. First, it is dominated by research using major media outlets from the United States and China. Second, television news appears to be a less explored medium despite being an important source of information that is no less influential (Reese and Buckalew 1995). This is especially relevant for Malaysia given that most people still regard mainstream media as more credible than online media (Liow 2012), most people consume content from traditional media despite the rise of digital media (Nielsen 2018), and more people get their news from television than from newspapers (*Star* 2017). Finally, there is a lack of Southeast Asian perspectives on the topic. The media does not only act as a means of social control but also reflects social and cultural patterns of a particular society (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Studies by Lim Guanie *et al.* (2021), Alvin Camba *et al.* (2021), and others have shown that the success of the BRI in Southeast Asia is not determined solely by the Chinese government but also by dynamics in the host countries. The same can be said of the representation of China, whereby domestic factors can affect how the country is portrayed. Hence, more research is needed to promote a better understanding of the region and narrow the gap in the literature. Building on the existing studies about media coverage of China, the present paper seeks to offer new insights with the two research questions above on the representation of China in Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the Hierarchy of Influences model as the theoretical framework. Proposed by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996; 2014), the model theorizes that media content is shaped by multiple forces throughout the process of its making. It categorizes the forces into five levels, based on the strength of their influence on media content:

1. Individual: Content is affected by a media worker's characteristics and experiences, such as gender, ethnicity, and upbringing, but only to the extent where the influence is sufficient to override more powerful forces coming from professional ethics and higher levels of the hierarchy;
2. Routine: Content is shaped by the repeated and patterned practices used by media workers to cope with their jobs while serving the needs of the organization;
3. Organizational: Forces impacting the content come from the policies that ensure the goals of a media organization are achieved and the interests of the owner are served;
4. Extra-media/Social institutional: Forces come from interested parties such as sources, government, audience, and advertisers. Competition, market trends, and technology can also have an impact on content;
5. Ideological/Social system: Ideological/social system forms the foundation for how media content is produced in the first place by dictating the interactions of social institutions, ownerships of media organizations, media routines, and also the values of journalists. It ensures the media perpetuates the status quo and interests of the power elites.

The model is relevant to this study in several aspects. First, it allows the coverage of Najib's visit to China to be examined more systematically: the author is able to identify the sources of influence based on the tiered framework. For example, Jason Abbott (2011) offered three explanations for the pro-government bias in the Malaysian media: legislative checks on freedom of the press, structural or institutional constraints, and cultural or environmental constraints. With the Hierarchy of Influences model, this would translate into influences from the social institution (legislative checks), organization (structural or institutional constraints), and social system (cultural or environmental constraints). Yang and Md. Sidin (2016) have argued that the diverse points of view held by Malaysia's newspapers in different languages are rooted in different political beliefs and institutional practices. This denotes forces from the owners with different political

beliefs and the audiences they target (social institution), which in turn affect practices such as reporting policy (organization) and editorial decisions (routine).

Second, the model provides a comprehensive explanation of the nature of media content by taking into account the "multiple forces that simultaneously impinge on the media and suggest how influence at one level may interact with that at another" (Shoemaker and Reese 2014, 1, cited in Reese and Shoemaker 2016, 396). The argument that the social system is the most powerful influence on media content also corresponds with the concept of representation, which contends that meaning-giving is a practice rooted in the cultural and political context of society (Hall 2005). Ultimately, the framework that places media content in a social context is consistent with the intent of the present study, which seeks to understand the impact of Malaysia's sociopolitical construct on the news-making process.

Methodology

The study was conducted qualitatively in two stages. First, content analysis was carried out to uncover the extent and patterns of coverage, as well as the resulting representations of China. In the second stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with media practitioners to get their explanation for the findings recorded in the content analysis phase.

The samples were news stories about Najib's visit to China, which took place between October 31 and November 5, 2016. They were collected using the purposive sampling method from six primetime newscasts on free-to-air television:

1. TV3's *Buletin Utama* (Malay)
2. 8TV's *8TV Mandarin News* (Mandarin)
3. ntv7's *7 Edition* (English)
4. TV1's *Nasional 8* (Malay)
5. TV2's *TV2 Mandarin News* (Mandarin)
6. TV2's *News On 2* (English)

TV3, 8TV, and ntv7 are private television channels operated by Media Prima, whereas TV1 and TV2 are run by the public broadcaster RTM. The bulletins were chosen for their prominence as well as practical reasons: *Buletin Utama* has the highest viewership, 8TV is the number one Chinese channel, and the now ceased *7 Edition* was the only English bulletin aired during primetime (Chua 2018; Media Prima 2020). Malay,

Mandarin, and English news programs from RTM stations were selected so that a comparison could be made between the coverage on commercial television and that on public television.

To gather the samples, the author visited the bulletins' online archives: RTMKlik (https://rtmklik.rtm.gov.my) for news on TV1 and TV2, and Tonton (www.tonton.com.my) for news on TV3, 8TV, and ntv7. The sampling period was set between October 24 and November 12, 2016—one week before the visit and one week after. Newscasts within the sampling period were watched from beginning to end to scour the coverage of the visit. Relevant stories were recorded using a camera and labeled according to their dates, channels, and topics. The duration of these stories was also calculated.

The research continued with a close reading of the content of the samples. The focus was to uncover the patterns or characteristics of coverage, and also how China was represented as a result. The former could be detected by identifying the organizing ideas in the stories that helped the audiences in "making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 3), while the latter could be discovered through the themes arising from "patterned response or meaning" about China in the stories (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). The unit of analysis was individual news stories. The author viewed the footage repeatedly to achieve immersion and took note of the clues and insights that emerged from the stories. Specific attention was placed on the narratives, namely, what was conveyed verbally by the news presenters; but other elements such as tone (excited or neutral), presentation style (descriptive or straight), and visuals (captions or expressions) could also be taken into account when applicable. During data collection, the data was also analyzed. For qualitative research, this is standard and even crucial because it can help in "adding to the depth and quality of data analysis" (Vaismoradi *et al.* 2013, 401).

To get more accurate findings, the coverage of the various news programs was compared and contrasted. This was intended to uncover news frames that normally appear natural to the audience and are hard to detect unless a comparison of narratives is carried out (Entman 1991, 6), disclosing "what stories, stakeholders and frames are included and excluded . . . and to what effect" (Seib and Powers 2010, 10). The procedures were repeated until saturation was reached and no new information or theme was recorded. Finally, the themes about China that had been collected were sorted to ensure only those containing the "essence" that captured a particular aspect of the data remained (Braun and Clarke 2006, 92). They were then calculated to find out their frequency of appearance. This step helped unveil the salience of the themes, which reflected not just China's representation in the coverage but also the overall reporting pattern of a bulletin on the topic.

Finally, to substantiate the findings of content analysis, the study continued with in-depth interviews with media practitioners who possessed firsthand experiences in television newsrooms. A total of four semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The outcome of the study will be presented in the next section.

Results: Content Analysis

A total of 216.45 minutes of coverage related to Najib's visit was collected between October 24 and November 12, 2016. It is worth noting that the airtime for the Malay news is 60 minutes, as opposed to 30 minutes for the English and Mandarin news. Table 1 shows the amount of coverage given to the visit in the total airtime of each bulletin, which is obtained by multiplying their respective durations by the 20 days that cover the sampling period. The news programs on private television offered significantly more coverage than their public counterparts, with 137.85 minutes (63.69 percent) compared to only 78.6 minutes (36.31 percent) by the latter. By linguistic line, the Malay newscasts contributed the bulk of the coverage with 126.05 minutes (58.24 percent), the English newscasts dedicated 46.22 minutes (21.35 percent), and the Mandarin newscasts offered the least with 44.18 minutes (20.41 percent).

Overall, the portrayal of China in the coverage was positive because the messages contained in the majority of the stories were favorable to China's image. As demonstrated in Table 2, the messages that contribute to the shaping of China's representation can be categorized into 11 themes. A single news story can carry more than one theme at the same time.

Among these themes, "economic importance," "strategic partner," "close friend," "advanced country," "economic power," "courtesy," and "superpower" are likely to give

Table 1 Amount of Coverage of Najib's Visit to China between October 24 and November 12, 2016

Bulletin	Language	Ownership	Duration (minutes)	Length of Coverage (minutes)	Total Airtime (minutes)	Percentage (%)
Buletin Utama	Malay	Private	60	76.60	1,200	6.38
7 Edition	English	Private	30	30.85	600	5.14
8TV Mandarin News	Mandarin	Private	30	30.40	600	5.07
Nasional 8	Malay	Public	60	49.45	1,200	4.12
News On 2	English	Public	30	15.37	600	2.56
TV2 Mandarin News	Mandarin	Public	30	13.78	600	2.30
Total				216.45	4,800	

Source: Author.

Table 2 Themes of China's Representations in the Coverage of Najib's Visit to China

	Themes	Implications	Representative Quotes
1.	Economic importance	A country important to Malaysia's economy	"China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2009." (ntv7 2016b)
2.	Strategic partner	A country Malaysia shares extensive and strategic cooperation with	". . . the cooperation is not limited only to politics, economy and investment but also in the sectors of science, social, defence and security." (TV3 2016a)
3.	Close friend	A country Malaysia shares a good relationship with	"China's relations with Malaysia as being as close as lips are to teeth." (ntv7 2016a)
4.	Geopolitics	A country that is involved in the region's geopolitics	"China appears to be assertive in the South China Sea issue." (TV3 2016c)
5.	Sovereignty issue	A country associated with Malaysia's sovereignty issues	". . . several agreements signed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak with China might jeopardize Malaysia's sovereignty." (ntv7 2016c)
6.	Governance issue	A country associated with Malaysia's governance issues	". . . embrace China after the US Department of Justice announcing seizure of assets and investigation on 1MDB for allegedly involving in money laundering." (8TV 2016c)
7.	Advanced country	A country with modern, innovative technologies	"In China, even loan is made online . . . the approval is done within three minutes and repayment within one minute, without any interface with humans." (TV1 2016d)
8.	Economic power	One of the world's economic powerhouses	"China is seen as an economic power and is expected to become the largest economy in the world by 2050." (TV3 2016e)
9.	Superpower	One of the world's superpowers	"China as a superpower is confident with Malaysia's prosperity and political stability." (TV3 2016e)
10.	Competitor	A fearsome rival for Malaysian businesses	"China as an economic giant with giant companies, how are Malaysian companies going to compete?" (8TV 2016f)
11.	Courtesy	A country that respects Malaysia	". . . a country that has a lot of respect for us." (TV1 2016a)

Source: Author.

China a positive portrayal, whereas "geopolitics," "sovereignty issue," "governance issue," and "competitor" are likely to give China a mixed or negative portrayal. Nevertheless, all of the themes can give China a positive, negative, or mixed portrayal depending on the context of the story. In general, China's positive representation in the coverage is contributed to by the dominant presence of "economic importance" and "strategic partner" themes, even though "strategic partner" is a less substantial theme in the RTM newscasts.

The representation of China in the coverage of the visit on public television was overwhelmingly positive. Since public television is the government's media, its reportage was based on the positive official view of the relationship between Malaysia and China. Most of the themes related to China in the stories were positive. To illustrate, in a report under the "economic importance" theme featured on all three RTM newscasts

on November 6, Minister of Plantation, Industries and Commodities Mah Siew Keong was seen saying:

> China is the second-largest importer of commodities, exceeding RM15 billion last year. In Malaysia, there are more than 1 million smallholders . . . so China is a very important market for all of our commodities; we want to sell more to China. (TV1 2016e; TV2 2016g; 2016h)

The report highlighted China's importance to Malaysia's economy, hence presenting a positive image of China.

Another example would be a story from *News On 2* about Najib's trip to the Gu'an New Industry City on November 2. In the report, the city was reported to be a former agricultural area that had been transformed into an international industrial development powerhouse focusing on the five clusters of aerospace, biomedical, high-end equipment manufacturing, e-commerce, and modern services industries. The audience was also informed that JD.com's sorting center in Gu'an had the capacity of sorting 300,000 JD.com orders daily (TV2 2016a). By underlining the innovative features of the city, the story took on an "advanced country" theme and contributed to a positive impression of China as a country with advanced technology.

Even so, the representation of China in the news programs varied from one to another despite the programs belonging to the same RTM network. It appears that China's portrayal was decidedly positive in the Malay and English bulletins and much more neutral in the Mandarin bulletin. This follows the higher ratio of "economic importance" stories in the English news, "close friend" and "courtesy" stories in the Malay news, and "sovereignty issue" in the Mandarin news (Table 3). The difference is also contributed to by the angle of coverage and the amount of details provided.

For example, in the coverage of Najib's travel to Tianjin on November 3, *TV2 Mandarin News* merely reported that he and the delegation "took high-speed rail (HSR) and reached Tianjin from Beijing in only 30 minutes," as opposed to *Nasional 8*, which offered details such as it "took only 30 minutes compared to 90 minutes using the highway" and "among the fastest in the world," besides claiming that the "renowned HSR has demonstrated the ability of Chinese technology amid its effort to bid the HSR project between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore" (TV1 2016c; TV2 2016b). As a result, China received a more positive representation in the latter compared to the former.

Such contrast can be seen also in the November 4 reportage about the appointment of the founder of Alibaba Group, Jack Ma, as Malaysia's digital economy adviser and the launch of Malaysia Tourism Pavilion on Alibaba's e-commerce platform for tourism. In *News On 2*, the story came with visuals of Jack Ma paying a courtesy call on Najib and friendly interaction between him and the Malaysia delegation, in addition to him saying,

Table 3 Frequency of Appearance of Themes Related to China in the Coverage of Najib's Visit to China (Public TV)

Theme \ Bulletin	*Nasional 8*	Percentage (%)	*TV2 Mandarin News*	Percentage (%)	*News On 2*	Percentage (%)	Number of Themes	Percentage (%)
Economic importance	12	30.77	8	44.44	8	53.33	28	38.89
Strategic partner	8	20.51	4	22.22	2	13.33	14	19.44
Close friend	8	20.51	1	5.56	2	13.33	11	15.28
Sovereignty issue	2	5.13	4	22.22	1	6.67	7	9.72
Advanced country	4	10.26	0	0	2	13.33	6	8.33
Courtesy	3	7.69	0	0	0	0	3	4.17
Geopolitics	2	5.13	0	0	0	0	2	2.78
Economic power	0	0	1	5.56	0	0	1	1.39
Governance issue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Superpower	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Competitor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	39	100	18	100	15	100	72	100

Source: Author.

"Malaysian people are very friendly, very inclusive, they'd love to make friends" (TV2 2016f). Coverage of the same event by *TV2 Mandarin News*, on the other hand, reported that the Pavilion was a platform to attract Chinese tourists to Malaysia and that Alibaba was actively expanding its presence in the ASEAN market of 600 million people, where the digital economy was projected to reach USD200 billion by 2025 (TV2 2016d). Because of this difference in angle, China appeared to take on the image of a "close friend" in the former and a "strategic partner" in the latter.

On private television the representation of China was positive, albeit to a lesser extent. This was due to more variety in the messages and focuses of coverage of China, with themes not seen in the formal and comparatively monotonous reporting on the national broadcaster (Table 4). The country was portrayed positively in the Malay news and in a more mixed manner in the Mandarin and English news.

In *8TV Mandarin News*, the coverage focused on the trade and economic aspect of the visit, as well as the contentious issues related to the deals signed during Najib's trip. As a result, although China received positive representation in stories that highlighted its "economic importance," such as one on October 31 about the mission to increase palm oil exports to China (8TV 2016a), the favorable portrayal can be discounted by the bulletin's heavy feature of news concerning the controversy surrounding the deals signed. For example, in a story about the ECRL project on November 2, the opposition leaders claimed that the project was signed with China without going through the necessary studies and that at RM92 million per kilometer, the cost was ridiculously high compared to even the allegedly most difficult railway to build, the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, which cost RM17 million per kilometer (8TV 2016d). The report suggested a "governance issue" was involved and tended to give China a negative portrayal because it associated the country with dubious approval and costing of the ECRL project.

In *7 Edition*, the representation of China was also mixed following the bulletin's geopolitical and strategic focus in the coverage. To illustrate, the former premier was seen in a story on November 5 telling the Malaysian diaspora and students in Beijing that he believed Malaysia would benefit from China's rise under the strong leadership of President Xi (ntv7 2016d). While reports with a "geopolitics" theme like this tend to cast China in a positive light, others give a rather mixed image of the country as they imply superpower rivalry and territorial disputes in the region. This can be seen, for instance, in a story on November 5 in which the author of the book *When China Rules the World*, Martin Jacques, suggested that Malaysia "think more strategically" about what it wanted from its relationship with China before embracing the BRI (ntv7 2016e), and another report on November 2 in which Najib was reportedly "telling off former colonial powers not to meddle in the internal affairs of their former colonies" and that he had

Table 4 Frequency of Appearance of Themes Related to China in the Coverage of Najib's Visit to China (Private TV)

Theme \ Bulletin	*Buletin Utama*	Percentage (%)	*8TV Mandarin News*	Percentage (%)	*7 Edition*	Percentage (%)	Number of Themes	Percentage (%)
Strategic partner	22	32.84	9	25.00	11	32.35	42	30.66
Economic importance	18	26.87	10	27.78	9	26.47	37	27.01
Sovereignty issue	7	10.45	5	13.89	4	11.76	16	11.68
Close friend	10	14.92	3	8.33	2	5.88	15	10.95
Geopolitics	3	4.48	3	8.33	5	14.71	11	8.03
Economic power	3	4.48	1	2.78	1	2.94	5	3.65
Governance issue	0	0	3	8.33	1	2.94	4	2.92
Advanced country	1	1.49	1	2.78	1	2.94	3	2.19
Superpower	2	2.99	0	0	0	0	2	1.46
Competitor	0	0	1	2.78	0	0	1	0.73
Courtesy	1	1.49	0	0	0	0	1	0.73
Total	67	100	36	100	34	100	137	100

Source: Author.

"acquired China's commitment to protect and defend the sovereignty of the separate states" (ntv7 2016b).

In *Buletin Utama*, China enjoyed positive representation due to coverage that stressed the benefits Malaysia could receive from its close relationship with China, as well as the justification for the deals signed during Najib's visit. To illustrate, in a story on November 5 with "economic power" and "superpower" themes, a commentator was seen asserting:

> China is expected to become the largest economy in the world by 2050. It will play an important role in 10 or 20 years to come, so Malaysia doesn't want to be left out. Now the son of Tun Abdul Razak [Najib's father, Malaysia's second prime minister] is opening the door for Malaysians to take part in China's greatness. (TV3 2016e)

Buletin Utama also featured UMNO leaders refuting the opposition's selling-off allegations, an approach not seen in *Nasional 8* that used government officials for the same purpose. For example, in a report on November 6, the party's Supreme Council member Tajuddin Abdul Rahman stated that the Chinese merely financed the projects and gained profit as a contractor, just like the foreign investors brought in by Mahathir to develop Langkawi into a tourist destination (TV3 2016f).

As in the case of RTM, the representation of China in the coverage on the commercial channels was similarly affected by the choice of details offered to the audience. For instance, in a story by *8TV Mandarin News* on November 5, UMNO Information Chief Annuar Musa noted that the deals inked during Najib's visit were "something to be proud of because not every country gets such opportunity, yet it has been interpreted as selling off the country. Since when did trade between two countries become selling off the country?" (8TV 2016e). *Buletin Utama* also had the same story, albeit with a longer quote ending "the trade between Malaysia and China has been going on for hundreds of years yet the country has not been sold off" (TV3 2016d). The latter would give a more positive portrayal of China compared to the former.

Such a situation can also occur with two bulletins on different networks covering the same event. For example, a story from *News On 2* on November 3 about Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi clarifying that the move of bringing in Chinese investments would not threaten Malaysia's sovereignty concluded with him quoted saying "Malaysia-China relations were over 40 years old, but the question of sovereignty being threatened had never arisen" (TV2 2016c). In *7 Edition*, however, the same story ended with Mahathir reportedly claiming that "the agreements could send the wrong signal to China on the dispute between the two countries pertaining to the South China Sea" (ntv7 2016c). As a result, China took on a positive "close friend" image in the

former and a negative image in the latter as a country involved in the "sovereignty issue" and "geopolitics" that affected Malaysia.

On both public and private television, stories with a "close friend" theme that gave China a favorable depiction were featured more prominently in the Malay news programs. An example would be a *Buletin Utama* report on November 2, in which Najib recounted him asking his father (second Prime Minister Abdul Razak Hussein) why he was so confident about establishing ties with China, to which his father answered: "Because Zhou Enlai is a trustable man" (TV3 2016b). This is in addition to "courtesy," a theme exclusive to Malay newscasts that has the potential to strengthen China's positive image among Malay viewers. It can be seen, for example, in a story about the purchase of Littoral Mission Ships by *Nasional 8* on November 2, where Defense Minister Hishammuddin Hussein claimed it was done "with a country that has a lot of respect for us" (TV1 2016a).

When it comes to messages that can affect China's image negatively, the "sovereignty issue" is a clear theme capable of hampering China's overall positive representation in the coverage. It appeared mainly in stories related to the "selling-off" controversy raised by the opposition leaders who argued that the deals worth RM144 billion signed with China could jeopardize Malaysia's sovereignty. The issue was covered by all six bulletins and was sometimes reported along with geopolitical issues under the "geopolitics" theme, particularly the South China Sea dispute. To illustrate, *8TV Mandarin News* reported on November 2 that "With Malaysia awarding contracts of many mega projects to China, the government getting loans from China, both countries strengthen defense cooperation, the opposition members of parliament worried that Malaysia would become a puppet state of China" (8TV 2016b). In another example, *Buletin Utama* reported on November 3 that Mahathir "expressed concerns about the impact of over-reliance on borrowings from a single source such as China, besides claiming China appears to be assertive in the issue of overlapping claims in the South China Sea" (TV3 2016c).

The coverage of the controversy on public television was far briefer. It was reported by *Nasional 8* on November 3 as "certain parties claiming that several agreements Prime Minister Najib Razak signed with China might be able to jeopardize the country's sovereignty" (TV1 2016b). In *News On 2*, it was merely referred to on November 3 as certain individuals "spreading stories that national sovereignty was at stake with the signing of the MOUs" (TV2 2016c). *TV2 Mandarin News* was the most detailed of the three. For instance, its story on November 4 reported that "former Prime Minister Mahathir criticized Prime Minister Najib for piling up debt, notably the RM 55 billion ECRL project signed with China may seriously impact the country's sovereignty" (TV2 2016e).

As illustrated in Table 4, other stories with "negative themes" that could challenge China's favorable portrayal in the coverage of the visit were also found on private television only. For instance, in a "governance issue" story on November 2, *8TV Mandarin News* cited a Reuters report claiming that Najib's pivot to China was driven by the US Department of Justice's investigation into 1MDB over alleged involvement in money laundering activities (8TV 2016c). Another report under the same theme by *7 Edition* on November 7, on the other hand, quoted an opposition member of parliament arguing that the ECRL project was a move to bail out the 1MDB debt crisis (ntv7 2016f). Lastly, *8TV Mandarin News* also had a story with the "competitor" theme on November 6 about the business community calling on the government to ensure that "Chinese companies are coming to Malaysia as partners instead of competitors" (8TV 2016f). These reports to some extent reflected the concerns arising from China's growing presence in the country. Overall, *8TV Mandarin News* offered the most extensive coverage of the contentious issues related to Najib's visit. Interestingly, such news was absent from *Buletin Utama*, where the focus was on defending the government's policy, hence giving China a positive portrayal instead.

Results: In-depth Interviews

Discussions with the informants revealed that several factors contributed to the differences in how the news programs reported on Najib's visit to China, which in turn affected how China was represented in the coverage. The outcome supported the proposition of the Hierarchy of Influences model and showed that reportage is a product shaped by five levels of forces coming from individual media workers, media routines, media organizations, extra-media/social institutions, and the ideological/social system. The following section presents information shared by the informants according to the model's framework. For the sake of confidentiality, the informants are referred to as Informant 1, Informant 2, Informant 3, and Informant 4.

Influence of Individual Media Workers

The respondents admitted that their personal experiences affected how they wrote a story, which in turn shaped the angle or focus of a report. Such influence has an even greater impact when it is in the form of shared experiences among a group of media workers. This was highlighted when a Mandarin news presenter explained why their coverage focused on business and trade instead of other aspects of the visit such as geopolitics, as had been done by the English news:

> I'm not sure why, but we weren't really interested in that. Maybe Chinese Malaysians are particularly concerned about the economy, trade, money, things like that. The direction is also decided by the mentality, attitude, and thinking of the people behind a news program. We report news from our [Chinese Malaysian] perspective. For people from the English or Malay background, their ways of thinking are different, and their concerns would be different too. For us, it is almost natural to pay more attention to topics related to the economy. Not just because the audience wants to see it, we also want to show news that we can relate to our audience. (Informant 2, interview with the author, November 22, 2018)

The response shows that the ethnic and cultural background of media workers plays a significant role in news making in a plural society like Malaysia. Interestingly, this also explains Mandarin newscasts' greater willingness to report on the controversy surrounding Najib's visit. This has to do with the news teams' attitude toward journalism, drawing upon their experiences as Malaysians of Chinese descent:

> Personally, I would like to compare the difference to a child trying to challenge the rules set by the adults. This is because for the local Chinese media, we are still hoping for fairness [amidst the country's race-based policy]. In a TV station, we are actually divided along the racial line instead of the linguistic line, so it's a representation of our country. For us, we hope to let our audience see more and know more. (Informant 2, interview with the author, November 22, 2018)

Influence of Routines

The influence of routines is manifested through the application of newsworthiness in news reporting. Given the backdrop of the study, which was inspired partly by China's global media expansion efforts, the author asked the informants whether initiatives such as the MOU on media cooperation between RTM and CCTV (*Malay Mail* 2014) would have an impact on how China was reported in the news about Najib's visit. All of the informants responded that they were guided principally by news values, including when covering China. They also claimed that there was no cooperation in news reporting between their newsrooms and Chinese media organizations. For instance, a former broadcast journalist remarked:

> News values are most important. Yes, instructions [from the top management] or MOUs might contribute to what is being highlighted in the news, but most importantly, generally, it's because of news values. It [Najib's visit] is a must for us to report because it is a state visit. The purpose of MOU is to make news exchange easy; let's say you want to share with me the news from China or you want to have news about Malaysia. Even so, it doesn't mean we must use the content. (Informant 3, interview with the author, December 1, 2018)

Another influence at the media routine level is the gatekeeper. This is defined as individuals or procedures that do not only determine what stories get to reach the audience

in the end but also how the messages are shaped, handled, and disseminated (Shoemaker *et al.* 2001). The styles and focuses of the news programs appeared to vary slightly from one to another in the coverage of Najib's visit to China. On this observation, the informants noted that it had to do with gatekeeping decisions. For example:

> This [difference in reportage] is due to the editorial arrangements made by the editors. The editors have the right to decide how they want to present the news. This is planned along with the policy of news coverage, the policy of the company, news values, and also instructions from the top management. (Informant 3, interview with the author, December 1, 2018)

Influence of Organization

The statement about the editors making their decisions based on company policies and orders shows that the gatekeeper carries out their duty as a representative of the company (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). It further points to the organizational-level influence on media content. There were several occasions when the power of the media owner was referred to by the informants. To start, all of them mentioned the need to follow company rules or risk losing jobs, demonstrating that they were subject to the organization's reward system. Another case in point is RTM's policy as the national broadcaster. According to the informants, the mission of RTM is to promote the government's policies and inform the public; therefore, it avoids sensationalism in news reports. Besides, it is funded by taxpayers' money, and advertising income has never been a concern. The case is different for private television, where advertising and other sources of funding are vital for sustainability. These ownership and funding factors are likely to be the cause for the differences in the extent and style of coverage between RTM and Media Prima stations, whereby the former appears to be more direct, formal, and shorter in general compared to the latter, which is more descriptive, sensationalized, and lengthy not just for audience appeal reasons but also because of the propaganda content that traces back to its UMNO ownership. This indicates news reporting is subject to the influence of the owner/funder.

Other policies also affected how RTM reported on Najib's visit to China. For example, the state broadcaster uses news programs in different languages as a "platform" to reach out to different communities in the country. As one informant noted:

> When covering some issues, they would use the Malay platform [bulletin] for certain matters, while in the Mandarin news they focus on something else. . . . If I want to push for my Chinese audience to understand a specific issue, I would extend my coverage of that topic on the Mandarin platform. (Informant 3, interview with the author, December 1, 2018)

The comment sheds light on some of the attributes observed in RTM bulletins' reportage.

For instance, the highlighting of the "sovereignty issue" theme in *TV2 Mandarin News* was likely caused by the intent of clarifying the selling-off claims and stressing the economic importance of the visit to the Chinese audience, just as the underlining of Malaysia-China friendship and partnership in *Nasional 8* could be motivated by the intention of showing the close relations between the two countries to the Malay audience.

Notably, RTM's foreign news coverage is based on the principle of Malaysia's foreign policy of maintaining good relations with all countries, as one informant revealed:

> We cannot come up with reports that contain negative elements about China or other countries because sensitivities also exist in the relations between two countries, so the rule of thumb is to report only what is happening without going into the details. (Informant 4, interview with the author, December 5, 2018)

Although this policy of RTM applies also to other countries and is not limited to China specifically, it might help to explain the limited amount of news under the "sovereignty issue," "geopolitics," and "strategic partner" themes in its coverage of Najib's visit to China, given the negative connotations some of the stories might carry for China's or even the Malaysian government's image.

Stephen Reese and Pamela Shoemaker (2016) cited a study by Francis L. F. Lee and Joseph Chan (2008) on the increasing political pressure faced by the local media in Hong Kong following the handover to China and categorized it as an organizational level of influence. This seems to be the case for Malaysia as well, where a foreign government's interference in local media coverage, should it occur, also takes place at the organizational level. One informant shared his knowledge on the matter:

> The ambassador can meet with the foreign minister, deputy prime minister, or the prime minister to discuss and reach a decision on not to highlight a particular issue, and then we'll get a letter from the government. You can't stop social media from reporting about it, but for the government or conventional media, we'll have to stop reporting about it. (Informant 3, interview with the author, December 1, 2018)

Influence of Extra-media/Social Institutions

The informants were frank about the presence of political influence in the news-making process at their organizations, which inevitably played a role in shaping the coverage of Najib's visit to China. For example, they noted that the blatant government propaganda in *Buletin Utama*'s coverage was the result of UMNO's intention to get voter support, and that being the most-viewed program on the country's number one television station had made it susceptible to political influence. As a news presenter pointed out: "Because their reach is bigger. The mass market is their audience, the mass Malays are their

audience, so influencing them means you influence the people" (Informant 1, interview with the author, May 23, 2018).

Audiences are another important social institutional influence on the coverage of Najib's visit to China. It was often the first answer the informants came up with when asked about what contributed to the differences in the bulletins' reports. They noted that news programs tailor their content according to their target audience. This means selecting news items that carry value and relevance for their respective communities. As one informant said of the observation that *7 Edition*'s coverage was focused on geo-political issues, *8TV Mandarin News* on business and trade, and *Buletin Utama* on how the visit could benefit Malaysia:

> The mass Malay or the rural Malaysians are not concerned about how China will affect the country in general in five years' time, but they are thinking about how it will benefit them. It is very different the way people think, different groups of people think differently, that's how we find the different angles [to report on the visit]. (Informant 1, interview with the author, May 23, 2018)

Influence of Ideological/Social System

The influence of the ideological/social system is rightly manifested through the way all of the six bulletins reported on Najib's visit to China. The varying coverage styles are a testament to Malaysia's plural society, where each community has its own concerns, culture, and thinking. Notwithstanding this, there is still a marked similarity in their coverage, with stories about the PM's itinerary remaining at the center of their reporting. This indicates the presence of a "guiding hand" trying to control what the media reported about the visit. An informant's disclosure confirmed this:

> Correspondents, media, and reporters get information on what to highlight in coverage from the person in charge of the media during official visits. They have to follow the instructions given, but obviously their presentations would be different based on their in-house styles. (Informant 3, interview with the author, December 1, 2018)

Moreover, from the conversations with the interviewees, it could be easily observed that media control and self-censorship were accepted as part and parcel of working in the industry. It appears that the nature of Malaysian society, where racial and religious tensions are consistently present, is the primary reason that led them to subscribe to the notion of "responsible reporting." This is epitomized in one informant's comment on free media:

> The real free media do report everything, but does that really matter? We have to look at the culture of Malaysia. Sometimes even if we come out with a balanced report, although it is true, it

> might still cause sensitivities, or even worse, this is what we don't want to see. (Informant 4, interview with the author, December 5, 2018)

Limiting freedom of speech on the grounds of stability and harmony has been an ideology propagated at various levels of Malaysian society. Although the rule is often disregarded by politicians, who always seem to manage to evade disciplinary action for their offensive remarks, the ideology is promoted and abided by on the part of the media. This underlines how the media can act as a means of social control and help secure the interests of the power holder through perpetuating limited press freedom, thus proving the influence of the ideological/social system in shaping news coverage in Malaysia.

Discussion

This study examines the representation of China in Malaysia's ethnically and linguistically divided social and media environments by looking into television news coverage of Najib Razak's visit to China in 2016. The findings reveal that China enjoyed a positive representation in the coverage. This was especially true in the case of RTM, due to its role as the public broadcaster that communicates the Malaysian government's view. On private television, China's representation was largely positive but also more diverse, and in some cases mixed, as a result of the different styles and focuses of the bulletins. Interestingly, it turns out that the expansion of Chinese media under the Go Global initiative did not have much impact on how Malaysian television portrayed China in its reportage. Discussions with media practitioners indicate that the outcome was brought about by a mix of factors. The coverage affirms the presence of individual, routine, organizational, extra-media/social institutional, and also ideological/social system forces, as proposed by the Hierarchy of Influences model, in shaping coverage of the visit. It points to five implications, discussed in detail below.

First, the reporting was shaped by the ruling elites' interests. Media coverage can reflect the views and expectations one country has from its relationship with another country or even act as an intermediary between states (Tortajada and Pobre 2011; Lalisang 2013). With the positive representation of China resulting from the dominance of stories with "economic importance" and "strategic partner" themes, the coverage of Najib's visit to China implied an emphasis on economic and strategic gains in Malaysia-China relations, especially at a time when his administration was pressured by the 1MDB scandal and the need to ensure the survival of his administration (Elina and T. N. 2017). It supports the findings by Ch'ng (2016), Teoh *et al.* (2016), and Yang and Ponnan (2019),

which showed economic interests being the focus of Malaysian media when covering diplomatic ties with China. The outcome attests to the goals of Malaysia's China policy, which seeks to achieve economic growth, fulfill strategic and geopolitical interests, and ultimately maintain political legitimacy (Kuik 2015). It also demonstrates the continuation of the trend suggested by Bui (2017) and Wijaya and Bensa (2017), where China coverage was guided by state policies and interests.

Second, the coverage demonstrates the intention to create a positive image of China among Malay audiences, with the eventual goal being to secure voter support. This can be seen from the greater emphasis on the close relationship between Malaysia and China in the Malay news programs, both on public and private television, with a stronger presence of stories under the "close friend" and also the exclusive "courtesy" themes. Framing can promote public awareness or even shape public opinion toward a news topic (Iyengar *et al.* 1982; Entman 1991). The intention became more obvious given that the coverage of the visit by the Malay newscasts was lengthier than other newscasts. This shows a continuation of the pro-government slant in the Malay news, suggesting the attempt to garner Malay viewers' approval for the government's China policy and the government as a whole. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the slight difference between the positive representation of China by *Nasional 8* and *Buletin Utama*: portrayal by the former was more of a direct result of RTM's status as the national broadcaster communicating the government's stand and Malaysia's foreign policy, as opposed to the latter, whose portrayal was more of an outcome of political propaganda.

Third, the coverage demonstrates the government's control of the media, cemented by restrictive laws and ownership structure. Additionally, it affirms the findings by Abbott and Givens (2015) and Yang and Md. Sidin (2016) about the variations in the extent of influence imposed upon different media outlets in the country. Taking the coverage on private television as an example, the noticeably pro-government bias in *Buletin Utama* indicates it was the most influenced, whereas the comparatively balanced and neutral reporting in *8TV Mandarin News* suggests a lower level of interference. When this is placed against the focus of coverage of the bulletins, as seen in the former's emphasis on the benefits Malaysia could receive from close ties with China so as to seek the Malay audience's support for the government's China policy, versus the highlighting of business and trade in the latter due to presumed Chinese Malaysians' interest in the economy and anything "money-related" (Informant 2, interview with the author, November 22, 2018), it implies that the more influenced a bulletin is, the less able it is to cater to audience interest, as political agenda overtakes editorial independence. It also hints at the positive correlation between government control and the media image of China as proposed by Zhang *et al.* (2016). The *7 Edition* reportage of Najib's visit to China supports Abbott and

Givens' (2015) and Yang and Md. Sidin's (2016) argument about the pro-government tone in Malaysia's traditional English-language media, despite its being more moderate and less driven by party politics compared to its Malay counterpart. Furthermore, its focus on the geopolitical and strategic aspect of the visit is consistent with the point made by Ch'ng about English-language media's emphasis on international power relations in its reporting, through which it underlines Malaysia's perspective as a country "sitting at the intersection of a range of global relations" (Ch'ng 2016, 236).

Fourth, one should not overlook the insights offered by stories with minority themes. Amidst a flood of news that placed China in a favorable light, these stories with themes such as "sovereignty issue" and "geopolitics" shed light on the concerns that cast a shadow over Malaysia-China ties. The low visibility of these reports was likely caused by the meaning-fixing practice or deliberate interference of the ruling class so as to limit interpretations related to certain topics (Hall 2005). Even so, the mere act of reporting the issues might still benefit the public "in ways unintended by the communicators and unwelcomed by the policymakers" (Parenti 1986, 208). This is all the more relevant in the case of Najib's visit to China: the selling-off controversy, together with the 1MDB scandal, is in fact part of a larger governance issue that plagues the country. Although mostly found on private television, it can be said that reports with "negative" themes are a showcase of how the Malaysian media put to use the limited freedom available, the very same practice that could not be discounted in the defeat of Najib's administration in the 2018 general election.

Finally, it is possible for the local media to overcome the restrictions imposed by the authorities and influence content in a reverse manner. This is demonstrated in *8TV Mandarin News*' willingness to provide more reporting on the controversy surrounding the visit, which could result in a more mixed or even negative representation of China and the Malaysian government. This follows the revelation that the country's ethnic inequality has driven local Chinese media practitioners to challenge the rules of the game and make informing audiences their mission (Informant 2, interview with the author, November 22, 2018). The observation proves the comparatively independent reporting culture of the local Chinese-language media (Abbott and Givens 2015; Yang and Md. Sidin 2015). It indicates that Malaysian media coverage of China does not always tie to national interests and can be of service to community interests as well. It also attests to the argument that representation is a practice taking place between members of a culture (Hall 1997). It would appear that such connections between media practitioners and their audiences are what contribute to the variations in how the Malay, Mandarin, and English news covered Najib's visit to China. After all, a media practitioner coming from the same cultural background as the audience would be more likely to have the same worldview

and use the same conceptual map when creating content. This underlines the role of culture in linking news production (journalists) and news consumption (audiences), and the fact that culture is as important as power in the making of news and media representations (Hall 2005; Van Gorp 2007).

Conclusion

The representation of China in Malaysian television coverage of Najib's 2016 visit to China is positive, despite episodes of stories that carry negative connotations for China's image. The outcome points to a state-dominated narrative, with instances of the press seeking to inform their audiences despite the restrictions they face. While "China" is an important element in the coverage of the visit, the portrayal of the country has not been much impacted by Chinese media's Go Global efforts. Instead, it is shaped by the social, cultural, and political environments of Malaysia. In other words, the representation of China found in this study is a product of the local context created by multiple intertwined factors "as complex as Malaysian society itself" (Yeoh 2019, 416) rather than one influenced by Beijing's interests.

It is unclear whether differences in the ways the news programs in this study cover China would have any implications on how different ethnic groups in Malaysia view China, and how that might impact society in the long run. This follows concerns about the potential effects of ethnically and linguistically divided media offerings on national integration (Amira 2006). Admittedly, this study is far from perfect. To start, there is the issue of subjectivity due to the methods used—content analysis, which involves subjective interpretation of data by the researcher (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Wimmer and Dominick 2011), and in-depth interviews where the responses are built upon the subjectivity of interviewee and interviewer (Qu and Dumay 2011, 256). The representativeness is also limited because of the small sample size used and the exclusion of samples from pay television and Tamil-language news. Therefore, the outcome can hardly be generalized as the representation of China on Malaysian television as a whole.

Despite the shortcomings, this study has managed to achieve its objective of providing insight into the representation of China in Malaysia, as well as narrowing the gap in the literature, which needs more Southeast Asian perspectives. For future studies, it is recommended that this research be carried out on a larger scale to cover other news topics or sectors of the media industry for a more comprehensive picture of China's representation. The study can also be replicated in other countries in the region to better understand how China is covered and perceived in these societies. Finally, it would be

interesting to see a study being done on the influence of media on their audiences by looking at the relationship between choices of media outlets and perceptions of China.

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List of Informants

Informant 1 (TV news presenter/producer), May 23, 2018.
Informant 2 (TV news presenter/former newspaper journalist), November 22, 2018.
Informant 3 (Radio station assistant manager/former broadcast journalist), December 1, 2018.
Informant 4 (TV program producer/former broadcast journalist), December 5, 2018.

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VILASHINI SOMIAH

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Vilashini Somiah, the author of *Irregular Migrants and the Sea at the Borders of Sabah, Malaysia: Pelagic Alliance*, makes her book-publishing debut on a topic that is perhaps the most controversial in Sabah today. Undocumented, now called irregular, migrants in Sabah are known to come primarily from two neighboring countries, the Philippines and Indonesia. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, in a state population of just over 4 million people, a single definitive decision on whether or not to integrate these migrants into the somewhat hostile Sabahan society has not been forthcoming. As a result, the Malaysian state resorts almost exclusively to deportation and repatriation to curb migrant numbers—and yet, at the risk of capture, irregular migrants continue to make the perilous and covert sea journey back to Sabah. Somiah contends through her investigations at her field site of Sandakan, on Sabah's eastern coast, that Philippine-descent migrants are in fact returning, because for them the locus for home includes the Sabahan border and the sea. In other words, irregular migrants keep coming to Sabah simply because it *is* home.

The book begins with situating the migrant at the border. Over time, what results is the familiar setting that goes along with this habitus: quarantine stations, enforcement personnel and police who conduct raids and set up roadblocks, and immigration agents from both Malaysia and the Philippines. As details of informants' firsthand experiences start to emerge, it becomes evident that the historical fact of Sabah's lease to the Suluk royal descendants (an oft-cited reason in the media as the impetus for human movement at the Sabah-Philippines border) is not altogether relevant to migrants. Instead, the sense of belonging to Sabah and claims on Sabah as being home prevail. In Chapter 2 Somiah explains how her interlocutors understand the idea of home as a perfect coalescing of the sea and land, so that the approximate term used by interlocutors for their place of belonging, *sini* (here) (p. 37), suffices. By bringing the sea into focus and demonstrating a pattern of migration that is guided by the sea, Somiah shows how the water imbues migrants with enough power and agency to counter the repatriation and security culture they are subjected to on land.

The core chapters of the book draw readers to appreciate poignant stories from each migrant generation, beginning with the wives and mothers (Chapter 3) and the men who attempt the return (Chapter 4). Somiah illustrates how women left behind by deported migrant men might seek to space out their pain and loss by the timing of the tide: in and through the sea-home, women seemingly inert and numb experience being comforted, reassured, and healed. Once the women are buoyed by the spirit of resilience that they gain from the sea, the agency within them becomes key to either spur them on to moving farther inland or to help them cast aside their past and so create a distance from the uncertainty of a returning/non-returning mate. There is a striking parallel with the deported men: since they were born in Sabah, many spend time working in the Philippines in unfamiliar places collecting just enough money before making the return journey. If their gamble pays off, their overwhelming desire to go home to Sabah to be back in the arms of their loved ones is well justified even if they are emotionally suspended until the reunion, and even if deportation reoccurs. In the backdrop, locals show a keen sense of their counterpart's humanity, and their compassion moves them to facilitate the cyclic nature of migrant departures and arrivals unto Sabah's shores, albeit their role may, in some aspects, be more than complicit.

The pelagic alliance starts to wane somewhat for younger generations as harsh realities await Sabah's migrant children, as described in the penultimate chapter. The sites of unmasking the otherwise invisible migrant identity, at the roadblock and the detention center, explained earlier on in the book now juxtapose sharply against the alternative learning centers that school-going migrant children appear to thrive in, and the youth hanging-out spaces in the town square. These are sites for camaraderie and identity making, respite and agency, however temporal, and yet they are not enough to lift the spirits of migrant youths. Longing for legitimacy and acceptance in their birthplace of Sabah, the youths are concerned about living in limbo with each passing year. Lacking identity documents, they are barred from further education and skills training despite wanting to engage in a fruitful way with the rest of Sabahan society. In the informants' own words, Somiah illustrates the untenable future of migrant children in Sabah: marginalized by the limitations of their social mobility, in order to resist and cope with their maligned life histories, migrant youths attempt to subvert the discrimination against their existence and call themselves *antu* (ghosts) (p. 126), the term for a deep-sea monster that is symbolic of the deep despair and frustration they must feel.

As the book ends, the narrative of longing for home and belonging leads readers to ponder on Philippine migrants' indigeneity in Sabah and how it should not be easily discounted. As the author notes, "Human migration is fluid, open and constant, but nation-states impose restrictions on these movements, making these experiences hard, rigid and static" (p. 162). Somiah reiterates the complex migrant-sea nexus and appeals for greater human rights for migrant communities in Sabah; some of her suggestions include interviewing irregular migrants of Indonesian descent to round out her study. Border migration in Sabah, being an intractable situation for over fifty years,

undoubtedly deserves a fresh look.

Overall, *Irregular Migrants and the Sea at the Borders of Sabah, Malaysia: Pelagic Alliance* is a compelling volume from start to finish. Rarely has the border migration situation in Sabah been seen through the eyes of migrant communities, at least not so far in a book-length examination. By bringing to the fore the powerful and evocative images of her informants, Somiah offers valuable insights into the cry of migrants to belong amid the heavy culture of surveillance, and compels readers to sympathize with irregular migrants, to see them as humans with children and families and not merely as governmental statistics. As such, Somiah does not stick to the traditional approach of treating each subject matter—the land, the sea, and migrant people—separately or chronologically. Her focus on weaving the unique experiences of her informants into the narrative deserves much credit. So too does her care with language: richly described, with much emphasis on nuances expressed in the local vernacular and written in a narrative that is wholly accessible, this book is a delight for the anthropologist reader. It is also versatile enough to be used as a how-to in ethnographic study to train university students keen on exploring societal issues involving migration and belonging.

In the end, the migrant story in Sabah may always be tainted by the illegality of undocumented entry and re-entry; but perhaps one of the most important contributions of this book is how it discusses the various forms of under-documentation that plague migrants. Through no fault of their own, Philippine descendants of undocumented migrants who are born in Sabah do not own any form of identification as proof of citizenship that is acceptable by either the Malaysian state or the Philippine government. While Somiah does not claim to have solutions for the problem, this book could be a meaningful place to start a conversation on what it means to truly belong in Sabah in the present time.

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Environmental Movements and Politics of the Asian Anthropocene

Paul Jobin, Ming-sho Ho, and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, eds.
Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021.

With ecological crises on a planetary scale threatening the mass destruction of human and non-human species, the book *Environmental Movements and Politics of the Asian Anthropocene*, edited by Paul Jobin, Ming-sho Ho, and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, is timely in noting the multiple dimensions in East and Southeast Asian environmental practices and movements for democratization

and democratic consolidation. Given the diversity of sociopolitical contexts and governance systems across the region, such as democracy, flawed democracy, and authoritarianism, this book raises two fundamental questions: (i) How have different sociopolitical contexts contributed to spreading organizations, practices, principles, and challenges of the environmental movement in various parts of the region? (ii) How have environmental movements shaped domestic politics and environmental policies in the countries of East and Southeast Asia and vice versa? Each contributor provides a qualitative assessment and theoretical discussion involving one of nine countries: Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

Environmental movements in East and Southeast Asia consider the ecological crisis as an integral aspect of democratization. In other words, democratization cannot be expected to move forward without environmental measures. From this viewpoint, this book is theoretically driven by the concept of the Anthropocene, introduced at the beginning of the twenty-first century by the Western scholars Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer. The Anthropocene designates the end of the Holocene while signaling that Earth is entering a new epoch with the unabated proliferation of destructive man-made activities. This neologism does not represent an ambition to celebrate human supremacy. Instead, humans must be made aware of environment-related issues and activities that are harmful to their lives. Examples are global warming, the rapid loss of biodiversity, and mass extinction of earthly species. Worthy of note is this book's dialectical synthesis representing the Anthropocene as a concept whose original significance is not limited to Western territories alone but extensively incorporates other newly industrialized regions such as countries in Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia. This conceptual expansion enables the volume's editors to legitimize the claim in the introductory chapter that the Anthropocene is a non-Eurocentric idea (p. 7). Entwined with the escalation in the loss of biological diversity of indigenous peoples and nonhuman species, environmentally harmful scenarios motivate the sociopolitical mobilizations responsible for anthropic activities in some parts of Asia. Two points are worth noting. First, "Asian Anthropocene" represents neither the invention of the Asian-style Anthropocene nor the Anthropocene in the Asian Way. Second, the Asian Anthropocene cannot be studied in isolation from other two quintessential theoretical accounts developed in the 1970s in the fields of social movement and political sociology, namely, Environmental Justice (EJ) and Political Opportunity Theory (POT) (p. 13).

Yet, while making their arguments on the concerned issues, contributors often endeavor to conflate EJ and POT with the Anthropocene. This book proceeds with nine case studies based on differing awarenesses of spatial historiographies and temporalities. Illuminating the Asian Anthropocene through selected case studies, each contributor's approach is associated with the frameworks of EJ, POT, and eco-authoritarianism.

EJ represents a radical movement—a sociocultural campaign pioneered by environmental

activists, universally extending justice to nonhuman beings. Its essence of thought in promoting justice from below corresponds well with the nature of environmental activists. Paul Jobin, the author of Chapter 2 on Taiwan, shows that EJ is explicit in the scenario where Taiwan's environmental movement continues its political practice of promoting and defending democracy (pp. 14, 22). Jobin has coined the term "eco-nationalism," designating "a civic form of ecological nationalism" (p. 39), expressing the view that environmental activists are privileged to stimulate and fulfill this principle. In Taiwan, the indigenous peoples' movement for the recognition of land rights and the community of farmers suffering from Formosa Steel are noted as exemplifying the ecological nationalism associated with EJ (pp. 66–67).

Francisco Magno also addresses this dimension of EJ in Chapter 5 on the Philippines (p. 140). Incorporating matters of equity and justice into an environmental issue as a condition for democratization in the Philippines is dangerous. Magno notes how environmental activists, faced with the alliance between pro-neoliberalism state officials and avaricious oligarchs, have dealt with pollution protection, local ecology, and livelihood systems.

In Chapter 7 Fadzilah Majid Cooke and Adnan A. Hezri view EJ as a distinct concept for understanding environmental activism in Malaysia (p. 225). For Cooke and Hezri, if EJ is promoted as a mutual framework involving state officials, civil society, and environmental activists, it will mitigate the issues of poverty and social inequality while enhancing the rights of indigenous people such as the inhabitants of Lun Bawang in north-central Borneo.

POT is another theoretical framework connected to the Asian Anthropocene. Although not entirely separate from EJ, POT is primarily considered a political movement that strives to release itself from the shackles of state-centric political repression to ignite the possible pathways or opportunities for politico-sociological change. However, POT also estimates the constraints and setbacks—not only in relation to state repression but also in relation to democratic movements unconcerned with environmental issues—that may hamper such social change. Such constraints can be viewed either as setbacks to anthropocentric activities or as active participation in creating windows of opportunity to reverse the existing human practices detrimental to Earth. The POT framework is indirectly discussed in Chapter 3 on Hong Kong. China's political influence since 1978 has driven Hong Kong to undertake a nonaggressive stance that enables political institutions to implement orders for environmental problem-solving. Such nonconfrontational yet institutionalized behavior is a feature of "managerial environmentalism" (p. 83). However, James Wong and Alvin So suggest an anti-authoritarian civic stance and introduce the alternative approach of "radical environmentalism," a concept that ushers a new pathway to rearticulate the environment and democracy in the non-state-based political agenda enunciated by local groups (pp. 83, 102).

Chapter 6 on Indonesia by Suharko Suharko discusses "Post-New Order" Indonesia through the performance of environmental nongovernmental organizations tasked with alerting the public on issues related to deforestation and climate emergencies (p. 172). Post-New Order Indonesia

reflects environmental activists' attempt to expand their political scope on the principles of civic and political rights for vulnerable groups (pp. 175, 192). To some extent, Post-New Order Indonesia enables a vision of democratization constituted in the environmental movement because activists are looking for a window of opportunity while assessing the threats and barriers imposed by the government to the movement and certainly eco-social change (p. 175).

Chapter 8 on Thailand by Jakkrit Sangkhamanee scrutinizes the enthusiastic activities of environmental movements in the country, dating back to the permission for civic participation stipulated in the 1997 constitution. Local NGOs and villagers once formed a close alliance to tackle environmental issues. However, such a cooperative stance has given way to ambivalence and a lack of trust because Thai populism and autocratic systems tend to interfere in cohesive partnerships (p. 254). The loss of legitimacy of NGOs and the Thai government's refusal to redirect environmental problem-solving are tremendous forces impeding the efforts of the environmental movement. Also, the recent democratization of Thai youths has allowed many liberal agendas to reshape Thailand's sociopolitical system; but environmental issues are outside the scope of the reforms. Youths' preoccupation with matters such as sexual freedom, fashion, hairstyles, feminism, and so on suggests a lack of concern with environmental matters. This leads Sangkhamanee to observe the nihilism of the environmental movement in Thailand while simultaneously encouraging ecological concerns as a part of Thailand's democratization process in the long run (p. 255).

Eco-authoritarianism is detailed by Jobin in the concluding chapter (pp. 334–339). The eco-authoritarianism paradigm represents the government's rigid control over climate change and environmental policies. According to the principles of eco-authoritarianism, the neoliberal market agenda, which seems to ignore the human rights of individuals, causes damage to the environment. Problem-solving is achieved only by resorting to state centrism while vanquishing the role of non-state actors in matters such as civil society and environmental policies. Xi Jinping's China's "environmental governance" in dealing with global warming is an example of eco-authoritarianism. But China's Belt and Road Initiative endangers the ecosystem in Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Imperative to this discussion is Chapter 10 on Cambodia. According to James Wang, civil society barely succeeds in Cambodia's neopatrimonial state, a regime that is politically engaged with the influence of China, and this represents a predicament that worsens the condition of local inhabitants (p. 320).

Chapter 9 by Stephan Ortmann examines Vietnam's environmental activism under the one-party system, in which the party seems dominant in fostering solutions to environmental problems. Vietnam's civil society must avoid a confrontational approach like the managerial system institutionalized in Hong Kong and presented by Wong and So in this volume. Despite the government's tolerance of activism, its fear that activism will challenge the status quo remains unabated; thus, the government has decided to reclaim its authority in dealing with environmental issues (pp. 262–263).

Chapter 4 on Singapore by Harvey Neo highlights a case study in which the environmental movement has been rolled back because of the country's emulation of China's eco-authoritarianism model (p. 133). As the government of Singapore can manage environmental activism effectively, this practice may be described as "post-politics"—where despite the dissidence of citizens, the ruling political power predominates. Given people's presumed ignorance, politics is managed by experts, technocrats, and the state. Neo seems to focus on this streamlined way of thinking, with any rebellious citizens being subtly managed by the post-political government of Singapore (p. 133).

In summary, this well-written book with nine convincing qualitative case studies offers a round-up of the relationships between governance systems, environmental movements, state policy, human rights, and democratization in different parts of Asia. The volume succeeds in stimulating a fruitful empirical and theoretical discussion on the Anthropocene in Asia by offering in-depth analyses on the impacts of the environmental movement on state administration and how all stakeholders have been expected to move forward for ecological advancement. This book is useful for anyone interested in understanding the Anthropocene debate in general, as well as the relations between environmentalism, domestic politics, and democracy in East and Southeast Asia. The book can also be seen as a starting point for further debate on the Asian Anthropocene in areas that are not limited to countries or sovereign states. The significance of the Asian Anthropocene can be extended to the phenomenon taking place in islands, borders, and stateless areas, including uncharted territories in the Asian region.

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Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820–1980

Gregor Benton and Hong Liu
Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.

Despite repeated attention being given to the significance of overseas Chinese communities as the world's largest diaspora, its historiography has not yet reached a level comparable with the scholarship of Western migration histories. One reason is the lack of written historical sources; in particular, relevant information about ordinary emigrants' lives at home and abroad is inadequate to elaborate on the historical evolution of overseas Chinese socioeconomic activities. To bridge this gap, Chinese scholars have primarily sought to collect private incoming letters—*qiaopi* (僑批)—sent by Chinese emigrants from their sojourning regions and analyze them to derive historical features and transformations of overseas Chinese businesses and societies. Additionally, after

qiaopi was inscribed into UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2013, the significance of the vast collections drew wider attention from global scholarship. Under these circumstances, the cornerstone work by Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Dear China*, aims to suggest the significance of *qiaopi* as historical sources and summarize the research by mainly Chinese academics on overseas Chinese socioeconomic history in an English-language publication.

According to the book's introduction, *qiaopi* (*qiao* means "sojourner" and *pi* means "letter") is a generic term for the letters sent home by Chinese emigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Significantly, they were sent as proof of remittance. Although it was assumed that most *qiaopi* were discarded, numerous letters remain, and quite a few are stored in archival collections by Chinese scholars, archivists, and grassroots historians. In the past few decades, while many *qiaopi*-based academic studies have been published in Chinese, their contributions have not been acknowledged internationally and a comprehensive understanding has not yet been established owing to a lack of English publications. Therefore, this work aims to marshal an array of existing studies' findings regarding overseas Chinese remittances and provide an overview of the long-run development of *the qiaopi* trade in the past two centuries.

While many Western studies on transnational Chinese migration have used national statistical data and are based on the conventional nation-state paradigm, new Chinese research has paid particular attention to "people without written history." The latter body of literature has utilized *qiaopi* collections to investigate not only the socioeconomic but also the cultural development of overseas Chinese migration. Furthermore, the inclusion of *qiaopi* in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2013 has vitalized international academic interest. The second and third chapters address historical changes in the *qiaopi* trade pattern and mechanism between China's southern coastal provinces and maritime Southeast Asia, with a focus on the long-run and overlapping evolution from *shuike* (merchant couriers) to *piju* (remittance shops) over the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. It has been highlighted that while adapting to Western-led new remittance technologies, such as exchange banking operations and postal services, the *qiaopi* trade was not completely transformed into transnational capitalism based on the institutionalized trust/market system, but essentially sustained the conventional affinity-based networks across homelands and settlements. The next chapter illuminates the diversity of remittance modes and migration networks among various communities in China and abroad; certain groups had closer connections with particular continents, which were nurtured through the long-standing development of the relationship between China and the respective settlers' lands. Chapter 5 focuses on the role of *qiaopi* trade in the modern Chinese economy and politics; it played a crucial role in China's balance of payments adjustments and contributed to the anti-Japanese war and postwar rise of black markets through fund remittances. A little-researched aspect of *qiaopi*, charity, is also examined as an underlying factor in the network's sustainability across space and time (Chapter 6). The remarkable features of *qiaopi* are discerned by comparing them with the existing scholar-

ship on European migrants' letters (Chapter 7).

The outstanding contribution of this study is that it highlights the potential significance of *qiaopi* in bridging the literature gap between studies using modern Western materials and those using vernacular sources. As mentioned in the book, the intra-Asian and global vitality of transnational Chinese migration has drawn greater scholarly attention since the 1990s, as the Chinese economy was opened to the world. Earlier empirical research was heavily dependent on historical records managed by the ruling authorities, particularly by Western (colonial) governments. Consequently, the historiography shaped by those studies tended to emphasize the emergence of Chinese migration as a telecoupling phenomenon between China and its diaspora regions, or the success stories of overseas Chinese businessmen. As for non-Western local sources—for instance, old archives of the eighteenth-century Batavian Chinese community and prewar Japanese investigation reports (translated into English and widely used, e.g., Hicks 1993)—they have been acknowledged as valuable records but are quite limited in their period of interest and focal points. Consequently, "overseas Chinese networks" were stressed as a fundamental factor in the rise of "Chinese *guanxi* capitalism," but their actual mechanism and operations were left untouched as a black box due to the dearth of primary sources that could shed light on the practical activities of network participants. Under these circumstances, *qiaopi* has great potential to enable us to find out the personal motivations for not only economic profits but also cultural and emotional acclimation facilitated by affinity-based networks, which were supposed to be essential for the sustainable development of Chinese migration and remittances across time and space. This book introduces some English-translated letters that are useful for prospective research alongside another volume edited by the authors (Benton *et al.* 2020).

Another significant challenge addressed by this book, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3, is shedding light on the development of the *qiaopi* trade in response to economic globalization throughout the modern period. Based on previous studies, the authors attempt to elucidate the long-term transformation of remittance businesses by key players, namely, from *suike* to *piju*, over the two centuries. They argue that it was not a linear development from conventional general merchants to innovative specialist entrepreneurs, but that those multiple modes of business coexisted and gradually evolved into suitable forms based on their incessant challenges and adaptations to the dramatically changing intra-Asian and global economic milieu. It has been assumed that the 1850s–70s was a crucial period for the increase in overseas Chinese remittances because the massive emigration to South China Sea littoral and Gold-Rush countries began in the aftermath of the 1840s–50s conclusions of unequal treaties and Western full-fledged economic expansion in a broad area of Asia. According to the authors' arguments, however, the fundamental system of sending letters together with remittances was rooted in the traditional mode of *qiaopi* trade run by *suike* who were vigorously engaged in China-Southeast Asia maritime commerce since the eighteenth century; their dialect- and kinship-based connections between homelands and diasporas continued

to work as a vital (informal) institution underlying the remarkable post-1850s growth of migration and remittances. In other words, it was not just that the expansion of Western political and economic influence led to an increase in overseas Chinese remittances, but the conventional *qiaopi* trade autonomously developed into more efficient undertakings while coordinating the financial and social nexus shaped by personal communications via innumerable letters in and out of China. This argument echoes the emerging historiography in the literature of global economic history, which advocates the significance of the first wave of globalization through the long nineteenth century.

This fascinating volume by Benton and Liu proposes many noteworthy arguments for Southeast Asian history research because it pays heed to overseas Chinese society as one of the key factors in the region's historical changes. From the viewpoint of Southeast Asian socioeconomic history, I would like to raise two further points. The first is the relevance to the "Chinese Century," one of the significant arguments in modern Southeast Asian history. It has been argued that maritime Southeast Asia's production and commerce were greatly revitalized in response to Chinese economic and trade expansion in 1740–1840, and such commercial development (its momentum lingered until around 1870) preceded the growth of intra-Asian and Western long-distance trade during the post-1870 high colonial period. As described in the volume, *suike* as couriers of goods, sojourners, and letters (along with money) were born from such a commercial boom, and so it may be said that the long-standing development of *qiaopi* trade originated from the socioeconomic dynamism of the Chinese Century. How can we then interpret the 1850s–60s coincidences of the inception of *suike* business transformation and the termination of the Chinese Century? Indeed, statistical tools document that while Southeast Asia's merchandise exports to China gradually diminished after the mid-nineteenth century, the latter started to send massive labor forces to the former in exchange for incoming remittances. Did these changes indicate a shift of those regions' positions in the modern global economy or the fall of China as an old giant economy and the rise of Southeast Asia as a new frontier? Thus, an exploration of the contemporaneous evolutions of *qiaopi* trade and the Chinese Century will not only serve us with a crucial understanding of the China-Southeast Asia historical interconnectedness, but also provide an insight into the significance of intra-Asian linkages in world history.

Second, I would say that it is imperative to reconsider the significance of affinity-based overseas Chinese networks in connection with the effectiveness of Westernized formal institutions, particularly in Southeast Asian colonial states. The authors stress the important function of geo-consanguine connections—not only for financial operations, but also for the self-identification of emigrants as members of a home-based community that guaranteed security of life in remote countries. This cultural and emotional sense of belonging promoted the incessant flow of emigrants and large-scale remittances not only as allowances but also as philanthropy. However, privately operated emigration and remittance businesses gradually diminished after the governments of

Communist China and independent Southeast Asian nations sought to control them in the postwar era. Conversely, did the immigration and financial policies of Western colonial governments promote overseas Chinese businesses? For instance, the Straits Settlements government established the Chinese Protectorate Office in 1879 to regulate Chinese immigration and secure the lives and rights of Chinese immigrants in the territories under British rule. In other words, the British colonial authority attempted to maintain social order by applying a legalized institution to Chinese populations. Thus, colonial Southeast Asia was the realm where the Western legal system interacted intensively with the Asian social order. How did such a formal institution affect the rise of the *qiaopi* trade? Furthermore, was there no positive reaction from individual emigrants who became aware of the effectiveness of Westernized institutions? Do *qiaopi* tell us something about those emigrants' "modernized" behavior? By exploring the effect of Western colonial institutions on the modern growth of overseas Chinese business, we can more deeply contextualize the latter's development within Southeast Asian and global historiography.

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