Pulang Kampung (Returning Home): Circuits of Mobility from a Chinese Town in Indonesia

by

Emily Zoe Hertzman

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Anthropology Department
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation explains some common cultural logics underpinning widespread mobility out of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, a majority Chinese Indonesian town in Indonesian Borneo. I focus on the primary domestic and international migrations taking place, and describe the concepts used to make sense of these sojourns. I study the mobilities of this Hakka Chinese Indonesian population in a context of current post-Suharto era politics, as well as the “diasporic” status of this community in relation to the discourses and developments of “rising China” and overseas Chinese transnationalism. Members of this community are influenced by these broader trends as they draw from their unique cultural resources in order to chart pathways into both real and imagined futures of prosperity. In Singkawang, the mobilities of the Chinese community are framed in terms of economic necessity and social mobility, which are talked about using the language of “becoming one’s own boss” and “looking for a better life”. These aspirations are constructed as the most important life goals, to the extent that other occupational possibilities become practically unimaginable. Private business ownership has become a hegemonic
aspiration and is best understood not merely as a form of livelihood, but also as a kind of quintessential adulthood subjectivity intimately linked to one’s ability to attain social status within the community. Some people entertain fantasies of becoming cosmopolitan transnational citizens, but experience practical limitations in transforming these fantasies into realities overseas. In relation to these limitations, and in relation to the powerful draw of home (Ind. *kampung halaman*), sojourns ultimately reinforce a connection to the city of Singkawang. The desire to return is as strong as the compulsion to leave, because of strong affective bonds with the hometown. This dissertation describes the process by which people make and remake themselves in relation to space and place in a context of mobility. I argue that migrants must continually reevaluate their concepts of home and away, by coming to terms with the fact that the ways they have changed as people during the migration process have also changed the contents of their categorizations of home and away.
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Introduction

This dissertation is about the ways people make sense of their transnational mobility and the ways that their encounters overseas, are, in turn, used to make sense of themselves, their lives and their home(s). My approach to understanding mobilities emphasizes the ways that people conceptualize and talk about their decisions to leave or not leave, to return or not return, and to leave again, often to new places. In this study I present several circuits of mobility in which Hakka Chinese Indonesians travel from Singkawang, a small town in Indonesian Borneo, to metropolises in Asia and, further afield, and back and forth again. I show how through the process of leaving, living overseas, returning and leaving again, cultural imaginaries of the family, the ethnic group, the nation, and the middle-class, are challenged and reworked by experiences of difference and recalibrations of the self in new contexts.

I use the term mobility to refer to the ways that people both conceptualize and actualize their movements of short and long range, and short and long term. I am purposefully choosing the word mobility, as opposed to migration, in order to avoid the connotation that people’s movements are precisely planned, permanent and from point A to point B. In reality, mobilities are significantly more complicated than origin to destination theories portray; the idea that there are sending and receiving countries with distinct push and pull factors alone is not enough to understand the role of the changing self in multiple shifting contexts, such as the family, the hometown, the big city, the social network, the workplace, and the deportation center. I also use the term mobility because of its semiotic affiliation with the concept of social mobility. In this dissertation I describe people’s physical travels between places as well as the ways that they imagine these movements, specifically in terms of ways that people in these mobility circuits employ discourses of upward social mobility. This connection between mobility and social mobility is not unique to this group of people but is a central aspect of migration and migration studies more broadly, and it expresses itself in distinctive ways among migrants and potential migrants from Singkawang, as I elaborate in the pages that follow.
Twenty years ago, Arjun Appadurai identified the large-scale international movement of people as one of the main “global flows” or “scapes” responsible for making the current world order increasingly interconnected (1996). At that time, he proposed that modern social imaginaries were based on five overlapping “scapes”: ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, ideoscape and mediascape. This way of thinking has been widely influential in the social sciences and more recently John Urry has devised a similar typology outlining five different kinds of mobilities—corporeal, objects, imaginative, virtual, and communicative—as a way of characterizing modern social life (2007). The recognition that flows of people are one of the most important vectors of social change around the world is no less powerful than it was in the 1990s when Appadurai and others were theorizing globalization (see for example, Clifford 1988; Giddens 1990; Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Hannerz 1990). These conceptualizations of mobility help to destabilize the idea that people, place and culture necessarily intersect in a straight-forward manner. They take account of processes of globalization and recognize the fact that more people than ever before are moving around, forging relationships across borders and negotiating livelihoods and identities transnationally (Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994).

In this transnational theoretical context, mobility is viewed as a dynamic process intimately connected with changing social structures and new social imaginaries. Migrants are no longer viewed as an aberration or exception to an otherwise dominant socio-geographical arrangement in which people, culture, nation and territory are conflated. Indeed, mobility is seen as a basic condition of modern social life affecting a wide range of contexts (Hannerz 1990; Urry 2002) from remote villages (Gardiner 1993) to burgeoning metropolises (Vora 2013); from those who are mobile, to those who are immobile; from those who move and those who are exposed to the transnational spaces of others (Jackson, Crange and Dwyer 2004). Many different forms of movement and multi-sitedness are being studied and theorized (Appadurai 1996; Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc 1994; Hannerz 1990; Marcus 1998; Ong 1996; Vertovec 2010) and provide an important corrective to previous migration studies paradigms, which viewed migration as an exception to the more normal and ideal condition of staying put in one’s “place of origin” (Papastergiadis 2009). This view was based on a set of assumptions about people’s spatial behaviour that implied a methodological nationalism, which is no longer (nor perhaps ever was) representative of people’s actual patterns of mobility.
According to Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) what distinguishes contemporary mobility is the creation of transnational spaces characterized broadly as having physical, social and imaginative aspects. They assert the importance of these transnational spaces and show how more people than previously imagined are experiencing these spaces, whether or not they are transnationals. In this dissertation I extend their theorization by revealing the continued importance of specific locations within that broader conceptualization of transnational space. The argument that I am making is intended to counterbalance what I see as a problem inherent in the idea of transnational space. As a multidimensional and loosely defined concept, ‘transnational space’ has a tendency to seem vague and deterritorialized. When put into conversation with studies that highlight the flexibility, creativity and hybridity of transnationals, the impression is given that place and geography are increasingly less important to people. My evidence suggests otherwise. I will argue that specific physical places in the world, which are made meaningful to people who are born there, who leave, who return and who imagine aspects of those places as a part of themselves, continue to have power in their lives, in the lives of their families and their communities.

In this dissertation I highlight the importance of particular locations that are a part of a broader transnational space but in a way that avoids turning ‘place’ into an essential anchoring point, something static, permanent or original. To do so would be inaccurate and undo much of the work that has been done to destabilize the notion of place. Rather than suggest that places have essential fixed characteristics that juxtapose with the more shifting symbolic realm of transnational space, I want to focus on the attachments that people make to places, the ways that notions of home are constructed and the continued significance of places in a period of heightened transnational mobility. While place figures largely in this dissertation, it is primarily the experiences of people and their changing sense of self, family and community that I explore in this dissertation. The significance of particular places in a geography of transnational mobility is seen through their experiences and their conceptualizations of home and away.

In order to understand the nature of space and place, alongside people’s experiences, I draw on a key insight from Doreen Massey’s book For Space (2005). Massey argues that our
understanding of space has been fundamentally flawed: that space is not now, nor has it ever
been, a surface upon which people are evenly spread according to a master logic of nationalism,
globalization, or modernization. On the contrary, space is something which is constituted in
relations of heterogeneity. She argues that we cannot take space for granted, as something stable
and similar around the world. Rather we need to understand specific spaces as socially
constructed and dynamic. Massey calls space a “story so far” to invoke the idea that space has
been constituted through relationships and continues to be constituted in that way. It is not a self-
evident object, although it has been treated that way. Nor should the concept of place (that is,
spaces that have been made meaningful by people, their ideas and attachments) be thought of as
the containers of all that is local and vernacular, and then contrasted with a notion of the global,
as an abstract and universal entity. Instead Massey suggests we think about the ‘event of space’,
or the ways that multiple trajectories play out to mutually constitute places. In fact, her
theorization of space is very similar to current anthropological understandings of the constitution
of subjects, and cultural imaginaries, that is, as assemblages of multiple heterogeneous forces
(Ong and Collier 2008).

In order to understand the mutual constitution of space and subjectivities I also employ Henri
Lefebvre’s influential theorization of space and place, in which space is seen as fundamentally
socially constructed and the cultural meanings given to specific places are determined through
negotiation by actors with a range of identities and interests who are connected through relations
of power. In this dissertation I identify specific places that are nodes that exist in a broader social
field which is social constructed, including by large economic and political actions, and through
everyday lived experiences (Lefebvre 1992; Hubbard and Kitchin 2011). In this way the ‘event
of space’, or the ‘story so far’, is created through people’s experiences, the ways they live and
move around various places, but also from the debris of tangled histories, local articulations of
national politics, the vagaries of the global economy, cultural scripts of religion and cosmology,
family norms and intergenerational patterns of mobility.

Jackson, Crange and Dwyer (2004) observe that there has been an excessive focus on networks,
urban politics, social movements and emergent cultural forms within the new mobilities
paradigm (Urry 2002). This focus, they argue, has happened at the expense of a focus on space.
They argue that space is central to transnationalism, because transnational practices are constituted within certain places, and because transnational spaces, where social forces and ideological formations intersect with new people and places, are increasingly being experienced by many different kinds of people, not solely those identified as transnationals. Migration along the US-Mexico border, for example, is understood in radically different ways than migration within the Asia Pacific. The differences have to do with regimes of value used to understand groups of people and their activities, the ways that places are linked by colonial histories and post-colonial relations of power, and contemporary economic geographies. Whereas migration from Mexico to the US is heavily criminalized and often stigmatized as “illegal” migration, the arrival of thousands of migrants from Asia Pacific into the US and Canada is often encouraged and celebrated as an entrepreneurial asset to both the sending and receiving countries. Aihwa Ong has written extensively about these differential valuations of people, for example, in her definition of the concept of graduated citizenship (Ong 2006; 1996). Specific regimes of value are ascribed to particular groups of people and migratory flows, which also have a spatial dimension and create distinct spatial forms. For example, the wall being built along the US-Mexico border or the building of new international airports in Hong Kong, Los Angeles and Vancouver become physical manifestations of these regimes of value. In Southeast Asia, the expansion of regional airports, particularly low cost carrier terminals, to accommodate large-scale air travel made possible by discount airlines is also changing local geographies. In Indonesia specifically, special arrival and departure processing areas for international domestic workers have been built in some larger airports (Lindquist 2012). The point that Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) make so forcefully is that particular geographies have unique spatialities and temporalities that should not be left out of analyses of transnationalism. This is also consonant with Massey’s understanding of space.

This dissertation is an ethnographic portrait of a community that is at once remote and at the same time highly mobile and dispersed around the world. It is about the ways that people construct deep attachments to a concept of home that relies on a place-based conceptualization, while at the same time engaging in both short and long range travel, often playing with the possibilities of building more transnational lives. In order to present my case, I draw on Massey’s theorization of space, but also extend it to understand people and the meanings that they create about their mobilities as they move from home to away places and back and forth
again. Massey argues that space should not be taken for granted or treated as a thing, nor, I would like to argue, should the circuits within which people travel. Rather than view these as predetermined entities understood by, for example, national understandings of space, such as the Indonesian notion of *Tanah Air* (Ind. land and water) or the bifurcation of the local/global, I want to treat these as sites of construction and uncover the emic understandings of self and space. I focus on the everyday practices that come to constitute self-making and place-making. While this is partially a story about how a specific group of Chinese Indonesians exist in and take up space in Indonesia and in the world, it is also about movement and how movement has an effect on the constitutive relationships that create space. It is a story about the dynamics between people’s changing concepts of self in relation to places and in relation to the experiences that they have via their mobilities.

The scale of international migration and the rise of the transnational as a ubiquitous social figure has necessarily led to redefinitions of the concept of home. The idea that there are clearly defined homes to which people belong has been an implicit assumption built into previous studies of migration. However, recent attempts to theorize the concept of home have shifted away from something seen as physically locatable, towards something more akin to a moving frontier which people construct out of multiple fragments from various places and the non-territorial spaces where they find meaning (Brah 1996; Blunt 2004; Papastergiadis 2009). This new conceptualization of home is more abstract, complex and ambiguous, and does not rely on a single meaning or anchoring point. Home, in this sense is a symbolic field. Others have theorized the idea of home by changing the notion of home as a noun, i.e. home as homeland, into home as a verb, or as a process called “homing” (Brah 1996) in which people are seen as the active agents of constructing meanings, patterns of daily life, social and emotional attachments that give them a sense of belonging in the world. This theorization helps to avoid treating individuals as though they have, or ought to have one and only one unproblematic homeland (Brah 1996; Papastergiadis 2009). In each case, however, “ideas of home invoke a sense of place, and belonging . . . that is intimately tied to a sense of self” (Blunt 2004). In this dissertation I explore precisely how the sense of self in connection to place and ideas about home are transformed through mobility.
While I adopt an understanding of shifting and mobile aspects of the concept of home, I also acknowledge that such a conceptualization has a tendency to downplay the resilience of the more bounded and fixed interpretations of home (Ralph and Staeheli 2011; Morley 2001). People’s conceptualizations of home include aspects that are both sedentary and mobile, dynamic and moored (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Without treating home as a designated location, I show that even in an era characterized by widespread mobility, place-based metaphors continue to be poignant conceptualizations of home for many people.

While recognizing that migrants must adopt a certain amount of creativity and flexibility in order to construct meaningful lives in transnational space, I want to challenge the impression given that their existence in such space constitutes a condition of being “ungrounded” (Ong and Nonini 1997). Through the people in this study I have learned that home, imagined primarily as a physical place which possesses a unique social and cultural milieu, continues to exert a powerful influence within their lives. In this dissertation I describe a particular conceptualization of home that exists in Indonesia called the kampung halaman (Ind. home [literally translated as village front yard]). I will show how this place-based conceptualization of home continues to be central to people’s lives, plans and mobilities. Even while people are sojourning (Ind. merantau) they find ways to make their lives more grounded (as opposed to ungrounded) by applying some of the logics of sociality, family, and enterprise derived from their place-based conceptualizations of home (kampung halaman) while away. I will show how, within the migration cycle (from the stages of planning and imagining, to the stages of travelling and returning), people must constantly play catch-up with their own conceptualizations of “home” and “away” because their very presence in either the kampung halaman or di luar negeri (Ind. overseas) has the effect of changing the contents of those conceptualized categories. By viewing the cycles of mobility from point A to point B to point C and back and forth again we are able to see a dialectic emerging, in which people are constantly trying to position themselves in relation to their current conceptualization of “home” only to find that “home” has in fact changed by their being there or by their being “away.”. Similarly those “away” places have also changed by their being overseas and by their returning “home” again. Places are never quite what people imagine them to be. The realities of who they are and what they can be in those places is always just beyond the horizon and the experience of having to play catch up in this way is often unexpected and lead to decisions to move again. As these individuals experience the ‘anxieties of mobility’ (Lindquist
the excitements, trials, and joys of living, working, studying and marrying overseas—they change as people. They have new experiences, are influenced by new ideas and perspectives, undergo changes in social status, employment status, and position in their families. Each of these changes contributes to the ways that home and away are imagined, and reimagined, as each return trip requires a new assessment of what has changed, in the kampung halaman and in the self. This is the process of making and remaking the self and place through mobility; and while I present the experiences of a specific community, this is a broader human experience that reveals an essential dynamic between subjects and space. For Massey space is undergoing a process of constitution from a variety of sources, or what she calls a “plurality of trajectories” (2005: 12). This is the “principle of coexisting heterogeneity” through which I illustrate, that people and their movements are one particular kind of trajectory which acts as a force in the constitution, not only of the self, but of space in relation to the self.

Migration flows are intimately connected to labour and market dynamics in the global economy and because of this connection research about migration tends to focus on various forms of economic migration, from elite cosmopolitan transnational capitalists, to working class labor migrants. This is particularly true of studies about overseas Chinese migrants, which focus primarily on new capitalist classes (Ley 2011; Ong 1999), middle-income entrepreneurs (Lem 2010; Waters 2005) and labor migrants (Ceccagno 2003; Guerassimoff 2003; Ho and Cheung 2011; Lin 2010; Stenberg 2014; Tseng and Wang 2011). In each case there is a conflation of Chinese identity with economic concerns, at the expense of focusing on other sorts of priorities and experiences of life and mobility. The implications of this conflation go beyond academic articles and research reports; they also enter into generalized characterizations of diasporic Chinese communities (Nonini 1997). This poses a particular problem for Chinese Indonesians, and particularly the Hakka Chinese Indonesians represented in this study, because the ways they travel overseas complicate these various economic categories, and because they are often trying to escape the prevalent (and inaccurate) stereotypes associated with the Chinese in Indonesia (as wealthy, greedy, threatening) and the paranoid rhetoric of Chinese economic domination that has fueled those stereotypes.

The image of the highly mobile and quintessentially flexible transnational Chinese capitalist is particularly problematic for this group of Chinese Indonesian migrants from Singkawang. While
they are symbolically included in that broad category—modern Chinese transnationals—by virtue of some shared ethnic identity, they are not particularly, or inherently flexible, adaptable, or capitalistic about their migrations. The people in this study have persistent and powerful emotional attachments to place-based conceptualizations of home in Borneo, Indonesia and are not the “natural denizens of a borderless world” (Ley 2006). They are peripheral within a variety of current geo-cultural definitions of Chinese and overseas Chinese identities based on being Chinese Indonesians; being Hakka speakers; having lived in Indonesia for multiple generations; being mostly illiterate in Mandarin and Cantonese; and being relatively poor. The people in this study have various kinds of marginality, particularly socio-economic, and yet they must continuously confront the idea and image of the modern Chinese transnational capitalist. They are always negotiating values both within their internal cultural sphere, and against the values they encounter on their journeys, and the values that come from more exterior images and reports about others.

The figure of the contemporary Chinese capitalist is particularly problematic because it contributes to the discursive construction of the Chinese as an inherently entrepreneurial and economically adept group. In Indonesia, this characterization has had a long history of stereotyping, scapegoating, violence and segregation. Not only does this misrepresent people, as was made clear to me by my research subjects, but it also makes it difficult for outsiders to view the community in different terms or to understand other important non-economic aspects of everyday life. Viewing Chinese migration activities in these economic terms plays into the Indonesian stereotypes of an essential outsider entrepreneurial minority (Dobbins 1996), and also plays into a broader theoretical stereotype of “the Chinese” as being economically adept in a primordial sense. In the context of Indonesia, the perception that Chinese are natural business people, and economically dominant has been used strategically to create social divisions, including a bifurcation of many sectors of society. For example, certain ethnic groups dominate the civil services, police and military while Chinese Indonesians have been excluded from these professions, officially and unofficially, until recently. The pressure to conform to a preconceived notion of one’s place in the social division of the economy has placed serious constraints on what Chinese Indonesians can do and what they can imagine they can do. This has given a particular shape to the possibilities and limitations that exist for people and has influenced their decisions.
about their movements. While the people in this study are not considered elite locally, nationally or internationally, they must continuously contend with the image and the ideal of the wealthy Chinese transnational. In many cases this involves mimicking or shadowing similar international itineraries, except with significantly lesser means.

David Ley’s study of Hong Kong migrants to Canada entitled “Millionaire Migrants: Trans-Pacific Life Lines” develops a thesis about how wealthy immigrants from East Asia typify what he calls *homo economicus*, or the ultimate migrant-citizen-subject of the neoliberal state and global economy. His study, builds on he work of others, and focuses on the mobility and flexibility (including flexible capital) of “astronaut families” (Waters 2002) describing them as “globally networked” (Yeung and Olds 2000) “cosmopolitan capitalists” (Hamilton 1999) and “territorially ungrounded” (Ong and Nonini 1997) (Ley 2010:9). The families in Ley’s study are presented as transnationals *par excellence*, who can easily take up residence and citizenship in Canada while maintaining transnational families and businesses in East Asia. Ley is aware of the tendency for globalization theories to “evoke abstract spaces of flows and networks that comprise ‘a system of variable geometry and dematerialized geography’ (Castells 1996:359)” (Ley 2010:4) and his study seeks to “emphasize the continued importance of geography in transnational migration” (2010:4). However, the way he portrays these “millionaire migrants” also treats them as essentially ungrounded, transient subjects who are spontaneous and calculating in their ability to invest, reinvest and de-invest in property markets and citizenships. He interprets their experiences as primarily motivated by markets and investment opportunities. He identifies a “unified social field that transcends national political boundaries” (Ley 2010:14) but it is comprised mainly by trans-pacific air-travel and long-distance phone calls between family members in Canada and Hong Kong. This points to a set of important questions about the ways that place-based attachments exert an influence on people’s mobility choices.

What are the roles of space and place and how would a conceptualization of home as, at least partially, situated in physical places help to understand the experiences of highly mobile people? Would the challenges faced by the “astronaut families” that Ley describes, such as the complex emotional strains of being separated across long distances, role reversals among children, wives and husbands, language barriers and cultural dislocations, be the same if migration routes went to different regions or in different directions? Are the high rates of return (both temporary and
permanent) that he identifies indicative of more than just the pursuit of better market involvement? I ask these questions, not merely to address gaps in his study, but as broader questions about human behavior, the pursuit of belonging and the construction of self and place in the context of mobility. To what extent do returns have a nostalgic or an emotional basis related to specific places, their unique characteristics, and the ways that people feel when they are there? In this study I am posing a question about the affective motivations of people’s geographical yearnings, and, while the group of people I am focusing on are not Hong Kong elites, as in Ley’s study, I believe this question ought to be asked of everyone, regardless of social class or nationality. At the root of this question is the recognition that longing and nostalgia for home is a potent human experience, but is manifested in widely diverse ways in different communities.

Aihwa Ong also emphasizes the novelty of deterritorialized forms of flexible accumulation and mobility (Ong 1999; Ong and Nonini 1997) among elite Chinese transnationals. Like Ley, she also presents a portrait of Chinese migrants as quintessential capitalists, arguing, in fact, that modern transnational Chinese subjectivities can only be understood in relation to strategies of accumulation under late capitalism (Ong and Nonini 1997). According to her, Chinese identities have been misrepresented using outmoded, place-bound theorizations of territory, region, ethnicity and nationality, or the presence of essential “Chinese” values. These, she argues must be replaced with an understanding of the restlessness, mobility and novelty associated with “global capitalism and its modernities” (Ong and Nonini 1997). Using anecdotes (rather than thick ethnographic descriptions) about Chinese “boat people” being brought in to the USA by smuggling syndicates, she explains the ways that modern Chinese transnationals can use their operational flexibility and spatial mobility for personal advancement in ways which circumvent disciplining by nation-states (Ong and Nonini 1997). In this analysis, Chinese people, both the precarious labour migrants and the syndicates that organize their mobility, are framed in terms of their economic value in a world where capitalist logic above all prevails. She presents her elite transnationals as crafty and calculating, “caught up in the migrations, dislocations, and cultural upheavals associated with the “hypermodernity of late capitalism” able to adapt strategies to maximize economic gain in the global economy. She employs the concepts of social imaginary and imagined communities to describe both the work of nation-states and “of other kinds of collectivities…brought together by reconfigurations of global capitalism,” (Ong 1997:172).
Again, there is conflation of Chineseness, mobility and capitalism in this analysis and it provokes the same set of questions. These questions are about the nostalgic, emotive and affective dimensions of people’s experiences, particularly the highly mobile and “flexible”. The concept of imaginary is useful to show how nation-states attempt to control subjects and construct national identities, with an emphasis on maintaining authority over the increasingly globalized economy. However, what about the role of space and place within which transnational capitalists, ‘boat people’, and all those in between, circulate? The question is about whether geography continues to be meaningful for people and this question could be posed to labour migrants, highly-skilled migrants or nouveau riche classes. By asking these questions about attachments to space and place, the relationship between subjectivity and mobility can be repositioned so that capitalism is not the sole driving force behind citizenship, national ideologies and cultural imaginaries acting on the individual.

Arjun Appadurai’s influential work about modern social imaginaries leaves more possibility for the continued relevance of place-based concepts of home and sense of belonging while nonetheless theorizing transnational practices and global interconnectivity. His major contribution to the field is the observation that imagination has become a widespread social practice, which many different kinds of people can engage in, including those from non-cosmopolitan groups and groups that, while not mobile in a physical sense, can become mobile through imagining. According to Appadurai,

…imagination has…now acquired a singular new power in social life. The imagination—expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories—has always been part of the repertoire of every society, in some culturally organized way. But there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before. One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others. (Appadurai 1996:53)

While one does not need to migrate in order to be exposed to the raw materials used for imagination, migrants nonetheless stand out as central figures who are actively engaged in actualizing those possible lives, fueled by imagination as a social practice on a global scale.
Whereas previous migration paradigms often portrayed migrants as a suspect category of people whose loyalties to host places were in question (Vertovec 2011), migrants are now also viewed more in terms of their creative ability to manifest transnational imagining. Migrants have often been treated as people out of place, who either ought to return to their places of origin, or at least should be dreaming of doing so (Papastergiadis 2009). The “new mobilities paradigm” (Urry 2002), which views long and short range movements within the same frame, is redrawing that picture and showing that there is nothing particularly abnormal about being a migrant (Vertovec 2011) and that mobility on a large scale is a process that characterizes the modern moment (Urry 2012). National spaces are recognized as places where multiple actors, ideologies, technologies, information and capital intermingle, what Massey would identify as the multiple trajectories creating space. Within this space, the possibilities for how migrants and transnationals are viewed is opening up. In many respects mobile people are central within the heterogeneous spaces in which identities are formed and re-formed, policies are written and rewritten, and national imaginaries and imagined communities are reworked. In this paradigm the migrant is reclaimed from a formerly deviant and aberrant position, to one that is not only common, but in some ways emblematic of the conditions of life in the current interconnected world. It is more and more common for children to be born and raised outside the countries of their parents’ birth, and the idiosyncratic hybrid identities that emerge from those experiences are contributing to new forms of multicultural citizenship and cosmopolitanism, a fact that governments and citizens are managing and facilitating on a policy level and in terms of law, infrastructure, education, and national imaginaries.

The emphasis on transnational flexibility and mobility, however, also has the tendency to re-engage the image of migrants with an outward-looking nature—an essential detachment from place. This view can perpetuate the notion that migrants have weak ties to national, local or place-based forms of belonging, albeit now with a more positive characterization of the attributes that make international migrants one of the primary vectors of “global flow” (Appadurai 1996). Following in the steps of a handful of others (McKay 2012; Gardiner 1993; Jackson 1995), this study highlights the very real and powerful ways in which migrants continue to be rooted in local origin places, local systems of wealth and social status accrual (which often do not easily transfer or translate transnationally). Further, I illustrate the ways that migrations and transnational experiences are an extension of place-based attachments made meaningful by the cultural logics
or commonsense understanding shared by groups of people coming from the same place and speaking the same language dialect. Rather than people out of place, or people who comfortably exist in vague transnational identity spaces, the mobile people in this study are firmly rooted by logics derived from their place-based conceptualizations of home. These logics are transposed to life abroad while they live overseas, shaping their choices, plans, adaptations and experiences. While some of these logics, as they travel and circulate, may come to constitute parts of what Appadurai calls “diasporic public spheres” (1996:4). However, many of these commonsense logics remain rooted in local, territory-based homes where small groups of people living in close physical proximity share a dialect, a physical and social space and a common cultural terrain, which is itself embedded in particular regional and national contexts, as well as villages, *kampung* (neighbourhoods) and landscapes.

The theoretical basis of this observation is the recognition that the cultural logics of people’s lives do not exist merely in an abstract sense but rather are manifested in forms that give them presence, for example by being embodied in speech, in writing, in architecture, in movement and in social practice. Different kinds of cultural logics can take on different forms of presence such that we may identify specific kinds of territoriality and mobility. This is the mutual constitution of the self in relation to space and social practice. When people talk about their *kampung halaman*, or about the desire to pulang kampung (Ind. return home), they are giving “presence”, through speech, to a particular conceptualization of home. When these people make trips overseas, when they return home again, when they gather at their neighborhood hang-out spots (Ind. *pos*), when they clean the graves of their ancestors, or when they intentionally avoid certain parts of the landscape, they are also giving “presence” to a particular idea of home. These continual acts of “presencing” give form to the concept of *kampung halaman*. This particular idea of the *kampung halaman* is continually being called into being by these acts of presence in which the notion itself, what the *kampung halaman* signifies, and how it is experienced changes. One of the primary vectors of change, mentioned above, is the way that one’s own location within the cycle of mobility being either at “home” or “away”, wanting to leave or wanting to return, affects the contents and conceptualization of those categories.
While the concept of home, or the *kampung halaman*, as a place\(^1\) is central to people’s lives and sense of belonging in the world, imagination is another important aspect essential for understanding people’s mobilities, the process of becoming an adult and the pursuit of upward social mobility. Individuals dream of “a better life” and long to become transnational and cosmopolitan and these imaginings, as Appadurai has suggested, have acquired a particular prominence in modern social life. These dreams provide the aspirational material motivating both migration and return. However, there is an immense gap between the practice of imagination and the actual realities of migration. To be mobile, flexible and translocal necessitates much more than imagination. It requires capital and logistics, a migration infrastructure, skills, bravery, agents, etc. What I present in this dissertation moves back and forth between the imaginative dimensions of mobility, on the one hand, and its more concrete architecture, on the other, as both of these dimensions are essential to the perpetuation of the social system of mobility at stake here.

This dissertation describes the lives of Hakka Chinese Indonesian migrants from a small town in West Kalimantan in an exploration of the continued importance of place, and place-based conceptualizations of home for transnational migrants. I show how migration is directly linked to local systems of meaning and that migrants, rather than existing in deterritorialized transnational space, make concrete arrangements that resonate with their local understandings of how to build a good life. Overseas migrants do concrete things to create consistency between “home” and “away” in order to maintain a cohesive cultural logic of the world, under conditions in which those logics are not always shared by others. I will also show how returning home, particularly by temporary overseas workers, is a major aspect of the whole social system of migration, and that these returns are often a major part of people’s migration dreams.

The migrants in this study are heavily invested in their conceptualization of home even while they are sojourning overseas. This concept of home, I will argue, while shifting and symbolic, remains tied to an actual physical location—Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia—because of the elaboration of the territorial metaphor of the *kampung halaman*. Singkawang, is perceived by this group of people as having a unique social and cultural environment which locals continue

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\(^1\) Place is defined as both the physical and social space that is meaningfully constructed by groups of people in relation to one another.
to be connected with and invest in (financially, emotionally, spiritually and socially) despite their high rates of overseas migration. While migrants certainly engage in “homing” practices, and attempt to make temporary living arrangements overseas more comfortable through concrete behaviors or “acts of habitability” (Germann Molz 2008:328), the conceptualization of home, for this group of people, remains highly place-based. Aspects of the physical, social, and cultural world of Singkawang exert a powerful influence, which compels people to return, and to design their sojourns with returning in mind. This orientation toward the kampung halaman persists even in the face of complicated and long-standing challenges for ethnic Chinese belonging in Indonesia. And the constant construction and upkeep of the kampung halaman as both a physical place and a social space is one defining feature that connects Hakka Chinese Indonesians with Indonesians of other ethnicities.

1.1 Migration in Indonesia

Widespread internal migration within Indonesia has been going on for decades, particularly from rural to urban areas, from the outer islands to the island of Java, and as a result of state-administered resettlement schemes (Ind. transmigrasi) (Elmhirst 2002; Hugo 1982, 1992). International migration from Indonesia, however, is relatively more recent, beginning in the 1970s and gaining momentum and scale after the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis (Silvey 2006; Lindquist 2012). The financial crisis was followed by the fall of Suharto, and a period of democratization and economic restructuring. At this time more and more Indonesians began to travel overseas to seek temporary employment as jobs in national labour markets disappeared (Lindquist 2012). Neighbouring Malaysia quickly became the primary destination for labourers in oil palm plantations, unskilled factory workers and domestic servants (Lindquist 2012; Ford 2006). Hong Kong, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar also become major destinations for Indonesian overseas workers (Silvey 2004, 2006; Sim 2009).

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2 According to Germann Molz these “acts of habitability” are comprised of embodied routines and emotional attachments that people make in order to balance belonging within mobility (2008:3).

3 Transmigration is a program of moving people from densely populated areas in Java, Bali and Madura to less densely populated areas in Sumatra, Sulawesi, Papua and Kalimantan. This program was started by the Dutch colonial government and continued by the governments of independent Indonesia (Hardjono 1988). Transmigrants are usually given plots of land with basic houses and required to farm, homestead, or find employment in other sectors. Transmigration is a controversial program because of the effects it has had on the environment and on local social and inter-ethnic relations (Otten 1986).
At the beginning of this recent migratory wave, undocumented or illegal migration was common (Ford 2006; Hugo 2001; Lindquist 2012). However, after a series of widely-publicized incidents of serious abuse of Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Hong Kong, and a growing tension over the perception that Indonesian workers were flooding the Malaysian labour market, Indonesia initiated a process of formalization and bureaucratization of the migration process (Lindquist 2012; Ford 2006). Transnational labour migration continued to be encouraged and labour export was included in five-year economic development plans (Silvey 2006), while NGOs and governmental agencies began to organize in order to increase social protection for overseas domestic workers (Silvey 2006). According to the formalized procedures, Indonesia overseas workers, known as TKI (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia - Indonesia workforce) or TKW (Tenaga Kerja Wanita – female workforce), are required to travel overseas with assistance from a government-approved labour recruitment agency. As a result, hundreds of private labour recruiting agencies have emerged to fill this niche. These agencies have headquarters in Jakarta and operate branches all over Indonesia, employing branch managers, and relying on a network of informal local labour brokers called petugas lapangan, or field agents (Lindquist 2012). As Indonesia’s migration industry becomes more formalized there is an attempt to rein in undocumented migration; however, reports from people on the ground, including the testimony of people in this research, reveal that undocumented labour migration is still prevalent. The scale of overseas migration also continues to increase despite periodic attempts by the Indonesian government to curtail migration flows to certain countries deemed too dangerous for TKW (Silvey 2006).

As the number of documented workers has increased so has the number of migration destinations, and the types of employment available to these people overseas. Not only are women working as nannies, servants and housekeepers in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, but they are also finding employment in cafeterias, factories and plantations. Men find work in those factories and plantations as well, and work manual labour jobs and join the crews of fishing and cruise ships (Ford 2006; Hugo 2001). Remittances from
overseas workers were estimated to be worth US $8.6 million⁴ in 2015, which, although may not represent a large percentage of national incomes, when aggregated at the level of towns and villages represents a significant contribution to the local economy.

While there have been significant changes to the migration industry over the past 30 years, the role of intermediaries, calo (agents), tai kong (smugglers), and most recently petugas lapangan (field agents) has remained an integral aspect of the process of migration, essential to brokering the transition from villager to migrant (Lindquist 2012). Whereas in the past tai kong and calo were seen as exploitative and parasitic, today’s petugas lapangan who do freelance work for multiple labour recruitment agencies hold a similar position and perform a similar function in the orchestration of people’s mobility, albeit with a more legitimate and improved social status. The persistence of this middleman role is linked to a larger social pattern and cultural preference to go places using a pengantar (or a go-between) to perform the tasks of picking up, transporting and dropping off (Shiraishi 1990). Petugas Lepangan occupy a specific position by being able to mediate between potential migrants within their local social network and the recruitment agencies and government offices migrants need to pass through in order to travel abroad (Lindquist 2012: 82). Lindquist calls this the “space of mediation” and reveals how style, dress, language and the performance of other competencies are important aspects of the social relationship building that takes place between informal labour recruiters and villagers (2012). He identifies these petugas lapangan as cultural brokers, who embody “both local and embedded forms of legitimacy and disembedded knowledge . . . [to mediate] between a local economy of trust and the broader migration system,” (Lindquist 2012: 88). In the chapters that follow I also discuss the role of three different types of migration brokers: marriage matchmakers, informal labour recruiters and educational consultants, all of whom play important roles in producing Singkawang’s distinctive mobility patterns and experiences.

1.2 Patterns of Hakka Singkawang Migration

Singkawang has a population of over 200,000 thousand and is growing rapidly. However, the atmosphere is more like a small town than a city. Nestled between the ocean and some small mountains, with a river running through the town, this city of shop houses is scenic and slow-paced. For city residents, Singkawang occupies a special place in their lives; it is both beloved and enjoyable; a place they like to live and return to. But, at the same time it is limited and parochial; it is a place that can frustrate people and compel them to leave in order to change the circumstances of their lives.

In the following two chapters I discuss some of the reasons that people hold such a powerful orientation toward Singkawang as their home. In addition, I describe and analyze the significant and clearly defined Chinese mobility system, in which thousands of Hakka Singkawang sojourn to other places in Indonesia and overseas. Hakka Singkawang are not unique in their participation in temporary labor migration circuits, but the specific ways that they carry out their journeys and the work that they do while sojourning distinguish their practices from those of other ethnic groups in Singkawang.

Among the Hakka, migration starts right after junior or senior high school when large numbers of young people go to Jakarta and other large cities in Java, either to study or to start working. For those who have already completed high school, Jakarta may be a stopover on the way to studying abroad in places such as Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, America and England, or the ultimate destination for university or to start working. For youth who have only completed junior high school, Jakarta is either a place to enroll in a private high school or, more often, a place to begin working with a friend or relative. In this case the most common option is to work in one of the industries dominated by Hakka from Singkawang, including the small garment (konfeksi) and silk-screening (sablon) industries. After a few years of living and working with relatives in Jakarta, many of these youth decide to seek work overseas in Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, America, Australia or England, with Taiwan currently one of the most common destinations. Many young people also go straight from Singkawang overseas directly after high school. Added to the ranks of overseas workers from Singkawang are also middle-aged men, and, to a lesser extent, women, who, like the youth workers, also travel great distances for short periods of time to take advantage of better labor market opportunities overseas in order to save
money with the hopes of being able either to emigrate permanently or to return to Indonesia and improve their life circumstances. Destinations for labor migration change, not only with the needs of local labor markets, but also as visa regulations change and different enforcement regimes are put into practice. While Malaysia, Taiwan and Korea are currently the most popular destinations in Asia, in which people from Singkawang find temporary, low-wage labor jobs, the aspiration to work in places with both higher wages and greater symbolic capital (such as Australia, America and Great Britain), are also pursued and frequently talked about in daily life.

There are three main aspects of Hakka Singkawang migration patterns that are distinct from those of other Indonesians in Singkawang and elsewhere in the province of West Kalimantan. The first is the fact that Hakka Singkawang rarely travel overseas using the official government overseas workforce programs discussed above (Ind. Tenaga Kerja Indonesia [TKI]; Tenaga Kerja Wanita [TKW]). Rather, they use their own networks of agents and connections to make their migrations possible. Second, unlike the migrants in the official TKI/TKW programs, the majority of Hakka Singkawang travel without proper working visas, preferring to enter destination countries under the auspices of tourism, education or medical necessity and then seek employment illegally after their arrival. These migrants are well aware of and willing to accept the risks associated with working illegally, and to take these risks is something that can become part of an individual’s process of “testing their fate” (discussed in Chapter 3). Third, once overseas, Hakka Singkawang typically do not engage in the same kinds of work as other Indonesians in the official TKI/TKW programs, including housekeeping, child-rearing, and manual labor. Instead, these people prefer to find factory or service sector jobs, relying on information and introductions from individuals in their existing social/ethnic network to find employment in these sectors.

Finding employment overseas is not the only course open to migrants. Young Hakka women marry men from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia via arranged marriages. This cross-border marriage trend began in the 1970s, peaked in the late 1990s and has slowly lessened over the last two decades (the reasons for which I discuss in Chapter 5). It is estimated that there are now

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5 Many non-Hakka Indonesians also go overseas as undocumented migrants, using informal agents, rather than the official channels. However, the extend to which Hakka Singkawang avoid the official government channels is striking and contrasts with the migration patterns of other ethnic groups.
10,000 women from West Kalimantan in Hong Kong and another 30,000 in Taiwan, which intimately connects these places via transnational family relationships, long distance communications, remittances and both annual and more sporadic return trips home (Ind. *pulang kampung*; Hakka *con hiong chun*; Mandarin 回乡 hui xiang). Each year thousands of Hakka Singkawang make home-coming trips for Chinese New Year, Cap Go Meh, and the annual Grave Cleaning and Worshipping times; people making this trips include cross-border marriage migrants, overseas workers as well as members of the sizeable communities of Hakka Singkawang who live concentrated in the neighbourhoods of central and west Jakarta (Jembatan Lima, Jembatan Besi, Padamangan, and Tanah Seral).

### 1.3 Methodology

This dissertation is based on research conducted between 2010 and 2012. I used a multi-sited ethnographic research design in which I followed people from Singkawang to the places that they were sojourning or had migrated. I began my fieldwork in May 2010 in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, where I spent thirteen months. During that time, I made one research trip to Hong Kong in December 2010 and two trips to Malaysia in the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011. June to August 2011 I spent in Jakarta, followed by three and a half months in Taiwan (September to December 2011.) In June 2012, I returned to Singkawang for two months of follow-up research in order to track down and learn about some of the family members of the people whom I met while I was in Taiwan the previous year.

During my extended period of ethnographic research, from May 2010 to August 2012, I used several different research methods including observation; participant observation; ethnographic field notes; informal interviews; and formal, semi-structured interviews. The project was divided into a series of phases, which allowed me to establish a knowledge base upon which subsequent stages of research and lines of inquiry were built. When I first arrived in Singkawang I began by conducting observations at a number of public places (a coffee shop, a recreational park, and the night market) in order to learn about the public sphere, the modes of social interaction, language environments, and atmospheres of public space, as well as to meet people, begin to establish relationships and recruit participants for my study. During this first phase I also conducted a
simple survey in order to verify the accounts given during my preliminary research about the number of Hakka Singkawang migrating overseas.

Early on I also began asking my growing network of participants to identify individuals who they considered to be community leaders in some capacity. In the next phase of research, I interviewed these individuals as key participants. I conducted 22 key-participant interviews, which included local government officials, police officers, and leaders of mutual-aid societies, teachers and principals, social workers, journalists, leaders of national religious organizations, radio station owners, photographers, tribal leaders and other prominent individuals. This phase of the research allowed me to collect a wide range of information about Singkawang, ethnic relations, and Hakka society in Singkawang, which served to contextualize the next phase of interviewing, which focused specifically on the processes and practices of migration within the Chinese community, particularly people’s experiences of the migration process.

During this third phase I interviewed 132 people: 63 overseas workers and students, 42 Hakka Singkawang who live/d and work/ed in Jakarta, and 27 cross-border marriage migrants (all of whom were women who had married men from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Malaysia). In addition to these migrant interviews I also talked to the family members of some of these migrants, as well as travel agents, labor recruiters, matchmakers, and educational agents. Finally, for the purposes of comparison, I interviewed nine non-Chinese migrants—eight women and one man of Malay, Dayak, and Madurese ethnicities—who each worked overseas as part of the official government TKI/TKW programs. The majority of interviews took place in Singkawang with people who had either already returned to Singkawang permanently from Jakarta or overseas, or were visiting home temporarily. The balance of the interviews took place in the three other field sites (Jakarta, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) with migrants who were currently living, working, studying, or had married in those places. After seven months in my field site, I was having difficulty finding cross-border marriage migrants who were willing to participate in my research, so I sought assistance from a social worker and women’s rights activist. This woman, as well as members of her social worker’s network, helped to introduce me to individuals who then became participants.
In the first few weeks of June 2010, as I was getting oriented in my fieldsite, I conducted a survey of 60 people as a way of adding quantitative data to my qualitative analysis on mobility patterns. This survey included 30 Chinese, 10 Malay, 10 Dayak and 10 individuals from other minority ethnic groups. I asked two simple and straightforward questions: How many siblings do you have? And where do your siblings currently live? The survey confirmed that Hakka Singkawang are over three times more likely to *merantau* (Ind. sojourn) to Jakarta and overseas than other ethnic groups in the city. It also showed that Chinese family size, on average, is larger than that of the other groups surveyed and well above the national fertility rate of 2.4. While this survey confirmed what I had heard about rates of overseas migration, the results of my qualitative fieldwork contradicted some of my initial working hypotheses. As a result, several aspects of the research changed as certain areas of inquiry proved less relevant than anticipated and other areas of inquiry emerged as central themes.

Originally, I had gone to Singkawang with the hypothesis that large numbers of Hakka Singkawang were moving, in part, in order to seek safer places for ethnic Chinese belonging. This hypothesis was based on the perspectives of a handful of people I talked with during my preliminary research in 2009, as well as the impressions given in the literature about Chinese Indonesians. What I discovered during my fieldwork substantially contradicted this hypothesis. The vast majority of individuals were migrating for economic reasons, primarily as labour migrants, and only a handful of individuals specifically mentioned the desire for safety as a motivation for migration. Despite their economic motivations, however, concerns about safety and security in Indonesia were common topics of conversation. Furthermore, people’s impressions from their experiences living overseas allowed them to recognize, compare, and reflect upon the conditions of life in Indonesia; the perennial lack of safety, security, and discipline and a perpetual instability that exists, not just for Chinese Indonesians, but for all Indonesian citizens.

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6 I also adjusted this question to suit the age of the person I was surveying. If the person was older I would ask them not only how many siblings they have, but also how many children they have and where their children live. As a result, I was able to attain more than one data set from some individuals, so in fact the total number of survey results is greater than 60.

I chose to spend the majority of time in Singkawang because I wanted to understand the effects of mobility on that place in particular, and in the Indonesian context more broadly. Consequently, the majority of people I interviewed were those who had returned to Singkawang, as opposed to those who have emigrated permanently. However, I did interview people who had emigrated permanently, and no longer hold Indonesian passports. I met these individuals in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but also in Singkawang while they were on their short trips home for Chinese New Year. Their voices are not the dominant perspective represented here, but they nonetheless reinforce the sentiments about the motivations for returns given by others. These individuals also spoke strongly and emotionally about a nostalgic longing for friends, food, and familiarity. However, they may have different motivations for migration, some perhaps based on a desire to seek safer places for ethnic belonging, and their experiences may contrast with those of the participants in my study.

Prior to fieldwork, I had also assumed that the majority of Hakka from Singkawang were migrating overseas on a permanent basis. While there is a sizeable group of migrants who have stayed on long enough in new societies to attain permanent residency or change their citizenship, the majority migrate on a temporary basis. In most of these cases migrants return to Singkawang (or Jakarta), and these returns are often planned, or built in to the migration plan from the start. Singkawang, as people’s kampung halaman, is an important component of people’s migration plans. It is from Singkawang that the logic with which people make sense of these journeys and their returns originates (discussed in Chapter 3). Singkawang and Jakarta become places in Indonesia to return to when more permanent migrations and transnational ambitions are not possible (discussed in Chapter 4).

In another aspect of the theorization of my original hypothesis about motivations for migration, I had suggested that Hakka Singkawang are increasingly positioning themselves in relation to a Chinese diasporic media sphere, as well as the activities of elite overseas Chinese transnational capitalists. I wanted to know whether there was a connection between the new freedom for Chinese cultural expression in post-Suharto Indonesia, the “rise of China” (as both a rhetorical

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8 This is particularly true of the large populations of Hakka Singkawang who have become Taiwanese and Hong Kong citizens as a result of cross-border marriage (discussed in Chapter 5).
and a social, economic, and historical force in the world), and people’s migrations. Throughout my inquiry it has become clear that reidentification and reorientation toward mainland China, both as a place of ancestral and cultural roots and as a contemporary historical force in the world is limited, complicated in large part by the last 60 years of Indonesian history and the history of mainland China. Previous connections with China, which were kept intact for a long time by individuals who made a conscious and strategic effort to do so, have practically all expired, partially due to the passage of time and partially because of explicit policies during the New Order which constructed China and Chinese identities as anathema to Indonesian identity and culture. Some new connections are being forged, but the process is slow and there are barriers based on language, access, and cultural differences. The idea that there ought to be a connection between Chinese Indonesians and Chinese mainlanders is based on a fallacy of pan ethnic identity. Being Chinese in the context of Indonesia (just as being Chinese in mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, America, etc.) carries with it a whole host of national, social, cultural, historic, and political idiosyncrasies, which make it impossible to define a coherent and meaningful category under the name “Chinese diaspora”. To identify Pan-Chinese cultural characteristics relies on imagining that these populations share the same ethnicity, but the conditions under which ethnic identities are constructed differ too greatly for this conceptualization to be meaningful, or useful analytically.

I set out into the field with a thorough understanding of anthropological theorizations of ethnic identity, fully aware of the ways that identities are mutable, relational and contextual (Barth 1969; Golubović 2011; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Despite these theorizations, there were times during my fieldwork when I was guilty of imagining the existence of some essential Chineseness or Chinese ethnic identity, which might exist “out there”. Luckily for me, these erroneous projections were stopped short by the attitudes of my participants, who reminded me that there is not now, nor has there ever been a single thing called “Chineseness” (Ang 1998). Ironically, this was made clear to me by their own hidden comparisons and essentialisms. One day I was chatting with one of my participants on Facebook (she had recently gone to Australia to study at university and I was still in Singkawang). I was grateful to be able to hear about her experiences as they were taking place, but I will admit that I was surprised when she declared to me what she had newly discovered during her encounters overseas. “I hate Chinese people. I never want a
Chinese boyfriend,” she declared. Of course, her meaning was not Chinese Indonesian. Her meaning was Chinese from China or another national context. She began listing the things that made her feel this way and why she felt she was different. I tried just to listen, but I could not resist making some small interventions into her racist sentiments and by doing so I was able to steer the conversation toward explaining perceptions (and stereotypes) about lots of different sorts of people. What I learned from my initial shock at her statement, though, was that latent in my own thinking was an assumption that there would be some kind of affinity based on a shared ethnicity connecting Chinese people from different national contexts. How can she hate Chinese people? I thought. Is she not herself Chinese in some way? I already knew from our discussions that her parents have forbidden her from marrying someone who is not Chinese. . . Of course the answer was so clear. No, she is not Chinese. She is Indonesian, she is a Chinese Indonesian, and more specifically she is Hakka Singkawang. Singkawang, it turns out has very little to do with China. While, I was expecting to learn about her own perceptions of difference between herself and others, I was unprepared for the all-out racism and rejection she articulated. As a result of this, and many other conversations, I had to adjust my own erroneous assumption that somehow sharing aspects of ethnic identify would connect groups of people spread out around the world, such that they may resemble each other and in that resemblance find an affinity and a mutual respect.

Clearly language is one of the sources of this problem. To use the term “Chinese” all too easily conjures up the idea of pan ethnic or pan cultural continuities. “Chinese”, like other ethnic identifiers, suggests primordial characteristics, or an essential essence, which could be labeled “Chineseness”. While linguistically and sociologically there may be ways to empirically identify and evaluate “Chineseness”, based on what we know about the ways that ethnic identities are produced, speaking of “Chinese” is actually impossible. It is impossibly imprecise, although useful as an imaginary. I must be explicit that in this dissertation I talk about the experiences of migrants who are specifically Hakka, Chinese Indonesians from Singkawang in the year 2012 and what each of those categories can mean (Hakka, Chinese Indonesian, Hakka Singkawang, migrant) must be understood in its precise local, national, international, social, semiotic, and historic context. That might sound merely like a long list of contexts, and it is, but each one is
very important and contributes to the possibilities and limitations of how people construct their identities at given moments in time.

Yew Foong Hui (2011) has traced some of the semiotics of the term and the social position of Chinese in Indonesia, showing how at various historical moments the possibilities for Chinese Indonesian subjectivities became constrained⁹. I would like to continue this analysis by suggesting that the current moment is also a pivotal historical period in which major changes for Chinese Indonesians are underway. Not only are the semiotics of what the term “Chinese Indonesian” signifies shifting, but also the very words that people use to describe themselves and others are changing. In Singkawang you can now hear people say Cine, Chinese and Tionghoa instead of the more derogatory Cina used during Suharto’s New Order, a change which is a symbol of the changing social position and status of Chinese in Indonesia. The validity of their legal status as citizens and the legitimacy of their belonging within the nation are continually being reaffirmed. These advancements to the state of possibilities for being Chinese in Indonesia are directly related to the legal reforms that took place during the beginning of Reformasi era; exploring and identifying with “things Chinese” (resinification practices) are no longer interpreted as expressions of disloyalty to the nation, but simply recognized as acts of identity-making that exist in post-Suharto Indonesia along with many others, including the re-discovery of multiple other ethnic and sub-ethnic identities.

While connection building with China and “greater China” is limited there are definitely processes of resinification going on throughout Indonesia and particularly in Singkawang. This has taken the form of a rapid and extensive reintroduction of Mandarin education, and has the potential to allow future generations to more easily build connections (business, educational, tourism, marriage, religious, etc.) with other Chinese communities in other countries. There is also a significant amount of Chinese popular media entering Singkawang, but these influences remain limited and compete with Indonesian media and pop culture, which often consumes young people who move to Jakarta. Other competing spheres of influence on people’s identifications come from Indonesian protestant churches overseas, Western/Hollywood pop

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⁹ I summarize his main arguments in the next chapter.
culture, as well as Korean pop culture. Contrary to my original hypothesis, what I discovered was that Chinese and overseas Chinese diasporic media, rather than being a dominant force in people’s lives, are merely one of many sources for translocal identifications and do not correlate with transnational consciousness or migration patterns per se. In fact, for the majority of the participants in the study, their orientation was primarily towards home, both Singkawang and Indonesia, even while they were sojourning overseas, studying Mandarin, watching Korean melodramas, or rehearsing hip hop dance choreography.

Home has emerged as an integral theme in the study of migration and transnationalism and there are many different ways the concept is being theorized. One of the main debates is whether home is best understood as a place, a space, feelings, practices, relationships, or an attitude (Mallett 2004). I have tried to take the things that people identify as home—the ways they narrate their experiences in Singkawang and away from Singkawang and the ways that they give presence to their conceptualizations through movement, practices and speech—as the primary evidence of their senses of place, and experiences of place. For the participants in this research, one of the main modalities in which to create and sustain a sense of belonging in the world relies on the Indonesian concept of the kampung halaman, which itself relies on a territorial metaphor. Within this conceptualization, “home” is considered a place, identifiable, fixed and unambiguous. The experience of home can be very different from this conceptualization; it can contain ambivalences as well as a desire to leave, or to merantau. What I have learned from all of the people who have given me a glimpse into their lives is that there is something limiting about the experience of being only at home in Singkawang. This sense of limitation is part of a set of motivations that compel people to leave. But this compulsion to leave and the large-scale migration that is taking place are incredibly vital to the definition of home as it is only through the experience of leaving that place and social space that people are able to recognize and gain a different perspective on their own conceptualizations of home. For some this is extremely clear, and in interviews they could immediately pinpoint exactly how they felt at home and away or they could identify exactly what was present at home, but lacking overseas. For others this was never something so lucidly sorted out in their minds. It remained mostly a constellation of feelings and sense of belonging within and to a place (Singkawang and Indonesia) as well as a sense of not really being able to fully belong or be accepted in other places.
Michael Jackson (1995) and others (see, for example, Gardiner 1993) have observed that the idea of home and the idea of away are intimately linked and are mutually constituting. Home and away are a part of each other because there is simultaneously a desire to have a sense of rootedness in the world and at the same time to periodically experience a sense of uprootedness (Jackson 1995). There is something about the sense of uprootedness, which allows people to see and understand in new ways those things which give them a more rooted sense of belonging. It is this tacking between home and away, feeling rooted and uprooted, feeling a sense of belonging in and to a place and then a sense of not belonging in another place, which I document and analyze in the chapters that follow.

1.4 Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1 sets the scene by presenting Singkawang, the primary fieldsite of this research, as the ultimate Chinatown of Indonesia. I start by describing the unique social and cultural environment and situate this description in the context of a post-Suharto era politics of belonging. To do this I explain the history of the treatment of the Chinese in Indonesia and describe some of the recent changes that have had dramatic effects in Singkawang. I argue that Singkawang has some exceptional qualities, being the only city in Indonesia with a majority Chinese population, making it the quintessential Chinatown of Indonesia and an important hometown (Ind. *kampung halaman*) for Hakka Singkawang. In this chapter I also relativize the idea of this uniqueness by explaining the ways that the Chinese in Singkawang, like Chinese elsewhere in Indonesia, have experienced a history of violence which continues up to the present as a force that is actively mediated through community collusions between Chinese and Dayak parts of the population.

Chapter 2 explains the concept of *kampung halaman*, as a distinctly Indonesian territorial metaphor used to conceptualize home and hometown. I unpack this concept by explaining the basis of people’s emotional attachments to this idea of place. I argue that this conceptualization of home is important in light of the politics of belonging in Indonesia, in which membership in the “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson 1991) often requires demonstrating legitimacy through definitive origins which are territorially imagined. Place-making discourses
and practices, including grave rituals, visits home, temple construction, and the more quotidian rhythms of being in and moving around Singkawang, are important acts in which an idea of autochthonous origins is performed. This chapter concludes with one of the central problematics of this dissertation; the question of why, in a place with such strong hometown attachments, there would also be such high rates of out migration.

In Chapter 3 I describe the broad conceptual framing people use to make sense of their mobilities. This is called “khao miang siu” or testing one’s fate. I explain the routes people take to leave Singkawang and go to Jakarta, and the discourses that are used to explain these movements. Khao miang siu involves “struggling to become a boss” (Ind. berjuang menjadi bos) and proving the worth of one’s mobility by transforming that mobility into social mobility. I argue that this process is a rite of passage in which young people pursue more than just a profession but an ideal form of adulthood. The status of being a boss is recognized and reinforced in group social dynamics that happen through friendships and working relationships, in addition to the better known role of the family, all of which act as important sites in the production of Hakka Singkawang subjectivity.

In Chapter 4 I describe the lives of people who sojourn (Ind. merantau) overseas to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and further afield for the purposes of working or studying. This longer range mobility is also part of a strategy for upward social mobility, but in this case migrants play with fantasies of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship, in ways that are different from those who go to Jakarta. In this chapter I explain the schism that people experience between these fantasies and the real world limitations they encounter trying to actualize these dreams. I argue that an experience of isolation and alienation overseas contributes to a framing of “us” and “them” in which other ethnic groups are stereotyped and Hakka Singkawang culture is elaborated in ideal terms. Ultimately, these experiences overseas generate deeper longing and nostalgia for the kampung halaman and become a major motivation for returning.

Chapter 5 is about cross–border marriage between women from Singkawang (and the surrounding rural areas) and men from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Using the same structure as the previous chapters, I describe the precise arrangements needed in order to marry overseas and
then I describe some of the discourses used to make sense of this kind of mobility. Cross-border marriage resembles traditional Chinese arranged marriage (which was common until the 1950s in Singkawang) because of the reliance on matchmakers to brokering the exchange. However, cross-border marriage is embedded in a commercialized marriage market in Taiwan and involves multinational networks of matchmakers with more concretely commodified transactions. I argue that the rise of international anti-human trafficking discourse has been a major factor in the reduction of this kind of cross-border marriage. Other factors include economic development, negative reports from divorced marriage migrants and changes in the Taiwanese marriage market. In this chapter I argue that cross-border marriage is a form of labour migration, not merely emigration, which is part of a family strategy for social mobility. High rates of divorce and return signal the difficulties inherent in these cross-border marriages, but also suggest a deep longing to return to the *kampung halaman*.

Chapter 6 describes the multiple kinds of returns to Singkawang that take place. These ranging from temporary and sporadic, cyclical to more permanent forms of return migration. I show some migrants have their sojourns stopped short by deportation as well as family obligation. I also show annual returns are structured around important times in the Chinese calendar, including Chinese New Year (Hak. *Ko Nyian*, Ind. *Tahun Baru Imlek*), Cap Go Meh (Hak. *Cang Nyit Ban*, last day of Chinese New Year), Grave Cleaning (Hak. *Kaci*; Ind. *sembahyang kubur*), and birthday celebrations of gods (Hak. *sin min sang*). These are moments when successful *perantar* (Ind. sojourners) return home to perform religious and familial duties, and take up key positions as members of committees of temples and associations. These forms of engagement are the embodied expression of attachments to the hometown, and constitute practices of place-making, in which territorial claims are reinforced. At the same time, these returns are central to a system of social reproduction as returnees have opportunities to display their social status and receive deferential treatment as powerful, charismatic figures, by local friends and family. Being able to view these successful home town returnees in turn, perpetuates the cycle of *merantau*, as more youth imagine leaving Singkawang to *khao miang shui* (Hak. test their fate).

In Chapter 7 I present the largest annual festival in Singkawang, Cap Go Meh, the 15th day after Chinese New Year. I explain how it has developed an element that makes it unique: a massive
Chinese spirit-medium parade. I argue that the local government, along with parts of the Chinese community, has worked to develop the festival into a major tourist attraction despite potential conflicts arising from some of the more extreme aspect of the event. Self-mortification, animal sacrifice and demon possession make the event both sensational and marketable for tourism, but are also religiously prohibited (Ind. *haram*) according to Islam. I explain how Cap Go Meh has become a site for conflicts in which multiple groups of stake-holders pursue their respective interests. The stakes of the event are high because of the importance of Cap Go Meh as an expression of collective Chinese religious identity which is territorially rooted. Hometown returnees increasingly use their involvement in organizing Cap Go Meh as a way to create a name for themselves and enter local politics.
Chapter 1: A Chinatown for Indonesia

2 Kopi Tiam (Hak. Coffee Shop)

Amoi pours the coffee confidently, stretching it out between the brass pitcher and a small glass, releasing the last few drops dramatically, as though she is making Malaysian *teh tarik* (Ind. pulled tea). She mixes in a few spoons of sugar, places the glass on an enamel saucer and slowly walks over to one of the tiny tables where a group of men are sitting on stools, gossiping and reading the newspaper.

Pak Suri takes the coffee in his hands—hands which are bejeweled with gold and silver rings impregnated with sapphires, rubies and jade. He skillfully tips the coffee over into the saucer and begins swirling it around as he watches Amoi walk back to her high stool beside the coffee maker, her figure stretched out beneath a T-shirt and a pair of bright orange spandex pants. “You are more and more beautiful every day,” Pak Suri says, flirting with her. Facing away from him now, arranging an assortment of cakes onto a small plate she makes a polite denial (“not possible”, Ind. *masa sih*) but her cheekbones are lifted by the broad smile that opens up across her heavily powdered face. She loves the attention she later confides in me. “How else could I endure the last 22 years of waking up each day before dawn to serve coffee and cakes? He’s only joking anyway,” she says.

Pak Suri bangs his fist on the table and laughs out loud, already engrossed in a conversation with his friends. “It’s not like that,” he exclaims to his cronies, all of whom are dressed in clean, freshly starched khaki-colored government uniforms. “It’s like this…” He starts to explain about how some funding for an educational program was reallocated to build a something or other. I can only catch fragments of his story as he moves between Indonesian and the local Malay dialect because my attention is drawn to a woman approaching on a bicycle that has been converted into a snack wagon. “*Bong fon, bong fon, pau suk, pau suk, bong fon loi oh,*” she yells in Hakka over and over, sounding like a bird chirping rhythmically. On her wagon there are

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10“Yellow rice, yellow rice, corn, corn, yellow rice is coming.”
varieties of foods packaged neatly into single-serving-sized plastic bags tied with raffia and rubber bands, which dangle from the cart and swing from side to side as she rides up beside the coffee shop on the corner. There are coconut-jelly candies, half-pickled papaya strips, krupuk, kripik, cakes, fried snacks and portions of yellow rice wrapped in banana leaves. She stops in front of the kopi tiam (Hak. coffee shop), flicks down the kickstand on her bicycle, and immediately squats down to take a rest, her conical hat broad over her narrow shoulders.

From around the other corner comes a cacophonous sound of drums banging and cymbals clanking, loud and chaotic and only vaguely musical. I look up just in time to catch the sight of a truck whizzing by with musicians sitting haphazardly around in the open back. “What’s that?” I ask, “Is there a parade today?” The snack lady, squatting near my table, shakes her head and responds in Indonesian inflected with a thick Hakka accent, “No, not a parade. Someone died.” Later I learned that this is part of a Chinese funeral procession (Hak. hang ji). The funeral specialist (Hak. bosong), along with a group of musicians from one of the neighborhood funeral associations, leads a cortege through town making enough noise to scare away any dangerous ghosts or spirits that may be lurking in the path of the corpse on its journey into the afterlife.

Moments later a wandering salesman came by. He was wearing old flip-flop sandals and an oversized men’s dress shirt that was heavily faded by the sun. He had a tiny frame and dark sun-exposed skin. From beneath his loose cotton shorts his calf muscles bulged out, lean and hard like a becak driver (Ind. rickshaw), a body that knows hard labor. He approached each person in the café in silence, extending his arm from which eight large dried sea cucumbers (Ind. trepang; Hak. hoisim) were hanging. When he got to my table, he put out his hand and looked directly but blankly into my face, slightly raising his eyebrows in a gesture I interpreted to mean “Would you like to buy some?” I stared back at him blankly for a second and then shook my head but he did not leave. He stood there silently for a long time, his arm outstretched, perhaps hoping that the longer I looked at trepang, the more likely I change my mind.

Amoi came over smiling, almost laughing, rested her hand on my shoulder and said, “It’s hoisim (Hak. sea cucumber). Do you like it?” “No” I said quickly and shook my head, unable to hide the
repulsed look on my face. The truth was I had never eaten sea cucumber. Not yet. I had not had a chance yet. This was only the very beginning of my fieldwork.

Each day began much the same as this. I woke up early and went to Amoi’s café, a 100-year-old shop house nestled in a row of shops on a street running between the Thai Pakkung\(^\text{11}\) and the Tugu Naga (Ind. dragon monument). Some days I went to the café across the street from the pork market, next to the man who sells dried barbecued squid, and the woman who sells fresh soya milk. Other days I went to one of the cafés near the wet market, where the smell of the sate being cooked in front was strong enough to mask the smell of the fetid river and the rotting garbage piling up nearby. Well, almost strong enough. In Singkawang there are small cafés in shop houses all over town, each with a group of regulars who gather every morning, afternoon or evening to relax, hang out, enjoy coffee and gossip (Ind. nongkrong).

On this particular morning I planned to meet someone. His name is Alim. He is a friend of a friend and I was told that I should talk to him because my friend considered him to be someone who knows a lot about local history and politics. Alim is 43 years old and one of 11 brothers and sisters. He has recently moved back to Singkawang from Jakarta in order to pursue a new career in local politics and live with his aging father. I was already drinking coffee when he arrived, approached the table, shook my hand and hurriedly apologized for being late. I told him it was no problem and made a joke about how, as a foreigner in Indonesia, I’d had to learn how to accept jam karet (Ind. rubber time). Alim is tall with dark black hair and dark skin. He was wearing a loose silk dress shirt tucked into a pair of slacks that were belted and held a cell phone caddy. Looking up I saw sweat dripping off his face, his hair glistening from all the moisture. It was, after all, the siang hari (Ind. mid-morning/early afternoon) on a very hot day in the dry season. He sat down, ordered a coffee and I began to explain my research while he nodded and smiled and then began to cut in excitedly. “Yes, yes…you already know so much…it’s unbelievable. You are asking all of the right questions. I am also interested in these things. Let me show you some of the things that I have written.” Alim got up and went out to his car and brought back a paper folder, which he flopped open on the table and started to pull out things.

\(^{11}\) *Thai Pakkung* is the Hakka name for the oldest and most central Chinese temple in Singkawang.
“Here is a short history of Cap Go Meh that I just wrote for the newspaper, and here is another article I wrote about the recent horizontal conflict between the two mayoral candidates, now the question of migration…you’re right, so many women marry to Taiwan, but also Hong Kong…” And just like that Alim and I sat and talked for hours, and on many other occasions after that. He turned out to be one of those informants who is endlessly interested, engaging and limitlessly open to my lines of questioning. As I worked to understand what kind of place this town Singkawang is in order to frame my study of migration, I found it useful to talk to people like Alim who have such deep commitments to the place, but have also lived away long enough to have gained a comparative perspective. Their perspectives provided me with an important complement to the perspectives of the locals that I met each day in the cafes, at the mountain and in the market.

3 Singkawang

Singkawang is the second largest city in West Kalimantan on the west coast of Borneo. While the official census does not aggregate the population by ethnicity, estimates based on religious affiliation suggest that the Chinese population of the city is approximately 42 percent of roughly 220,000. The former mayor, Hasan Karman, in an interview with me, claimed the percentage is over 62 percent and media reports sometimes cite it is as high as 72 percent. As the only city in Indonesia with a Chinese Indonesian majority population, Singkawang is unique in many ways. Hakka, a Chinese dialect, is the main language spoken in the city and the former mayor, Hasan Karman, was the first ethnically Chinese mayor to be elected in Indonesia. The Chinese community traces its origins back to multiple waves of overseas Chinese migrants, coolies and pioneers, who, beginning in the 1740s, came to Borneo from the southeastern coastal provinces of China at the request of the sultans of Sambas and Mempawah in order to mine for gold (Heidhues 2003; Yuan 2000). The first generation of these laborers married local indigenous women who adopted their husbands’ language, patrilineal and patrilocal family structure, and religious practices, creating subsequent generations that came to constitute the local Chinese community (Heidhues 2003). Traders, merchants, entrepreneurs and Chinese women arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, further diversifying the community socially, economically,
and linguistically (Heidhues 2003). Until today, the Chinese population consists primarily of working-class and lower-middle-class petty merchants, farmers, and primary producers.

Despite ongoing efforts to develop and modernize the city, Singkawang remains relatively peripheral; lacking a functioning port, airport, or a university, it has limited economic prospects. Many houses are not connected to water or electricity and for those that are, water shortages and blackouts are an almost daily occurrence. Singkawang is a city of shop houses where people from the surrounding rural and upriver areas can buy clothing, furniture, household goods, food, and building materials. However, with little production-based economy, and profits from agricultural and forest products benefitting only a small portion of the population, many people are compelled to go overseas for employment and higher education. Despite this relative marginality most residents exclaim that Singkawang is quickly developing and becoming busier (Ind. sudah ramai, sudah maju).

Besides the Chinese population, Singkawang also has large Malay, Dayak, Javanese, Madurese and Bugis populations and smaller numbers of other ethnic groups, including a Tambi community, descendants of Indian traders who married Malays. Capitalizing on this diversity, the local government has been trying to redefine the city of Singkawang (and the province of West Kalimantan) as a multiethnic exemplar of peace and harmony. To do so they use ideas and images of triculturalism, or equal representation of Chinese, Dayak and Malay groups, which have been defined as the three pillars of the province (Hui 2007:301; Chan 2008). Known by the cute and catchy abbreviation Chidayu (Chinese, Dayak, Malay) or Tidayu (Tionghoa, Dayak, Malay) this triculturalism is actively and strategically promoted and has acquired a kind of brand status complete with a series of batik prints blending design motifs from these three cultures into a single pattern. Triculturalism is represented in architecture, costumes, songs, dances, tourism promotions, special events, and celebrations that partially reflect the ethnic

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12 These batik motifs are worn during formal events by elected officials, temple committee members as well as by the hosts of birthday and wedding celebrations. The fabric can be bought in fabric stores in Singkawang and Pontianak. In Singkawang there is also a karaoke bar, resort and a housing complex called Chidayu. The Chidayu batik motif is also used as the backdrop image on the official government website for the city: http://www.singkawangkota.go.id.
composition of the population yet also erase the presence and significance of other groups, particularly the Madurese and Javanese communities.

The explicit adoption of an ideology of triculturalism is relatively new and part of a broader reimagining of multiculturalism in post-Reformasi Indonesia (Hoon 2008). This vision of triculturalism has clearly defined ethnic boundaries that closely resemble what Furnivall described over fifty years ago as a “plural society”, in which different ethnic groups mix but do not combine (Furnivall 1948:304). The physical manifestations of triculturalism are intentional interventions that often appear more as a caricature of multiculturalism rather than representative of the spontaneous expressions of ethnic diversity and ethnic relations as they exist on the ground, in coffee shops like Amoi’s, in the marketplace, on the badminton court, or at the neighborhood hangout spots. However, a surprising process is under way. The local population is embracing this ideology of triculturalism despite its being strategic and governmental. What began as a media campaign is now being adopted by city residents as a meaningful self definition of their city. In those early weeks of fieldwork, everywhere I went people were proud to describe their hometown as “multi”: multiethnic and multicultural (Ind. multi-etnis; multi-suku; multi-kultur). Random people I met in coffee shops, civil servants, shop owners, and elected members of parliament all wanted to tell me that Singkawang is multicultural, and in those declarations was a distinct connotation of peace and harmony. The new Chidayu that people speak about is not haunted by interethnic antagonism, violence or history. There are many incidents of violence and conflict which could haunt the present, including the obliteration of members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKL) in 1965 (Cribb 2004), the rural expulsion of Chinese from the interior of the province in 1966 (Davidson and Kammen 2002) and the violent clashes between Dayak and Madurese, and between the Malay and Madurese communities, in 1997, 1999 and 2001 (Davidson and Kammen 2002). Rather it is Chidayu with a space for multiple sukus (Ind. tribes). And while that space is tightly circumscribed, this ideology of triculturalism is nonetheless allowing Singkawang residents to reimagine themselves and their place in the town and in society in new ways.

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13 What I am calling caricature Hui has also observed and refers to as mimicry (2007: 328).
14 I discuss these conflicts in greater detail below.
3.1 Post-Suharto Singkawang

In May 1998 President Suharto fell from power after serving as president of Indonesia for 32 years. This happened during the Asian Financial Crisis and widespread student protests, which erupted into some of the worst anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian history. During the riots in May 1998 it is estimated that over 1,000 people died, and over 168 ethnic Chinese women were raped (Heryanto 1999; Seigel 1998). Property damage is estimated to be over three trillion rupiah\(^{15}\). Directly after Suharto’s resignation, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie stepped in as interim president and began the process of dismantling Suharto’s Chinese assimilation policy by banning the use of the terms *pribumi* and *non-pribumi* (Ind. indigenous and non-indigenous). The following year Abdurrahman Wahid was elected president and he proceeded to retract Suharto’s 1966 and 1967 presidential decisions and instructions, which placed bans on Chinese language, culture and religion. In 2001, he announced that Chinese New Year (Ind. *Tahun Baru, Imlek*; Hak. *Ko Nyian*) was once again permitted to be celebrated in public and months later, under the presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri, *Imlek* was declared a national holiday. Most recently, in 2006, a new citizenship law was passed which finally removed the long-standing discrimination against “foreigners” (legislated within law No. 62 of 1958) which was used to differentiate and discriminate against Indonesians of Chinese decent. As a result of these legal changes, and a growing culture of openness and democratization throughout Indonesia, a space for Chinese culture in the public sphere has rapidly opened up. This constitutes a remarkable sea change from the repressive environment of the New Order, a time when Chinese Indonesians who experienced legal, social and cultural discrimination in the public sphere were given little choice other than to change their identifications or turn their identities inwards.

At first, people were cautious to proclaim a renaissance of Chinese culture in Indonesia. Indeed, many Chinese Indonesians were traumatized by the outbreaks of violence and many had fled the country, believing, rightfully, that it was not a safe place to remain. Furthermore, after over thirty years of living with assimilation policies designed to reduce evidence of Chinese culture from

the public sphere, why would people suddenly feel trusting of this supposed new freedom? Fifteen years later, however, many scholars of Chinese Indonesians are ready to assert that just such a renaissance is taking place (Hoon 2008; Turner 2003) and can be read in the formation of political parties and NGOs (Giblin 2003; Suryadinata 2001), in new media practices (Allen 2003; Dawis 2003; Hoon 2011), Chinese schools (Dawis 2008; Hoon 2011), religious revivals and cultural events (Chan 2013; Hew 2013). Media reports have been even quicker to keep pace with and promote these developments by reporting on this fluorescence. A simple search of the word *Imlek* on Kompas.com yields six pages of results and all the major television stations have published special exposés on Chinese culture and Chinese Indonesians16 as they vye to keep pace with the changing climate of acceptance. There has been so much media attention that there is fatigue over reporting about Chinese cultural events, not to mention fatigue over celebrating them. One editorial from a Jakarta newspaper describes the feeling of weariness and boredom of having to watch yet another lion dance performance at a gaudy and grandiose shopping mall in Tangerang. Clearly a space has opened up in the Indonesian public sphere for outward displays of Chinese culture and ethnicity, but what is most interesting is that this new space is not limited to Chinese Indonesians having a greater sense of cultural freedom. Other ethnic groups have also been granted the opportunity to explore, understand and consume Chinese things and by extension they are allowed to construct a new imagined form of “Chineseness” in ways that were not possible during the Suharto era.

In Singkawang, Chinese culture17 has become trendy. On a hot night a week after the beginning of *Imlek* and a week before the enormous *Cap Go Meh*18 celebration was to take place, I went out to *pasar Hong Kong* (Ind. Hong Kong [night] market) to get some fried noodles. As I was walking there, I admired the long strings of red lanterns that were hung over the street like a bright red canopy and how busy the streets were now that so many people had returned home for

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17 In this instance I am using the term “Chinese culture” to refer to visual representations of Chinese things, including holidays, architecture, clothing, food, etc. As I have said, it is impossible to speak of Chinese culture in an objective way because both Chinese and culture are floating signifiers, with meanings that are constantly changing and can never be fully pinned down.

18 *Cap Go Meh* is the Indonesian term for the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, which is derived from the Hokkien dialect. The Hakka term is *cang nya it ban*. In Singkawang, *Cap Go Meh* is the occasion of an enormous parade of possessed spirit-mediums, which is discussed in Chapter 7.
Ko Nyian. I noticed a crowd forming around the Thai Pakkung and approached to get a better look at what was happening. I saw a huge painted chariot with eight dramatically sculpted horses parked outside the temple. There were crowds of people stopped to take a look and take photographs, both Chinese and non-Chinese locals. I stayed there and spent an hour chatting with people who were taking photos in front of the temple and the chariot. A group of four young women approached me. They were shy and giggling as they pushed each other closer to me. Each was wearing a brightly colored tie-dyed hijab, elaborately layered and draped over her head and shoulders. “Foto bareng?” (Ind. photo together) one girl asked as another wrapped her arm around mine. At the same time, another sidled up close on the other side while the fourth positioned herself in front with her cell phone pointing at us, framing the picture. It was more of a statement than a question. I stood with them posing for photographs for a long time, until each girl’s cell phone camera was filled with shots of us making silly expressions beside the horse-drawn chariot in front of the Chinese temple.

The previous year I had taken a new friend of mine to the Thai Pakkung on the eve of Ko Nyian to see the crowds of local Chinese worshippers burning incense at the auspicious midnight hour. She was excited to witness this moment and as we were talking about our impressions afterwards, she admitted to me that, although she was born and raised in Singkawang, she had never been inside a Chinese temple and had never seen how people burn incense up close. As a Muslim and as a person of Javanese, Sundanese and Malay descent, she felt she had no access to Chinese culture, no way to witness and so no way to understand. “Things have changed so much recently,” she explained, “things are more open. You know it’s actually cool to be Chinese now,” she exclaimed. “I want to learn how to speak Hakka, and I wish I could wear that Chinese-style dress, like cheongsam, so keren,” (Ind. cool).

The Chinese cultural revival in Indonesia and the ideology of triculturalism in West Kalimantan are allowing residents to embrace a new civic identity in Singkawang. This civic identity is based on it being predominantly Chinese, but includes other minority ethnic groups, making it the inverse of the situation found in most Indonesian cities. In these cases, the Chinese are a minority population and are either concentrated in the old city center or in newer suburbs and gated communities on the outskirts of town. In Singkawang, the Chinese population is not
ghettoized into a pecinan (Ind. Chinatown) or fortified inside exclusive gated residential complexes (Ind. perumahan). Rather, it is the entirety of Singkawang that is the pecinan. Singkawang is the ultimate Chinatown: it is the Chinatown of Indonesia19. In Singkawang the Chinese population spreads out, from the city center into the surrounding villages in each direction, from the central market, through major streets and small alleys that comprise the city. Chinese people are everywhere, visible, prominent and at home. Chinese residents in Singkawang take up space in ways that are still considered difficult, risky, and unusual in other parts of Indonesia, such as riding through town on motorbikes late at night, camping on the beach or in the forest, and drinking beer at cafés across from the central Mosque. What it means to be Chinese in Singkawang, or Hakka Singkawang, has a wide range of possibilities and carries fewer derogatory connotations, or stereotypes about wealth, stinginess or economic domination.

Although the new civic identity of Singkawang is that of a multicultural place, it is primarily through celebrations of Chinese events that Singkawang’s unique “multicultural” character is performed. It is Singkawang’s status as the pecinan par excellence that residents both Chinese and non-Chinese have come to embrace. Singkawang is variously called the kota seribu k lenteng (Ind. city of a thousand temples), kota Amoi (City of Young and Beautiful Chinese Women) and Hong Kong Indonesia (Indonesia’s Hong Kong), marking its status as a pecinan writ large. When people describe the city as multicultural or multiethnic, they are, first and foremost, indexing the prevailing “Chineseness” of the city. Strategic efforts to balance out the overrepresentation of Chinese holidays have been taken in the form of governmental promotion of Dayak and Malay annual events, such as Naik Dango and Muharram (Hui 2007: 311) and hosting cultural “spectaculars” which showcase ethnic minority music, dance, sports, and games. Most recently, the local government has begun to develop Karapan Sapi (Madurese bull racing) into another annual tourism event as a way of acknowledging and including the large but marginalized Madurese community20. However, these government-organized events do not

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19 In 2011 a prominent businessman and philanthropist from Singkawang produced a campaign to promote Cap Go Meh around Indonesia using the slogan “Cap Go Meh Singkawang for Indonesia” and commissioning the musician Katon Bagaskara to write a song about Singkawang, entitled “Singkawang Sebuah Harmoni”. I am using the term “Chinatown for Indonesia” as an extension of this sentiment. “Katon Bagaskara Singkawang Sebuah Harmoni 1.” YouTube, video 5:05. Posted by Pariantjo Agus, February 5, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACfK6LixrVY

20 At 14%, the Madurese population is the third largest in the city. Larger, in fact, that the Dayak population which
attract nearly as many local, national, or international tourists. Nor do they generate the same volume of economic activity as the Chinese cultural events.

### 3.2 A Unique Kampung Halaman (Ind. Home)

In the pages that follow I want to present some of the features that make Singkawang a unique Chinese community in Indonesia, but at the same time similar to other Indonesian cities with large Chinese populations. In so doing, I provide an alternative perspective to the dominant paradigm which posits Chinese Indonesian identities and subjectivities as defined primarily by an essential ambivalence or ambiguity rooted in the precariousness of their social position in Indonesia (both historically and contemporarily). I show how the daily realities of Hakka Singkawang are guided by practical and straightforward (i.e. non-ambiguous) attachments to place and defined more by the quotidian concerns of everyday life than by a generalized existential condition of estrangement (Hui 2007). In the introduction I argued that transnational migrants should not be considered ungrounded subjects who construct their mobile lives in an amorphous transnational social space, but rather subjects who do practical things to make their lives more grounded under conditions that have the potential to feel transient and amorphous. My argument in this chapter continues to forward that theoretical position by showing how the lives of Hakka Singkawang are characterized by forms of attachment, particularly attachments to place, to the *kampung halaman*, which is a particularly common mode of attachment throughout Indonesia. People actively forge relationships and connections to their *kampung halaman*, which are evoked and expressed in multiple ways both from within and while away from that social and physical space.

In this chapter I also show how Singkawang is similar to any other *kampung halaman* in Indonesia while still retaining a distinctive identity. The place, landscape and sociality are...
meaningful to people who return home frequently and actively maintain long-term and long-range connections from Jakarta and overseas. Signs of "Chineseness" are everywhere, from shop houses to temples, from food to speech, from healing practices to health regimens. Chinese culture is ubiquitous and highly visible throughout Singkawang, which is strikingly different from other cities in Indonesia. The presence and visibility of these signs of Chineseness is also surprising given the long and recent history of forced assimilation during the Suharto era (discussed below). Chinese culture was not eliminated or removed, nor were Chinese Indonesians “assimilated”. It is evident throughout the city that Chinese language and traditions have persisted and since the reform era have multiplied and expanded. It is because of the remarkable character of Singkawang as a Chinese Indonesian city that I am claiming it is the Chinatown (Ind. pecinan) of Indonesia.

Before discussing the specific characteristics that make Singkawang pecinan Indonesia and a special kampung halaman for thousands of Chinese Indonesians, I want to explain the main contours of the social position of Chinese Indonesians at present and in a historical perspective because it provides some of the context for understanding the case of Singkawang.

4 Chinese Indonesians

The Chinese are one of many ethnic groups in Indonesia, with an estimated population of between 3 and 6 million, constituting between 1 and 3 percent of the population. They are diverse, multilingual, multireligious and multi-class. They trace ancestry back to several separate waves of overseas Chinese migration (Heidhues 2003; Suryadinata 2004) and have assimilated and integrated into Indonesian society in vastly varying degrees and in different ways at different

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21 Many estimate that the actual number is much more than this (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27991754; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/indonesia/special_report/51981.stm). It is difficult to arrive at accurate numbers because many people who may be of Chinese ancestry do not report themselves as Chinese, and many people who consider themselves Chinese, also do not want to publically identify as such.
times. Despite this diversity, Chinese Indonesians have had a shared experience of discrimination. Historically, and in modern times, they have been denied citizenship and property rights, forcibly assimilated, evicted from their land and targeted in violent attacks and massacres (Peluso 2006; Purdey 2006; Heryanto 1999; Hui 2007). Many scholars have studied their perilous minority status and concluded that Chinese Indonesians live “trapped” in a perpetual state of ambiguity (Ang 2001) and are “captives in their own situation and of their own history” (Coppel 1983). A more recent study in West Kalimantan builds on sociologist Georg Simmel’s theorization of the stranger to explain how Chinese Indonesians are “strangers at home” because their lives are marked by “estrangement as a condition of existence”. The study suggests that while their status as an ambiguous and ambivalent foreign minority (Hui 2007:197) changes over time, it is impossible to escape outright. Others have theorized the position of Chinese Indonesians as “essential outsiders” (Chirot and Read 1997), identifying the ways that colonial and then national politics and policies have shaped their forms of privilege and exclusion. These forces have also powerfully structured their participation in society, their inclusion in the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) and the “fictive ethnicity” (Balibar 2004) of the nation (Purdey 2006). While these theorizations have captured aspects of the experience of living as a problematic minority, the category “Chinese”, in Indonesia, as elsewhere, is not stable. What it means to be Chinese Indonesian at various points in time, under specific circumstances, and in relationship to others is constantly changing. There is a sense in my research, as well as the research of other scholars of Chinese Indonesian history and cultures, that the semantic meaning of Chinese as “outsider” is lessening quickly and dramatically throughout Indonesia (Hui 2011; Sai and Hoon 2013).

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22 Given this great diversity, the problems associated with using the of the word "Chinese" to reference both the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan, and the problem of using names to objectify ethnic identities more generally, it is surprising we can talk about "Chinese Indonesians" at all. However, there is a need to use a common language and in Indonesia one’s ethnic identity (Ind. suku) is not generally imagined to be something mutable. Even if someone assimilates, intermarries, converts, or through their regular social life (Ind. gaul) seems to have entered into another group, they are often still reduced to a single and essentialized ethnic group: Javanese, Chinese, Dayak, Malay, Bugis, etc. In this dissertation I alternate between the term Chinese Indonesians and the term Hakka Singkawang, depending on the context. Hakka Singkawang is both the most specific in terms of place and dialect group, and it is also how these people most often refer to themselves when speaking of their particular group vis-à-vis others in Indonesia. Chinese Indonesian is the broadest, most inclusive and most common term. I use it as well, but with full knowledge that it is also imperfect and that no single terms will ever be able to capture something as heterogeneous and changeable as ethnic identity.
In Indonesia, social inclusion and exclusion, belonging and entitlement have been mediated, in part, by a “politics of indigeneity” that many have argued has its roots in the period of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) (1602–1799) (Blusse 1986; McVey 1992). This period saw to the implementation of an ethnic division of labor based on a racial ideology of ethnic groups, their imagined propensities and relative valuations (Fasseur 1994). In the colonial period (1800–1942), the Netherlands Indies government formalized these ideas by organizing the colony according to three racialized legal categories: Europeans, Foreign Orientals (read: Chinese) and Natives. They also developed other unofficial ways to divide the population on the basis of race and imagined propensities (Fasseur 1994). Under the Cultivation System,23 for example, when large scale plantations were established or brought under Dutch control a racial division of labour was made mandatory. “Natives” labored, Chinese collected agricultural and other products, and Europeans exported and traded these products to Europe and their other colonies (Van Niel 1992). Middleman roles, including money lender, tax collector, small business operator, and regional trader, were primarily the work of Chinese, and manual labor jobs were primarily the work of “Natives”. The racialized trends in labor arrangements established during the VOC period became entrenched, normalized and intergenerational such that the ethnic division of labor was naturalized and used as the basis and legitimization of racialized legal categories and class and race-based social relations (Fasseur 1994; Kwee 2006; Van Niel 1992).

Anderson (1998:320) has argued that this “divide and rule” style of governance was a coalition-building strategy in which white colonialists (themselves a visible minority) could partner with Christians, Chinese, and other “minority” groups in opposition to more populous “majority” groups. One method of doing this was the introduction of a census that employed categories of identification based on either religion or ethnicity, though the categories themselves changed in the same way the colonists imagined that the populations surrounding them changed over time. This coalition-building strategy helped to create and formalize the very concept of majorities and minorities in Southeast Asia. The post-independence circumstances of these groups, particularly the Chinese, were often foreshadowed by their places in colonial society largely because

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23 This was a system implemented by Governor General Johannes van den Bosch in the 1830s in order to increase wealth for the Dutch government by mandating that cash crops be grown specifically for export (Fasseur 1994).
nationalist movements borrowed heavily from the majority rules politics common in the metropoles of the 20th century colonists. Not only did colonial regimes have a role in constructing the notion of minority populations (Anderson 1998), but they also introduced segregation policies (Sidel 2003). In the Netherlands Indies, for example, the Chinese, particularly in Java, were forced to live in ghettos (Sidel 2003), had their travel restricted by the need to use travel permits\(^{24}\) (Blusse 1986; Coppel 2006) and were strongly discouraged from assimilating into the local society, or converting to Islam (Sidel 2003). They were also mandated to wear traditional pajamas and keep their hair in queue style in order to visibly differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups in the population (Anderson 1998). According to Anderson, the Dutch tried to harden the boundaries between ethnic groups, so that by “the nineteenth century these policies had produced in Java a non-Chinese-speaking ethnic Chinese minority that increasingly was detached from an indigenous coalition and hitched to Batavia’s wagon,” (Anderson 1998:321). These policies have left an impression on the present in both subtle and powerful ways, contributing to settlement patterns, living arrangements, intergroup relations, and subjectivities.

In the Dutch East Indies, the social position of the Chinese was indeed complicated and regulated by policies of control and exclusion. However, they were also afforded certain forms of privilege that have left a powerful legacy on the present. As “Foreign Orientals”, the Chinese were, at certain times, allowed to use the Dutch civil code (Fasseur 1996:43), a privilege never extended to “Natives”. While they were residentially segregated under the quarter system, they were also appointed a Chinese Kapitan (Ind. captain) who was responsible for managing the affairs of the Chinese community, including births, deaths, marriages, and minor dispute resolution. This was a form of indirect rule, which made it easier for the Dutch to control otherwise self-regulating communities. The system in fact allowed aspects of Chinese social life to continue and have sovereignty. Under the category of “Foreign Orientals”, Chinese generally enjoyed a higher social status than the more populous “Natives” and were given access to Dutch education promoted by the HCSs (Holland Chinese Schools), and Dutch-medium schools for Chinese children that were opened specifically to rival the growing number of Chinese language schools

\(^{24}\) People in Singkawang report having to use these travel permits to go to Jakarta and other places up until the 1990s.
Finally, the Chinese were a favored selection by the Dutch for managerial and middleman type roles in the agricultural export sector, including sugar refining, tobacco processing, managing rubber estates, trading and tax farms (Coppel 2004; Pelly 2004). These privileges were both an expression of the government’s racial ordering of people and a self-fulfilling prophesy. It was a system ideologically backed by 19th century social Darwinism and commonly applied in colonial encounters to legitimize unequal social arrangements (Fasseur 1996:32).

For Chinese Indonesians, the nationalist movement and the period surrounding the declaration of independence required a major renegotiation of power in order to determine what their new social position would become. The relative absence of coalitions with indigenous elites left many Chinese Indonesians scrambling to find other methods of inclusion in the newly forming national power structures (Anderson 1998; Twang 1998). Despite these challenges, Chinese Indonesians were an integral part of the newly independent country from the onset. Recognizing the vulnerability of their situation as a minority aligned with the colonial regime, many Chinese Indonesians actively became involved in nationalist politics (Anderson 1998). They became members of newly formed political organizations and parties, including the Investigating the Business of Independence Preparation Council (BPUPK), the Committee for the Preparation for Independence (PPKI), the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the Consultative Body on Indonesian Citizenship (BAPERKI, which was comprised almost entirely of ethnic Chinese Indonesians) (McVey 1965; Tan 2004). The problem was, however, that despite major efforts of prominent activist politicians such as Siauw Giok Tjhan and Yap Thiam Hien, Indonesians of Chinese decent (Warga Negera Indonesia Keturunan Tionghoa\textsuperscript{25}) were not recognized as one of the true and constitutive ethnic groups (sukus) imagined to comprise the ideal diversity of the nation, as it was laid out in the national ideology, Pancasila (Ind. five principles), at the time of independence in 1949. During the Sukarno years (1945–1966), the social-political climate was relatively more favorable for ethnic Chinese incorporation and participation in politics and

\textsuperscript{25}Ironically, when someone is referred to as, or refers to themselves as a WNI (Warga Negara Indonesia), or Indonesian Citizen, what in fact is being denoted is that they are WNIKT (Warga Negara Indonesia Keturunan Tionghoa) or Indonesian Citizen of Chinese Descent, because non-Chinese Indonesians are never required to prove or verify their citizenship (Coppel 1983) in speech on in paperwork. It is assumed and it is the default position. As an identifier ‘WNI’ contains within it the suspicion that one in fact is not Indonesian, but foreign.
society than during the Suharto years (1966–1998) that followed. However, even during the
Sukarno era the masalah Cina (Ind. lit: The Chinese problem)—the question of how to
incorporate, treat, control and administer the Chinese population—was nonetheless constantly
debated. Pribumi (Ind. indigenous)-Chinese relations were strained by popular and generalized
resentment of the status of Chinese Indonesians as a predominantly entrepreneurial minority, or
capital owning class (Dobbin 1996; Purdey 2006), and an anxiety about the Chinese being an
intrinsically foreign (and therefore disloyal) part of the population (Purdey 2006).

Ultimately, the “solution” chosen was to assimilate the Chinese into the newly formed Indonesia,
begging during Sukarno’s presidency, and becoming stricter, and more legislated under
Suharto. An example of the language used to limit Chinese Indonesian cultural rights is found in
Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1962, concerning Chinese religion, beliefs and customs, which
was widely applied to restrict many forms of Chinese cultural expression,

Bawha agama, kepercayaan dan adat istiadat Cina di Indonesia yang
berpusat pada negeri leluhurnya, yang dalam manifestasinya dapat
menimbulkan pengaruh psychologis, mental dan moril yang kurang wajar
terhadap warganegara Indonesia sehingga merupakan hambatan terhadap
proses asimilasi, perlu diatur serta ditempatkan fungsinya pada proporsi
yang wajar . . . .

Tanpa mengurangi jaminan keleluasaan memeluk agama dan menunaikan
ibadatnya, tata-cara ibadah Cina yang memiliki aspek affinitas culturil yang
berpusat pada negeri leluhurnya, pelaksanaannya harus dilakukan secara
intern dalam hubungan keluarga atau perorangan

That Chinese religion, beliefs and customs in Indonesia, which are centered
in the country of their ancestors, in their manifestation can cause a
psychological, mental and moral influence that is less than natural for
Indonesian citizens such that it causes a challenge to the process of
assimilation that needs to be regulated and placed functionally in a way
which is proportionally fair.

Without diminishing the guarantee of freedom to religion or perform
worship, Chinese worship ordinances that have aspects of cultural affinity
centered on the country of the ancestors, the implementation should be done
internally in the family or individually.

This legislation was used to suppress public displays of religion and culture, but also to restrict
Chinese Indonesians’ ability to gather in large groups. In fact, all forms of Chinese associations
were banned, with the sole exception of Chinese funeral associations. Other laws affecting Chinese Indonesians included Presidential Decision No. 127 of 1966, which outlined the requirement and regulations for Chinese Indonesians to change their names to Indonesian names.

Prior to this, Presidential Regulation No. 10 of 1959 had already placed a ban on trading and business activities by 'foreigners' in rural areas and small towns, something which Chinese settlers had been doing for decades if not centuries in some places. This had a major impact on Chinese Indonesians, particularly in West Kalimantan, because they were considered foreigners de facto. Whether technically without proper identification (Ind. Kartu Tanda Penduduk [KTP]), or simply perceived as foreigners, the Chinese were seriously affected by this regulation. It led to large-scale violence in West Kalimantan as Chinese residents were forcibly evicted from rural areas by groups of Dayak people with support from the military (Davidson and Kammen 2002; Peluso 2006). This led to a process of urbanization in which rural Chinese villagers moved into the cities of Singkawang, Pontianak, Pemangkat, Tebas, Sambas, and Sintang. Singkawang, Pemangkat, and Pontianak all have specific kampung that were created in 1967 in order to house the influx of these internal refugees.

These Presidential Instructions were assimilationist measures designed to rid the Chinese of their Chinese culture and make them more Indonesian. However, there were several inconsistencies and contradictions that made it functionally impossible for Chinese Indonesians to fully abandon their Chinese status. First of all, there was a specific code on identity cards which marked people as Chinese. This was used by officials, police, and army officers to take advantage of Chinese people and harass them during raids, motor accidents, and bureaucratic transactions in order to extort money. This became so common that a cycle of bribe giving and taking became an entrenched aspect of the social relationship between Chinese Indonesians and representatives of the state. For a long time people have described this as a practice that has sudah jadi kebudayaan (Ind. already become a cultural practice). While Chinese were encouraged to change their names to more Indonesian sounding names, in many instances Chinese middle names were retained and functioned as another way to identify individuals as Chinese.
Another policy was created which required Chinese Indonesians to prove their citizenship by presenting a Certificate of Indonesian Citizenship (Ind. *Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republic Indonesia* SBKRI)\(^{26}\) in order to obtain identity cards and educational enrollment beginning at age eighteen. The SBKRI policy was initially an attempt to address the declaration in the mid-1950s by Mao Zedong, stating that all Chinese people living outside of China were de facto citizens of China based on blood inheritance (Latin. *jus sanguinis*). This put Chinese Indonesians in a difficult position in which they had to prove their loyalty to Indonesia\(^{27}\) even if they had been born in Indonesia and their ancestors had lived there for many generations. While the policy officially ended in 1996, news of the change in regulation was very slow to reach local bureaucrats who continued to demand that Chinese Indonesians show an SBKRI.

In 2006, a new citizenship law was passed which revoked law No. 62 of 1958 and finally got rid of legal differences between descendants of Chinese people and other Indonesians. One of the key features of this new legislation is the redefinition of the word *asli* (Ind. original/indigenous). The semiotics of the word *asli*, a word associated with the category *pribumi*, have changed over time but until recently carried the distinct connotation of something or someone more authentic and genuine (Coppel 1983). In the new citizenship law, a person who is *asli* is a natural born person. This opens up a variety of new possibilities for Chinese Indonesians as citizens, including the ability to become president and to stake claims to forms of belonging from which they were previously barred.

The “politics of indigeneity” that mediate the ways that people access forms of belonging and entitlement in the nation should not be viewed as trivial or merely discursive. Perceptions and valuations of ethnic identities in Indonesia, as elsewhere, have direct implications for people’s access to resources (be they material, social, or symbolic) and contribute to the ways that people understand themselves and others (Heryanto 1998). Ethnic identity can be used to


\(^{27}\) As outlined in the constitution of 1945, law No. 62 of 1958 and reaffirmed in 2006, Indonesian citizens are permitted to have only one citizenship.
legitimatize specific kinds of violence against particular groups at particular times (Stoler and Cooper 1997:6). This is clearly visible in Indonesia by the ways that the Chinese have been cast as scapegoats and have been targets of violence, harassment and discrimination at both a policy and a popular level. What I am calling the politics of indigeneity is also, by definition, not static; categories shift and change at various historical moments. Under the VOC, people in the Indies were more frequently categorized in terms of religion, with Christianized groups receiving higher social status and only later, during the late colonial state under the Dutch government, were groups divided on the basis of race (Fasseur 1996). In the lead up to independence in the 1940s there was an attempt to include the Chinese as one of the constituent sukus in the national ideology, Pancasila. This was proposed by BAPERKI, which advocated an integrationist as opposed to an assimilationist approach to define the place of Chinese Indonesians in the new nation (Coppel 1983:44).

Currently, the politics of indigeneity is undergoing another period of major change in which Chinese Indonesian identities are being renegotiated in the context of the greater cultural freedoms made possible in the post-Suharto era (Dawis 2009; Hoon 2008). This is happening throughout Indonesia but it is highly visible in Singkawang on three accounts. First, since the fall of Suharto, and the pencabutan (Ind. removal) of Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1962 by Gus Dur, there has been a major resurgence in Chinese culture in the public sphere. Second, there is a new kind of civic pride surrounding the multicultural character of the city. Third, there has been a large-scale reentry of Chinese Indonesians into local politics (discussed in Chapter 7).

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28 The government has been complicit in perpetuating a myth of Chinese economic dominance and using that myth as a way to divert attention away from its own economic and management failures. The popular statistic that the Chinese constitute 1% of the population but control 70% of the economy, which is repeated ad nauseam in the media, erases a more nuanced and complicated reality (Ang 2001). However, it has proved a convenient meme that can be used to shift blame for social problems and lack of economic development away from the government and onto a minority scapegoat (Chua 2008; Purdey 2003).

29 BAPERKI is an acronym for Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia (Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship). It was an organization started in 1954 in the period after independence when the Indonesian state was being formed. It had a mostly Chinese Indonesian membership and was concerned with issues of integration of Chinese into the newly forming Indonesian state and society. While it was formed in connection with the Indonesian Communist Party, BAPERKI had members occupying a wide spectrum of political ideology. BAPERKI was officially banned in 1965 after the coup attempt (Suryadinata 2001).
4.1 Beyond the Discourse of Precarity

Since Reformasi (Ind. reform), there has been tremendous growth in Chinese Indonesian studies, particularly in order to document the societal-wide changes that are underway as a result of the pencabutan of Suharto’s assimilation policies. Interestingly though, the majority of these studies continue to frame the lives of Chinese Indonesians in terms of an essential precarity and with reference to a discourse, which began during the pre-independence period, of the Masalah Cina (Ind. the Chinese Problem30). While studies are highly critical of this discourse (Sai and Hoon 2013), they nonetheless engage with it. One recent theorization, the one most relevant to my own current study, is “Strangers at Home: History and Subjectivity among the Chinese Communities of West Kalimantan, Indonesia” by Yew-Foong Hui (2011). In the book, which is based on his dissertation of the same name (2007), he analyzes a series of historical moments from the post-World War II period to the present as a way of showing how “itineraries” are “mapped by the historical self-consciousness of the Chinese subject” and “motivated by the desire to be inscribed within history—a desire not to be estranged from a place in history or the history of place” (2011:6). Hui begins by tracing the semiotics of terms (Man. zhonggou ren, huaqiao, huaren, huayi; Ind. Cina, Tionghoa, and Chinese) explaining how each has been used variously to recuperate, dissipate or erase “Chinese” as a meaningful sign in history (2011:13). Adopting Simmel’s theory of the stranger as an individual who is simultaneously remote and near, “a figure of value but also a figure of ambivalence” (Hui 2011:14), Hui argues that Chinese Indonesians are “strangers at home” because they can be perceived as an inner enemy imagined to have foreign-derived sovereignties which contrast with the autochthonous claims of natives. By investigating a series of historical moments—the Japanese occupation of Borneo during World War II, Suharto’s rise to power, the 1967 rural expulsion and the 2007 Cap Go Meh celebration—Hui shows what kind of strangers Chinese Indonesians were/are, revealing that they are not merely victims of unjust circumstances but are active subjects involved in making history (2011:16). He concludes that the Chinese subject in West Kalimantan is “caught between being a stranger and becoming a settler in a place that is both homely and unhomely” and that

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30 The “Chinese Problem” was a discursive debate that emerged in the lead up to independence that tried to understand how people of Chinese descent would be treated in the new Indonesia which was based on a majority-rules ethnic nationalist ideology. The erroneous ideational backing to this “problem” was the idea that there was some particular kind of obstacle to Chinese being or becoming Indonesian.
estrangement is a fundamental condition of existence (2011:304). However, at the end of the book he also gives an indication that this stranger role may be changing and that in time Chinese Indonesians will “finally assume the quasi-kinship of accredited settlers within the provincial and national imaginaries” (2011:303).

In his epilogue, Hui analyzes the 2007 mayoral election politics in West Kalimantan and makes an observation which resonates with my own findings, “Chinese are no longer acting as mere strangers whose wealth and even votes are to be appropriated by those who claim political primacy, but as citizens who assume full political rights within an electoral framework that Indonesia has broadly adopted” (2011:303). This sentiment was partly reiterated by the mayor, Hasan Karman when he explained to me the effects of the 2006 citizenship laws,

Pendapat saya begini. Indonesia sudah negara yang civilized. Sudah beradat. Ada hukum oleh undang-undang orang Tionghoa yang sudah warganegara Indonesia, iya bangsa Indonesialah otomatis dia bagian dari suku bangsa Indonesia, like it or not. Itu ada suku negara yang modern, yang tidak lagi melihat dia dari mana. Nah, negara yang lebih maju lagi immigration, immigrant yang masuk dia proses soal naturalization dia punya citizenship, dia sudah menjadi warga negara, itu sudah. Sekarang Indonesia punya government baik central, sampai propinsi sampai ke daerah lokal, semua sudah begitu.

My opinion is like this. Indonesia is already a civilized country. Already with rules. There are laws of the constitution that Chinese people, who are already Indonesian citizens, national Indonesians, automatically are a part of the Indonesian ethnic groups, like it or not. This is the ethnicity of a modern country that no longer looks at where people are from. An even more developed country is an immigration one, immigration that is in process so that one can be naturalized and have citizenship, in which one can already become part of the country, and that’s that. Right now Indonesian government, from the central to the provincial to the local, is all already like that.

In this statement the mayor acknowledges the legal changes that have been made to give equal rights for Chinese Indonesians and articulates an aspiration for a more just and modern form of multicultural citizenship. The legal framework, however, is only one aspect of the changes that need to take place in order to break down long-standing inter-ethnic group antagonisms. Ien Ang has written most clearly about what is needed to get beyond the treatment of Chinese Indonesians as a problem, a problem of race, of perceived economic domination, of imagined
foreign-derived sovereignties. She calls for a “politics of hybridity which emphasizes an accommodation of cultures and peoples at the local level.” She sees this as “a necessary condition for the very possibility of larger social and political transformation” (Ang 2001:71). According to her analysis, what is required is change in the micro-politics of everyday life because that is where Indonesians, Chinese and non-Chinese, have complicated entanglements, and can mix, collaborate, crossover and overlap (Ang 2001:90). Leaving Indonesia, a privilege only a very small percentage of Chinese Indonesians can afford, is not a solution. Seeking virtual belonging within a deterritorialized Chinese diaspora also does not help to change the realities of people’s daily lives. Legal and policy change is essential to remove structural discrimination; however, this alone may not have the effect of changing popular sentiments and stereotypes. A politics of hybridity, in which people are free to have multiple forms of identification and mixing, is not considered a transgression of boundaries. Ang argues opportunities to come together on bonds of identification based on categories other than race or ethnicity will be the most cathartic and the most meaningful change in people’s lives (Ang 2001). After all, the precariousness of ethnic relations in Indonesian is not limited to the Chinese, but can be felt by many groups, who would also benefit from such a politics of hybridity. The micro-politics of everyday life in Singkawang reveal precisely the kinds of mixing and collaborating that Ang envisions.

Based on my extended ethnographic research in Singkawang, I am compelled to take a slightly different stance than the essential outsider perspective on the Chinese that dominates the literature. I do not view the Chinese in West Kalimantan as strangers nor estranged, nor can I portray their lives as characterized by an existential ambivalence or ambiguity. After spending two years inside the Chinese community in Singkawang, I have been shown by my participants how their lives are filled richly with a sense of attachment and groundedness, an unequivocal and unquestioned sense of presence and belonging in place—not just in Singkawang, Kalimantan, Indonesia, but in neighborhoods, the streets, the landscape: sam tiao kong, pat to poi, hok lo nam, etc. In this dissertation, what I focus on is the “essential” aspect of what others have called “essential outsider” status and on the “home” aspect of what Hui calls being “strangers at home”. Essential in the sense that their lives are real, valid, and that they matter and that they can and do create Indonesia as much as the next person. Home in the sense that
they express a feeling of belonging, of familiarity with modes of being and a freedom from having one’s claims on that sense of belonging called into question, which is projected onto the place, the landscape, the cityscape and one’s movement back and forth from those places. Through such a focus, I show how Chinese Indonesians are insiders in Indonesia. I explore how the claims to place being made in the present moment, in the context of a post-Suharto era politics of belonging, are once again changing the relationship between people, local places, and mobilities. In this way, I am aligned with the argument made by Charles Coppel (1983), that you cannot understand Indonesia without understanding Chinese Indonesians. And having the perspective of Chinese Indonesians as insiders allows for a different perspective on Indonesia as a nation, particularly the ways that the politics of belonging intersect with the possibilities for transnational cultural identifications and imaginaries of international and social mobility.

It would be wrong to deny that the descriptions already presented are not at least partially accurate; the conditions of being a scapegoated entrepreneurial minority marginally positioned within the national imaginary and legally discriminated against have a material basis and have undoubtedly contributed to certain psychological states and subjectivities on the part of many Chinese Indonesians. These states could easily be described as ambivalent, or existentially ambiguous. But that is not the limit of possibilities for Chinese Indonesian subjectivities. I have chosen not to view Chinese Indonesians solely or primarily from the position of precarity. To analyze the conditions of people’s lives through the lens of precarity from the outset limit what can be seen and what is discovered during the research. First of all, this lens makes it difficult to see other aspects of people’s lives. The researcher goes into the field expecting to find subjectivities shaped by precarity, discrimination, repression or marginality, and indeed finds those things; anticipation informs the questions that are asked, the answers given, the things recorded, and post fieldwork selection

My experience, like other scholars of Chinese Indonesians, is no different. I went to Singkawang to begin my fieldwork equipped with a hypothesis that made sense from the perspective of a library carrel in Toronto surrounded by all the published literature. Put simply, my hypothesis was that Hakka Singkawang were leaving the town and leaving Indonesia in large numbers as a way of finding new places that provided possibilities for safer ethnic belonging. I sought to
show how even in a place like Singkawang, with a majority Chinese population, a Chinese
mayor, an intact Chinese dialect, and a long history of settlement in the area, people still felt as
though they were discriminated outsiders and were therefore emigrating to escape this precarity.

But that is not what I found. Yes, if you ask people about discrimination, violence, and tension
in ethnic relations, everyone has a story, sometimes many stories. Everyone can recall past times
when they were called derogatory names like Cina babi (Ind. Chinese pig), or squeezed for
money by the police, assaulted or evicted, imprisoned. Indeed, I began my research looking for
and collecting these stories. But after a couple of months in Singkawang what I was struck by
most was how little people talk about these things on their own. I had to directly ask people to
find out about these experiences.

Silence is partly a manner of protection and safety, of getting over things, of forgetting, or of
moving on. There is no need to talk about the past, because it is over, I was told. Not talking
about it is a preferred method. But also, these are old stories. They are real, and they are horrible
and unjust, but they don’t reflect the experiences of people right now. I was told over and over
again that “it used to be like that” (Ind. dulu memang begitu), but that things are different now,
better now. Things are changing and changing in positive ways. When people spoke in these
terms they were both describing actual changes that they see around them while also giving
voice to aspirations for better conditions in society.

Hearing these affirmations of positive change was a breakthrough moment in my fieldwork. It
may sound simple but it was a profound experience. The fact was that my desire to focus on
precarity and discrimination was influencing the information I was gathering. At that moment, I
decided that I needed to actually listen to what people were talking about themselves and not
insert my research interests into every social situation. This is an inherent problem of the limits,
or rather, the impossibility of objectivity. Nevertheless, I knew I had to bracket my own research
hypothesis and start to attempt to see more from an emic perspective.

My goal is to represent people’s lives as they have presented them and explained them to
me in a way that productively analyzes the tensions that exist in the cultural logics underpinning
mobility and the making of place, self and community. The result is a portrayal of a community in West Kalimantan which is not actively or overly concerned with existential questions of belonging, but engaged in the rhythms of daily life—which are constant enactments of being and belonging to that place, albeit in partial and mediated ways. I try to adopt an approach which neither critiques the explanations given to me by my participants, nor presents those explanations as authoritative or unproblematic (Silvey 2006). This research contributes to a scholarship that has emerged since the removal of anti-Chinese legislation in the context of post-Suharto democratization in Indonesia. It endeavors to tell different stories about Chinese Indonesians, stories framed by more than just persecution and the masalah Cina (Sai and Hoon 2013). It seeks to give voice to underrepresented groups, including rural populations, populations on the outer islands and Chinese in non-business activities.

4.2 The Dragon Statue

Figure 1: Dragon Statue Protest

“Can I come over and watch the protest at your house?” I asked and looked up to see Susanto’s face contorted into a shocked scowl.
“Emily, you must stay home, stay inside, it’s not safe,” he replied. I guess it was a strange request to make of my young friend, who was not allowed out of the house himself for that day. But his house was so centrally located I really did not want to pass up the opportunity to view what was going to happen.

May 28, 2010, Hari Waisak (Ind. Buddha’s birthday), members of the local branch of the Front Pembela Islam (FPI) (Ind. Islamic Defenders Front)\(^{31}\), held a demonstration protesting the existence of a dragon statue (Ind. Tugu Naga/Patung Naga) located in the center of Singkawang. During the protest they shouted slogans and threw stones at the sculpture. This protest was a repeat of an earlier protest that took place in 2008 directly after the dragon sculpture was built.

News of the protest circulated the day before. I learned about it from people hanging out in the café in front of my house. “What’s going to happen?” I asked.

“There will be a demo,” said Asau.

“Are you going to open your shop?” I asked.

“Um, maybe, I will see later. It might be better to just close the shop. But I will see, maybe I will open up.”

Herman, who was sitting in a relaxed position at the table next to us with his back against the wall and one leg lifted up resting on the thin wooden bench, joined our conversation: “Oh, no. Don’t. Don’t open your shop. It’s not a good idea. It is best to keep your shop closed. Just stay

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\(^{31}\) FPI is a radical religious people’s organization (Organizasi Masyarakat-Ormas) that was created in 1998 and has grown in popularity in some parts of Indonesia over the past two decades. Their stated mission is to spread a fundamentalist interpretation of Shari'a law through preaching, accountability and jihad. They are known to have military backing and some high political connections. There are repeated calls to ban the organization as a terrorist organization because of their connection with violent attacks. While FPI has supporters, there is also a widespread perception that their protests are disingenuous and are, in fact, attempts to instigate fear which could lead to preemptive bribing. The most common example told to me is the practice of paying members of FPI to NOT stage protests at karaoke bars, nightclubs or gambling dens where activities are either illegal or haram (Ind. religiously prohibited).
inside. It is not safe. This is Indonesia. You never know what will happen. Anything can happen,” he said.

“*Oh begitu.*” (Ind. Oh it’s like that.) I nodded and then looked over to the coffee shop owner, Afui, who was wiping down the counter and cleaning the brass coffee pot. “What do you think?” I asked him.

“Oh, just open up,” he said speaking in a tone of authority. “Closing the shop will just make them [FPI/ the demonstrators] stronger. If you close, they will think you are afraid. Don’t make them more audacious [Ind. *berani*]. Just open up the shop, ‘business as usual’ [spoken in English]. We should not let them think that we are afraid.”

Herman shrugged, but looked unconvinced. Asau was nodding in agreement.

This conversation represented the main views about how to handle threatening situations. There are those who emphasize the need to be cautious, those who emphasize the need to be brave and strong, and yet others who argue it is best to be flexible and see what happens. More than any single stance, it is these three positions that represent approaches to sensitive situations in Singkawang.

The following day I got up early in the morning, put my camera and my notebook into my shoulder bag and went out onto the street to see what was happening. Many shops were closed as anticipated, their metal gates shut and locked from the inside, families hiding deep inside and upstairs. Looking up, I could see people huddling around second-floor windows, straining to get a look at the street scene below. However, many shops were still open (also as anticipated). But the streets felt more deserted than usual. I walked four blocks to the intersection of *Jalan Niaga* and *Jalan Makmur*, where the dragon statue is located. When I arrived the protest was already under way. There were 7 to 10 members of FPI walking toward the *Tugu Naga*, distinguished from the plain-clothed members of the crowd behind them by their bright white *taqiyah* and long white tunics. One of the eldest began to shout energetically, and after each sentence the demonstrators raised their fists in the air and yelled out cries of support.
Susanto’s father spotted me on the street from upstairs and quickly came down, unlocked his metal gate and ushered me inside. “What are you doing?,” he asked. “Are you not afraid?”

“I want to watch it,” I replied. “Can I watch it from here?” I asked.

“Yes, come upstairs.”

I followed him upstairs into a long open room, with solid, century-old ironwood floors and walls. There were portraits of the family patriarchs hung prominently in the center of the room above a large wooden sofa and coffee table, flanked with antique ceramic vases holding peacock feathers. It was cool, comfortable and expansive, but I only had a few seconds to appreciate the space before hurrying out onto a tiny balcony that was caged in with metal lattice.

Looking down into the street I saw that the protestors had approached nearer to the Tugu Naga, and the police, who until now had been scattered around the intersection waiting and casually chatting with the other people on the street, began to reposition themselves into a circle in front of the monument. By now the numbers had increased, both rioters and onlookers. The shouting continued. Fists were raised and then the leader instructed the crowd to throw stones. Like a magic trick, stones instantly materialized in the hands of some of the demonstrators and were thrown at the statue. Police and onlookers had to duck and dodge being hit by these projectiles. The tail of the dragon, which coils down and around the central pillar, was hit in several places and some cement pieces fell to the ground. At this point the police decided to break up the protest. Suddenly, it was as though their numbers had tripled. They began to shoo the protestors back. From around the corner on Jalan Niaga, Singkawang’s anti-riot police vehicle appeared, black, ominous and impenetrable; it chased the demonstrators down the road.
By this point the number of people who had gathered to witness the protest greatly outnumbered the protestors, which, by the looks of it totaled no more than 25 individuals. They stood nearby, all around the intersection, observing and taking photos and video clips with their cell phone cameras. Some were from the neighborhood; others had stopped to gawk while passing by on motorbikes. There were a few journalists and photographers with large cameras strung around their necks, arching precariously over the shoulders of police officers to take close-up portraits of the FPI leaders in action. Women and children were squished together in front of the upstairs windows of the shop houses, and like me they were straining to see what was happening below. The police looked elegant and confident in their matching uniforms, pressed black pants with rigidly starched kaki shirts tucked in and belted neatly. They had dispersed the crowd easily, making them flee back down the street from where they had arrived and the protest ended almost as quickly as it had begun.

The following day, back at the café, I learned that a counter protest was being organized. There was a group of people talking about it and so I leaned over and asked Theo, someone I had met earlier that week, to tell me about it. Theo is a young stylish entrepreneur with wealthy relatives and multiple businesses in both Jakarta and Singkawang. I’d met him at the market at the end of my street while he was on one of his bimonthly trips to Singkawang to harvest birds’ nests in one of his many bird houses and to work on other business ventures. “Do you want to go and see the counter protest?” he asked. “Yeah, sure,” I replied. So, just like that, Theo, his sidekick, Joseph, and I jumped into his SUV and drove off down the road to Kridisana Stadium. There was a bend
in the road, and we veered off to the left, passing a bright red temple on the right and then a Chinese cemetery. The half-moon shaped graves dotted the side of the hill facing toward the ocean directly across from the driveway to the Dayak long house.

In Hakka dialect Dayak people are known as *Ko Buk Nyin*, literally “tall house people” and approaching the long house it was easy to see why. The long house structure, which is used by the *Dewan Adat Dayak* (DAD) (Dayak Customary Council) for gatherings, celebrations, and rituals, stands at least twelve feet off the ground, raised prominently by approximately twenty-five cement pillars. We ascended the narrow staircase at the front of the house and entered into the main hall. We were introduced to the leaders of DAD who were sitting in a semicircle on bamboo mats on a shaded platform. Stretched out in front of them were two rows of fabric, one red and one white (the colors of the Indonesian flag), and a group of people, both Chinese and Dayak supporters, were crowded over on one side of the long house waiting to be passed a permanent marker so they could add their own signatures to the long length of fabric.

This counter-action was spearheaded by the DAD, in partnership with a few key Chinese residents who vocally and publically oppose the anti-dragon statue protestors. This action took the form of gathering thousands of signatures on hundreds of meters of red and white fabric attesting to the people’s approval and acceptance of the dragon statue and then parading these long pieces of fabric through town. Parading through town has become a popular method of peaceful protest in Singkawang, and throughout Indonesia, a tactic through which people come together to express their collective identification or position with a commanding physical presence in the public space. There is a large literature about the dynamics and practices of parading in public space which I will explore in Chapter 7 in the analysis of Cap Go Meh.

I sat with the leaders of DAD on their bamboo mat and was brought some corn and sticky rice. I asked about the red cloth and about the dragon statue.

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“We like the dragon. We want the dragon to stay. We do not want to get rid of the dragon statute. There is no problem with the dragon. Some say that the dragon is a Chinese symbol, but it is also a Dayak symbol,” Herman Buhung announced from his position in the middle of the semicircle.

“It is just a decoration. It makes the city beautiful,” another to the right of him added. “Many tourists take photos at the dragon statue. For what should we destroy it?” a third man said directing his inquiry to me.

An older man in the corner leaned toward us and began speaking quietly, such that everyone had to be silent while listening to him. “There is no problem with the dragon statue,” he said slowly and assuredly. “This is just FPI trying to provoke. The majority of people in Singkawang do not support them [FPI],” he said, as he opened a package of Wismilak cigarettes, took one out and hung it from his moist lip.

“Oh begitu,” I said nodding and hurriedly writing down their statements in my notebook.

The following day I went out to Jalan J.M. Situt and walked down to the Gedung Bahagia (Ind. Happy Building) to watch the counter-protest in action. It was swelteringly hot, but despite the heat many people were out and the red and white cloth was stretched down the road. After about an hour, the cloth was paraded around town, followed by hundreds of supporters on motorcycles, wearing red shirts, most of which were those issued to participants in that year’s Cap Go Meh parade33.

A few weeks later an article appeared in Tribun Pontianak34 relaying the sentiments of the DAD leader, with whom I had spoken.

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33 There are several large annual parades in Singkawang, including Murharram (Islamic New Year), the Lantern Festival, Cap Go Meh, Independence Day, Hari Pramuka (Ind. Scout Day), and Idul Fitri.
34 Tribun Pontianak is a daily provincial newspaper which is part of the Kompas Gramedia conglomerate. It was started in 2008 and imagined by some of my informants to have more balanced reporting on issues of ethnic conflict than the other provincial dialy, the Potianak Post. According to them, the latter is less sympathetic to the position of Chinese Indonesians in the province.
**Chairman of the Dayak Customary Council Invites People to Keep Harmony**

Singkawang, Tribun - III Chairman of the Dayak Customary Council (DAD), Herman Buhing, invites the public to maintain ethnic harmony in Singkawang. The statement was conveyed by Herman in a peace rally to the Singkawang Parliament on Wednesday. “We request that the Dragon Monument be maintained and we ask that ethnic harmony is maintained,” he said. The same thing is also said by the Chairman of DAD East Singkawang, Noreseng Yosef. He said the existence of Dragon Monument is a beautiful accessory for Singkawang. In his statement, he said the ethnic groups that exist in Singkawang have long lived in harmony. “We have long lived in harmony with each ethnicity and religion,” he said. Noreseng also said it supports the government of Mayor Hasan Karman who is legally valid. Philip, Chairman of the DAD South Singkawang, requested there be no political maneuvers that lead to conflicts in Singkawang. “We’re working to not have political maneuvering that leads to conflict in Singkawang,” he said. “The area of West Kalimantan has already had frequent conflicts, and it hurt us all,” he said. Dayak Youth Chairman of Singkawang, Nando, says Indonesia is a pluralistic

35 Tribun Pontianak 17/06/2010 "Ketua DAD Ajak Jaga Keharmonisan"
nation, and equally before the law. He added, pluralism is not to separate from one another. Chairman of the Parliament Singkawang, Chui Tjhai Mie, said it will conduct future joint discussions with regional leaders in Singkawang. Singkawang police chief, Superintendent Toni Sinambela EP, said that the event ran safely and delivered good action with no anarchism. “We provide security and remain on guard. We hope that all communities are equally maintaining the situation in Singkawang as favorable. Don’t fish for issues that are not true,” he said.

4.3 From Conflict to Partnership

A situation like this could easily have escalated into a riot or triggered communal violence. However, in this instance what emerged was an interethnic partnership between members of the Dayak community, members of the Chinese community and other citizens opposed to the demonstrators. Both Yew Foong Hui (2013) and Margaret Chan (2008) have written about an
incident that took place during Cap Go Meh in Pontianak in 2007. These accounts speak to the different ways that disputes like this play out in other parts of the province where the ethnic makeup of the population is different. In that incident, damage to a parked car that took place during the Cap Go Meh parade became the trigger for fighting in the streets. This started off with only the two men involved but escalated quickly as onlookers joined in a fight divided along ethnic lines. Later, during the resolution process with the police, a group of Chinese tokoh (Ind. VIPs) agreed to submit a written apology to the local newspaper, taking responsibility for the clash. In addition to this letter, the police banned the traditional spirit-medium festival from the Cap Go Meh celebration (a ban which is enforced to this day) and also limited and circumscribed the area allowed for the lantern parade. Chan has argued that this outcome was based more on a sense within the Malay community of having their political hegemony challenged by the increasingly prominent and visible Chinese community (2008). Similarly, Hui linked this outcome directly to the provincial elections, which resulted in the election of a Dayak governor, Cornelis, and a Chinese vice governor, Christiandy Sanjaya (2013). The lack of Malay representation at those political levels, created a sense of anxiety amongst members of the predominantly Malay population in Pontianak concerning the positions of power and authority being taken up by members of minority ethnic groups. While rooted in questions of politics and legitimacy, this anxiety was displaced onto the public spectacle of Cap Go Meh. As a public expression of Chinese Indonesian cultural revival, Cap Go Meh also acted as symbol of the increasing involvement of Chinese Indonesians in politics. This very public spectacle came to be used as an arena to voice more broadly ranging anxieties about the perceived challenge to Malay political hegemony in the province.

The way in which the confrontation over the dragon statue unfolded, in comparison, reveals Singkawang’s unique ethnic politics, a result of the city’s majority Chinese population. The Hakka residents are central to the city, and they are increasingly asserting a commanding presence and a powerful sense of entitlement to the place. The dragon has become a symbol of this and a manifestation of the city’s characterization as a place of multicultural harmony. The interethnic alliance between Chinese and Dayak groups was made visible during the counteraction (the pro-dragon statue protest), but from the day to day this close relationship is based on high rates of intermarriage (primarily Chinese men with Dayak women), friendships
and the sharing of both pork and alcohol (things which cannot easily be shared with Malay Muslims). This counteraction also allowed moderate Muslim residents to join others in resisting the spread of what they viewed as extremism and intolerance, by adding their signatures to the red and white banners, and in so doing also invoking the symbolism of the nation. The local branch of FPI is small with limited public support, but there is nonetheless a lingering possibility that the work of a small group of provocateurs could trigger a wider conflict. Reminders of this threat are raised from time to time, by powerful factions provincially and nationally who provide ideological and financial backing to local chapters of this organization (Ind. Organisasi Masyarakat [Ormas]).

The morning after the anti-dragon statue demo, Pontianak Post published an article describing the protestors (who had been released from the police station) as heroes:

Singkawang - Following the suspended imprisonment, seven suspects from the dragon-statue tragedy Friday (28/5) night are right back to Singkawang. After one Isa, around 19:30, hundreds of people gathered in the Grand Mosque. The seven men were greeted with joy. Three drums beating, pounding ceaselessly. The courtyard of the mosque Jalan Merdeka was packed with people. Vehicles could not pass, the traffic flow was stopped. They were hero’s welcomed home from the war. The seven guys were not coming together. One by one they arrived in the courtyard of the mosque, right through the crowd. Takbir reverberate when the masses were aware of their arrival.

This dramatized description of the reception of the demonstrators gives a public voice to the small group who support FPI and their anti-dragon campaign. I have suggested earlier that Singkawang is best thought of a multicultural place in which the Chinese are a majority and other groups are the minorities, the reverse of Chinese communities in other Indonesian cities. This incident, and others like it, showed me that maintaining the hegemony of Chineseness within this multiculturalism is a delicate balance that requires constant negotiation.
In the context of post-Suharto Indonesia many different groups of people have been empowered to publicly resist forces which they see as oppressive. This began with the work of the students and activists who were responsible for organizing the political resistance which led to the collapse of the Suharto regime. In the Reformasi context political parties, unions and workers, interest groups and Ormas have joined student activists in mobilizing and using public protest as a form of political engagement. Chinese Indonesians, while underrepresented within all of those groups, are now also being empowered to engage in this kind of collective public action. Taking to the streets to resist or promote something in a coordinated communal action is a specific, learned social form, one which has proliferated in a democratized Indonesia and one which Hakka Singkawang are now learning how use. As the position of Chinese Indonesians in the national imaginary changes so that they occupy a more inclusive position, so too do their claims on public space and the public sphere. During the New Order, there was a clearer bifurcation of public and private space. The interior, privately-owned houses, both the real and imagined space of Chinese Indonesian lives, juxtaposed with street, a public space for the Indonesian masyarakat (Ind. the people) and an imaginary in which the Chinese were never quite fully accepted. Now that the politics of belonging are shifting again, claims to inclusion and, stepwise, claims to public space and the public sphere are also changing.

4.4 The Changing Politics of Indigeneity

Chinese people in Singkawang strongly identify with the city and the region as their home. They have a powerful sense of entitlement as residents and citizens. They continuously cultivate and maintain their attachments to local places, people, and traditions. Also, they express pride about the characteristics of their city and its unique contribution to the multicultural diversity of the nation. One aspect of the “ambivalence” that scholars have identified as characterizing Chinese Indonesians view on being Indonesian is strong sense of membership within Indonesia and an enjoyment and desire for the hometown (Chan 2008; Hui 2007:127). Why then do so many scholars conclude that Chinese Indonesian subjectivities are characterized by an unshakable
ambiguity? I would like to suggest that what is being identified as ambiguity and ambivalence is
generated by the politics of indigeneity which is not limited to the experience of the Chinese but
is so pervasive that it often eludes consideration. The daily routines of living, what people are
actually doing, play a larger role in the constitution of identities and subjectivities than moments
of existential reflection.

As I mentioned earlier, belonging in Indonesia is mediated by a politics of indigeneity in which
groups gain legitimacy as “true and valued” citizens via claims to indigeneity and ethnicity.
Ethnic groups (Ind. suku-bangsa) are clearly defined within the national imaginary. Each group
has a clearly demarcated territory, customs (Ind. adat), language, traditional clothing, musical
instrument, weapon, architecture, fabric, and marriage ceremony. This is the idealized
“matchbox” version\(^{36}\) of ethnicity, and indeed each of the ethnic groups included is considered
both unique and asli (Ind. original/indigenous). Being asli is a status. Being asli gives one
membership within the ideal multicultural diversity of the nation.

The position of the Chinese population in West Kalimantan is particularly complicated because
they constitute such a sizeable part of the population and have long histories of migration and
settlement in the area that date back to prior to Dutch colonial expansion (Yuan 2001; Chan
2008; Heidhues 2003). As such, they have made major contributions to society (Suryadinata
2001; Heidhues 2003), but are nonetheless limited in their ability to stake claims to indigeneity\(^{37}\).
The preoccupation with a concept of indigeneity based on autochthony makes it difficult for the
Chinese to be fully included and recognized as legitimate. The perception that their territory,
their soil (Ind. bumi), their original place is located somewhere beyond Indonesian territory (i.e.
China) is a source of this problem. However, two things are currently under way which are
transforming this situation. First, there are signs that the national imaginary and the practice of
politics rely less and less on claims to indigeneity in the democratizing environment of the post-
Suharto era. Secondly, although running in contradiction to this, Hakka Singkawang are

\(^{36}\) I call this the matchbox version because there is literally a series of matchboxes depicting couples from each suku
bangsa wearing their traditional marriage costumes.

\(^{37}\) This has also been problematic for other groups defined as "foreign others", including Japanese, Indians, Arabs,
and people of mixed descent (Eurasians), in Indonesia. The Tambi community in Singkawang has also faced the
same kinds of limitations, and discriminations as the Chinese population.
increasingly finding ways to express claims to originality/authenticity, which generate their own ideology of autochthony. Rather than something fixed or predetermined, being *asli* and autochthonous are revealed as things with can be created through strategic human action and discourse. This is being realized at the same time as this the concept of *asli* is losing legal purchase, as evidenced by the 2006 reformed Citizenship Law.


After the Reformasi, when Suharto fell in 98, specific changes for ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were extraordinary, but gradual. Especially for the ethnic Chinese in Singkawang that was a bit sensitive because in 1960 there was major discrimination. So if there were Chinese who were even a bit vocal, they could be labeled communists. They were captured easily, taken by, maybe, soldiers, at the time, so that it becomes something difficult. When I was little, I still know men who wuld normally watch the store, [at that time] usually do not dare to guard the store, including my father, because if the soldiers come they can take whatever without paying. So, at that time those watching the store were usually women. Men did not dare. If they see him [a soldier] coming they would enter [the house] and switch with a women. It was such a problem. Well, after Reformasi, slowly, more so in the center, has begun a variety of regulation [reform], included citizenship law no. 12 of 2006. It is said that anyone who was born in Indonesia, the father and mother were born in Indonesian, he is already a native Indonesia. So there is no such thing as ‘native’ or ‘not native’. Now that returns a sense of trust to Chinese people, including me, to get into politics.

Hasan Karman, Mayor of Singkawang, (2007-2011)
Hakka Singkawang, and Chinese Indonesians elsewhere are learning how to make claims to places and belonging, using the same rhetoric other groups are using to stake their claims, on the basis of being putra daerah (Ind. sons of the soil). And this is occurring alongside efforts to remove the concept of pribumi and non-pribumi. The reentry of Chinese Indonesians into politics is giving further voice to the presence of Chinese Indonesians as regular, common citizens (masyarakat biasa).

Language and Landscape

I arrived in Singkawang with a map of West Kalimantan that I had bought in a Gramedia bookstore in Jakarta. That first night in my hotel room in the center of town I unfolded the map on the bed and started to trace my finger along the roads that I had traveled, reading out loud the names of the places I had passed through: Pontianak, Sungai Pinyuh, Sungai Duri, Sedau, Kali Asin, Sakkok and finally Singkawang. I stared at the map for a long time, searching for an idea of how and why this place was situated as it was and what I was doing there. Lerang, Pajintan, Kolor, Semelantan, Tebas, Pemangkat, Bengkayang, Sambas, Jawai, Selakau, the list went on and on. I scrutinized the map hoping somehow to begin my research by memorizing these place names. Looking down at the key on the map I was startled to see only three languages listed:
Indonesian, Malay and Dayak. Where was Chinese? Where were Hakka and Tiochu, the main dialects of the province? Where were Madurese, Bugis and Javanese? This map must be old I thought, it must be from the Suharto era, an artifact of an era of cultural repression, attempted assimilation, erasure. I checked the date on the map: 2007! At the time, this did not make any sense to me.

I thought about Asan, Hendro’s mother, who I met the previous year during my preliminary fieldwork. She is 73 years old, one of 8 siblings. Her parents were from an area near Benkayang, but they were chased out of their home in 1967. Hendro had invited me to his house to meet her, she had cooked some steamed fish with fermented soya beans, water spinach and soup, but it was difficult to communicate with her. She speaks no Indonesian and very little Mandarin. Asan speaks Hak boi (Eng. Hakka; Ind. Bahasa Khek), which is the main dialect spoken in Singkawang, Sambas, Benkayang, Sintang, and the rural areas of the province. Hendro, who spent six years in the United States and was particularly enthusiastic to speak English with me, translated for his mother. “I have lived here all my life. My friends are here, my neighbors are here. I do not want to go anywhere,” she said and Hendro translated. “My mother is happy here,” Hendro said. “Every day she goes to the market. She stops to pray in the Chinese temple there (pointing across the street)—everyday. It is easy for her here. She can get whatever she wants. She has her friends.”

“It’s not a problem that she can’t speak Indonesian?” I asked naively.

“Hahaha, no. This is Singkawang, Emily, everyone can speak Hakka,” Hendro smiled.

Asan is like so many people in Singkawang, particularly those of the older generation, who have had very little formal education or were educated only briefly in Mandarin prior to the closure of Mandarin schools in the 1960s. Her mother tongue is Hakka and it is the only language she knows. Asan has traveled to Jakarta via Pontianak, to Kuching, Malaysia via Bengkayang, and overseas to Hong Kong several times to visit her children who are living there. But the names of the places on my map of West Kalimantant would be unrecognizable to her. For her the road goes from San Kheu Jong (Ind. Singkawang), to Khuntien (Ind. Pontianak) passing through Sakkok,
Saliung, Atap Kong, Jam Thang, Lilang, Pak Bu Jan, and Chung Pak Kong. The road to Entikong (the border town with Malaysia) goes through La La (Ind. Bengkayang), Lu Ban, Pajintan, etc. The road north to Kuta (Ind. Sambas) and Kasih (Ind. Jawai) passes through Bun Tu Nai (Ind. Selakau), to Bat Kong (Ind. Tebas), and Bangkat (Ind. Pemangkat). Not only those villages and towns, but also every street in Singkawang, every neighborhood, mountain and river has a Hakka name and most people are more familiar with the Hakka names than the official Indonesian names. After a few months living in Singkawang, I realized that it was easier to respond to the constant inquiry “where do you live” (Hak. Nyi choi abui het?; Ind. Kamu tinggal di mana?) by telling people that I live beside the small red temple (Hak. se pak kong) near to the pork market (Hak. chu pasak) in front of the thin man who sells pork porridge (Hak. chu nyuk muii), because this more clearly described how people understand their city landscape, than the official Indonesian names.

After nearly two years of fieldwork in Singkawang, and having studied the local dialect, learned the place names, the names of foods and vegetables, the names of gods and temples, illnesses and idioms, I think back to my map of West Kalimantan, published in 2007. In its truncated list of three languages and its complete erasure of local Chinese dialects, I feel the symbolic violence of omission. Hundreds of thousands of people living in a place, generation after generation, passing their language on to their children, all denied official recognition of their existence and legitimacy.

Singkawang viewed from the position of mapmakers and the textbook producers in Java is very different from the reality of daily life in Singkawang. Singkawang is unique in Indonesia as a city that has a Chinese dialect as the unofficial language of the town, the language of the market, the language of the street, and increasingly, the language of political events. Not only is there near universal adherence to a single dialect among the Chinese population38, but many non-Chinese people can also speak some Hakka, and a few are fluent. Like Asan, many older people only speak Hakka, and all business and daily needs are conducted in Hakka. It is clear that

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38 In previous decades, particularly prior to the 1966–67 rural expulsion, there was a greater diversity of Chinese dialects spoken in Singkawang. However, today Hakka is the overwhelmingly dominant dialect, with only a few people speaking Tio Chu, Hokkien, or Hainan dialects in their homes.
Indonesian is by no means mandatory for living in Singkawang. This is something that the map would not tell me.

In Singkawang, children learn Hakka as their mother tongue, and speak it among their peers which is a very different sociocultural pattern than Chinese communities in Java. In cities in Java, where Chinese Indonesians are a minority, multigenerational language changes have resulted in fewer parents teaching Chinese dialects to their children, and children and youth prefer to use Indonesian, Javanese, or Sundanese with both Chinese and non-Chinese neighbors, peers and classmates. The ban on Chinese language education during the Suharto era has created a generational language gap in Mandarin proficiency throughout Indonesia; however, Hakka, as a spoken dialect, continued to be used as the language of the home during that period and was thus preserved.

The Hakka dominant language milieu in town is largely the result of local population dynamics. The majority Chinese population in the city and the large rural Hakka population throughout the province reproduces the language environment from generation to generation. These numbers also create the unique local politics of belonging, particularly the alliance that exists with some members of the Dayak population. Strength in numbers creates an environment in which people feel relatively safer (than in Jakarta) to openly identify themselves as Chinese, particularly with other members of the Chinese community who are found in nearly all sectors of society working as pedicab drivers, farmers, bankers, businessmen, and politicians. The long history of Chinese settlement, dating back roughly to the 1740s, has also resulted in a long-standing, multigenerational history of interethnic cohabitation. Dayak, Malay, Chinese, Bugis, Madurese, and Javanese villagers have been living side by side in this region for hundreds of years. The presence of other suku is normalized and intelligible, making it difficult to imagine or portray local Chinese residents as outsiders or foreigners. Despite this history of cohabitation, there have been specific historical moments when community boundaries have hardened particularly under pressure from directives originating at the national level being worked through individuals at the
regional level\textsuperscript{39}. The FPI protest opposing Singkawang’s dragon statue also serves as a poignant reminder of the fact that movements based on discriminatory politics have arisen frequently in Indonesia and can quickly acquire popular support which can lead to strained inter-ethnic relations, and violent conflicts.

With a majority Chinese population, and Hakka as the main language of the city, Chinese culture and religion occupy a prominent position in the town. This evidence is notable precisely because it provides a stark contrast to the cultural landscape of other Indonesian cities where evidence of “Chineseness” is present but occupies a minority and marginal position in the public sphere vis-à-vis the symbols and expressions of other ethnic groups.

4.5 Peace and Violence

Singkawang has had periods of both peace and violence; it has been both a refuge and also a departure point. The years 1965–67 and 1997–98 mark two critical moments in this history of peace and violence. During the anti-Chinese riots that shook Jakarta, Solo, and Medan in May 1998 (Ind. Kerusuhan Mei), Singkawang was relatively peaceful; there were no instances of anti-Chinese violence in the city at that time (Varshney et al. 2004; Refugee Review Tribunal Australia 2005). In fact, Singkawang became a refuge not only for Hakka Singkawang returning from Jakarta, but also for other Chinese Indonesians from other parts of the country who had heard about Singkawang. Many Hakka Singkawang people living in the neighborhoods surrounding Glodok, the worst affected areas in Jakarta, returned to Singkawang en masse. While wealthier Chinese Indonesian from Jakarta and Medan were being escorted to the airport by armed guards and leaving the country as refugees and emigrants, the urban working poor Hakka Singkawang were fleeing back to West Kalimantan by boat and plane. Some hid in their houses, or were hidden by others in neighborhoods further from the central rioting area until they could find passage back home. Once in Singkawang, some of these people stayed only for a few

\textsuperscript{39} This has been shown clearly by those who have researched the role of the army in the rural expulsion of Chinese in West Kalimantan in 1967 and the legacy of violence on the social and natural environment (Davidson and Kammen 2002; Peluso 2009).
months and then returned to Jakarta. Others waited several years to return, some began making plans to go overseas, and a large group of these internal refugees never returned; they were too traumatized and chose to remain in Singkawang. At that time, Singkawang was considered a much safer place for Chinese Indonesians and the city grew in size. Some people tried to leave Singkawang as refugees, but had their refugee claims denied as investigations found little risk of violent persecution for Chinese in Singkawang at that time. Refugee claims for those leaving Jakarta, and Solo, on the other hand, were readily accepted in Australia, Canada, the United States, and Great Britain.

*Kerusuhan Mei* occurred during the pinnacle of student protests demanding Suharto’s resignation following the Asia Economic Crisis in 1997. Rioting and looting was fueled by long-standing stereotypes and perceptions of Chinese economic domination, partially encouraged by Suharto-era discourses and policy, it revealed a conflation, in the minds of rioters, of economic class and ethnic group. Characterizations of the Chinese as an economically dominant class are much harder to structure into a coherent “truth” in Singkawang. Visibly poor Chinese people are present throughout the city and in all the surrounding villages, and live side by side with poor villagers of other ethnicities. To emphasize this point—the existence of poor Chinese—both non-Chinese and Chinese people in Singkawang frequently remark that, unlike everywhere else in Indonesia, in Singkawang, even becak drivers (Ind. pedicab) (i.e. the poorest of the poor) are Chinese. Another story I was told many times as proof of this fact was about a Chinese family who had committed suicide together in their house on the outskirts of Singkawang because of their extreme poverty. The existence of poverty and the visible presence of poor Chinese people has helped to break down the Indonesian stereotype of Chinese economic domination and the perception of Chinese ethnicity as synonymous with elite social class.

While this may be obvious to locals, the national media enjoys discovering this fact and presenting it as though it were shocking and news breaking. In her new book, “Indonesian, etc.: 

Exploring the Improbable Nation”, Elizabeth Pisani confides in her readers that she too had fallen victim to these popular stereotypes.

I had seen this brick-making once before, in South Sulawesi. There, the women making the bricks had hands made stumpy by leprosy. Sitting with them had been the factory owner, a young ethnic Chinese woman in a pink tracksuit. That was the natural order of things in most of Indonesia. Here in Singkawang, it was the ethnic Chinese women doing the work and earning less than two dollars a day.

I was shocked, in the way that a visitor in the colonial era would have been shocked to see a Dutchman cutting cane in the sugar fields. And I was suddenly very aware of how completely I had absorbed indigenous Indonesians’ stereotypes about the babahs, as Chinese traders are sometimes called, though never politely. All Chinese are canny businesspeople, the stereotype holds, hardworking and deeply clannish. Though they are generous in supporting their own kind, they are always willing to wring an extra rupiah out of an indigenous Indonesian. As a result, they grow rich. …Ethnicity and roots are issues that loom large over Kalimantan; sometimes they erupt into cataclysmic violence. (Pisani 2013: 293)

Although it may have been safer for Chinese people living in Singkawang, as compared with Jakarta, during the political transition from Suharto to Reformasi, Singkawang was not totally peaceful either. At that time there was widespread interethnic violence between Madurese and Dayak villagers in the Sambas regency. These conflicts began in 1997 and then resumed in 1999–2001 when Malays joined with Dayaks in opposition to Madurese. An estimated 500 people were killed and 30,000 local Madurese residents fled to Pontianak and Madura (Peluso and Harwell 2001: 84; Davidson and Kammen 2002). While large-scale anti-Chinese violence has not occurred since the 1967 “anticommunist” rural expulsion, the entire population always lives with the fact of violence, not only memories of these most recent ethnic wars (Ind. parang suku/etnis) but also the violent history of Konfrontasi41 and the militarization during the Suharto era (Peluso and Harwell 2001:93). Many people have witnessed violence, lived near to, heard about or seen photos of the brutal acts of beheading and cannibalism that took place in 1996–97.

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41 Konfrontasi (Ind. Confrontation) was a period of low-level military threat and aggression between 1963 and 1966 stemming from Indonesia’s disapproval of the creation of an independent Malaysia. During this time, there was a large military presence in West Kalimantan which has the largest land border with East Malaysia (See Peluso and Harwell 2001). Investment in infrastructures for the military, such as roads, barracks and telecommunication systems still exist today, as have many of the military brigades.
1999, and 2001. Images, accounts and stories circulate and have mixed with people’s other existing memories of the Japanese occupation, the turmoil surrounding independence, and the killings that took place after Suharto’s rise to power. This has resulted in a tendency among the Chinese population toward caution and conflict avoidance. The Hakka Singkawang people I spoke to during my fieldwork did not express an acute or active fear of violent persecution; the prevailing attitude given this history of violence, however, is a solemn recognition that interethnics violence is always possible in West Kalimantan, and throughout Indonesia. A common perception among members of the Chinese population, and others, is that local Dayak groups possess particularly strong “cultural traditions” (Ind. *adat*) and spiritual power/magic (Ind. *ilmu*; *gaib*) which they are capable of releasing communally under conditions of duress\textsuperscript{42}. People live in awe and in fear of this power and it contributes to why Hakka Singkawang try to avoid conflicts and confrontation. It also partly explains why the strong and long-standing alliance between the Chinese and Dayak communities has been strategically very important for maintaining peace up until today.

These dynamics make the politics of indigeneity in Singkawang different from other places in Indonesia and the kind of consciousness or subjectivity produced under these conditions is likewise different. People are insulated within a predominantly Hakka social and cultural world, which is a source of power, security, and identification. It is not only possible, but in fact most common, for people to live their lives entirely within the linguistic, cultural and social space of the Hakka community without being exposed to the common antagonisms that Chinese communities face elsewhere in Indonesia from members of the non-Chinese population. Antagonisms communicated through language syntax, verbal insults, differential treatment, avoidance, and suspicion\textsuperscript{43}.

This characterization of Singkawang and the position of the Chinese population in Singkawang does not suggest that discrimination does not exist. Various forms of discrimination continue to

\textsuperscript{42} The government has been complicit in reproducing this notion by representing Dayak culture as based on head-hunting, animism and magic (Peluso and Harwell 2001:94).

\textsuperscript{43} Non-Chinese Indonesians in Java commonly address Chinese men as *Bos*, as opposed to *Pak*, and refer to young Chinese women as *Amoi*. Both of these terms of address identify a person as Chinese and place them within a different social category, creating social distance between interlocutors. The use of the more derogatory term *Cina* or *orang Cina*, while sometimes heard in Singkawang, is much more common in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia. The more polite term *Tionghoa* or simply the English word “Chinese” has become favorable locally.
exist, not only discrimination against Chinese people, but also between and against others. Ethnic groups in Indonesia are subject to essentializing stereotypes, both positive and negative, which have consequences for social inclusion, and interethnic relations. Whereas Chinese are stereotyped as clannish, arrogant and rich, Madurese are labeled rude, abrasive and unlawful, and Dayak are considered primitive, backward and uneducated. Like Chinese Indonesians, these other ethnic groups must constantly struggle against these popular stereotypes as they search for recognition and a respectful place vis-à-vis other groups in society. Other kinds of social groups are also marginalized and discriminated against in Indonesia, including Christians, gays and lesbians, transmigrants, leftists and Ahmadiyyas. Anti-Chinese discrimination and persecution ought to be viewed in the context of these other forms of discrimination as well; it is just one example among many in Indonesia. It has been given attention precisely because it has been particularly violent, systemic and long-lasting.

Legal discrimination during the Suharto era was only the most recent chapter in a much longer history of anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia. As early as the 1740s there was a massacre of Chinese settlers by Dutch forces in Java who felt threatened by what they perceived as growing prominence and power of the Chinese (Blusse 1986). A hundred years later, in West Kalimantan, the Dutch went to war with a confederation of Chinese mining societies, fueled by the same concern that the Chinese in the area held too much power and were living largely independent of colonial authority, like a state within a state (Heidhues 2003; Yuan 2000). The Japanese occupation of Borneo during WWII was another extremely violent period, with an estimated 30,000 people, many of whom were Chinese, killed in massacres by Japanese officers. In Mandor, a few hours away from Singkawang, there is a monument commemorating these tragic events, located at the site of one of the largest mass graves. Several people in Singkawang, including many individuals interviewed for this study, have family members who were killed in

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44 The Dutch also wanted to gain control of the gold resources in West Kalimantan, which were under the control of Chinese mining companies called Kongsi (Peluso and Harwell 2001:92).
45 Those Japanese officers justified their actions on the basis of rumors that there was a plot among the local Chinese population to rebel against the Japanese army. After a military tribunal in Japan, these rumors were proven to have been falsified, invented by Japanese officers who were seeking personal advancement within the military although few people in West Kalimantan are aware of that tribunal (Heidhue: 2005).
those massacres. Each year a group of the descendants goes there en masse to visit the monument and the bones of their ancestors.

During WWII, which was a catalyst for Indonesian independence, the Chinese also faced persecution from parts of the Indonesian population who objected to the loyalty and alliance that some members of Chinese society had with Dutch colonizers (Twang 1998). This Chinese-Dutch alliance was seen as a hindrance to the nationalist movement (Ind. pergerakan) and further fueled anti-Chinese sentiments, which had a long-term impact on the ways that Chinese people were incorporated into the state after independence in 1945\(^46\).

Suharto’s ascent to power in 1963, beginning with the controversial failed coup attempt, was another period of violent upheaval for Indonesians, including the Chinese population in West Kalimantan. There was an Indonesia-wide anticommunist purge, heavily influenced by cold war politics, in which one million people are estimated to have been killed. These included communists and suspected communists, as well as many others with no such political or ideological affiliation. In West Kalimantan, Chinese were specifically targeted because of an association of Chinese people with the Communist Party on Mainland China at that time. Both because there were local Chinese members of Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and because of the “communist emergency” taking place on the border between Malaysian Borneo and Kalimantan (Davidson and Kammen 2002; Hui 2007:129). Many Chinese Indonesian communists and suspected communists were killed, but the violence was not limited to them. Others, who had no connections to communism or political mobilization were also targeted, often simply on the basis of being ethnically Chinese (Refugee Review Tribunal 2005).

A year after the communist purges throughout Indonesia, there was a massive expulsion of Chinese people from the inland areas of West Kalimantan conducted by a combination of local Dayak residents and military instigators (Davidson and Kamman 2002; Hui 2007:129). Thousands of refugees fled to the coastal towns and cities by way of boats that were sent from Mainland China to rescue fleeing refugees who wanted to be repatriated to China (Godley and

\(^46\) While Indonesia officially declared independence in 1945, the Dutch did not acknowledge their independence until 1949 after a military struggle and the Indonesian war of independence.
While several boats were sent, it turned out to be a time-limited rescue operation. At a certain point, no more boats were allowed to travel and those who had not made the decision to leave soon enough were forced to stay put and start new lives, usually with little or no property, in various refugee settlements on the outskirts of Singkawang and Pontianak. It is difficult to estimate how many people died from violence, starvation and disease during this incident, although it is likely in the hundreds, if not thousands. Like elderly people’s memories of the Japanese occupation, this traumatic history is still very close to the surface of people’s memory. Many people remember their childhood homes in villages in the interior of the province, and remember the pain and fear of being violently evicted.

4.6 The Rehabilitation of the Pakkung (Hak. God of Locality)

In 2011, another act of vandalism occurred, this time directed toward the oldest and most central Chinese temple. The temple was broken into and the main god statue was stolen and thrown into the river nearby. The following day, the statue was recovered and there was a special ceremony in which the statue was cleaned, rehabilitated, returned to the altar, and reactivated via a god-putting-in ritual. Many local worshippers of Chinese Folk Religion (discussed in Chapter 7) congregated at the temple at this time in order to pray and witness the rehabilitation of the statue. The large-scale, visible public turnout for this rehabilitation ritual resembled the great show of support for the pro-dragon statue parade the previous year. The vandal in this incident was caught by the police and said to be an orang gila (Ind. crazy person), a claim that many local Chinese residents found hard to accept, seeing the action instead as a direct attack on Chinese religious and ethnic identity.

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47 These settlements remain until today and continue to be impoverished areas (discussed in Chapter 5).
48 The situation faced by the returned Chinese Indonesians to mainland China is a story with another although different set of unfortunate circumstances. Hui (2007) and Godley and Coppel (1990) have written about the experiences of these “return overseas Chinese” who were placed in communal farms, discriminated against during the Cultural Revolution and eventually fled to Hong Kong. Hakka refugees from West Kalimantan constituted a large group of these returnees and now continue to live as a distinct community in Hong Kong (Hui 2007).
Most recently, during the aftermath of the mayoral election in Singkawang in 2012, an event which had an interesting and complex interethnic dimension (also discussed in Chapter 7), several people reported a resurgence of anti-Chinese slogans, including *Cina babi* (Chinese pigs), which had not been heard since the Suharto era. The tensions that resulted in this name-calling were palpable in Singkawang during those weeks, and were related to a very close election between the incumbent Chinese mayor, Hasan Karman and the former Non-Chinese mayor, Awang Ishak and a third candidate, also Chinese, Nusantio Setiadi, who was accused of splitting the Chinese vote, some people even developing conspiracy theories of intentional vote splitting. When neither the incumbent, nor the new Chinese candidate won the mayoral race, mobs of angry Hakka Singkawang took to the streets holding protests in front of the mayor's office, but also in front of the *Thai Pakkung*, even going as far as to burn photos and effigies of either Chinese candidate they thought was to blame for the split\(^49\). Although I was not in Singkawang in 2007 when Hasan Karman won his first mayoral election, it was described to me by many people as a period of euphoria for Hakka Singkawang, whose pride and glory (Ind. *bangga*) were palpable and long-lasting, and manifested in, among other ways, large, bright Chinese New Year festivities around the city. After both Chinese candidates lost the election this time around, Chinese New Year also suffered considerably as few people wanted to decorate their houses, sponsor lion dance troupes, buy firecrackers, etc. It was "*Tidak ada semangat*" (Ind. not in the spirit) I was repeatedly told. Cap Go Meh, which had grown in size and scale under Hasan Karman's leadership also suffered considerable setbacks when the political rift between the supporters of the two opposing Chinese candidates refused to cooperate to organize the event smoothly (discussed in chapter 7.)

I started out this chapter trying to show how Singkawang is both alike, and yet distinct from other places in Indonesia, addressing its status as the largest *pecinan* when calculated as a proportion of the population. I have tried to show that the pervasiveness of "Chineseness" acts as

\(^49\) While protests in front of the mayor's office and residents are relatively routine, it is much less common for people to congregate at the *Thai Pakkung*. The *Thai Pakkung* has an area adjacent which allows people to gather where religious events take place. The fact that the disappointed voters took their effigies to the *Thai Pakkung* speaks to the level of calamity of the loss for them, a loss which would need the invocation of the gods. This is particularly true for those who had photos of the candidates and wanted to curse (Ind. *kukukan*) them for what they saw as a gross mismanagement of the situation.
a force of resistance, and a kind of presence, which mediates the forces (racism, discrimination, xenophobia, conflicting interests) that challenge the position of Chinese in Singkawang and in Indonesia. To develop this argument, I presented, perhaps ironically, the incidences that have taken place recently that constitute an affront to Chinese ethnic identity, or at least symbols of that identity. It is not my intention to suggest that incidents that threaten to destabilize the precarious ethnic harmony do not take place. They have, they do, and they will continue to. However, the promulgation of the ideology of multicultural harmony (represented by the province’s idea of triculturalism), has been taken up by many residents as their own civic identification. This promotes a sustained, functional harmony. A long standing alliance between parts of the Dayak and Chinese communities is central to this vision of multiculturalism. Finally, a new kind of adat (Ind. customary rules) governing the manner and shape of protests in the public sphere have emerged in Indonesia, including in the examples I have described in Singkawang. These factors are working together to mitigate the risk that communal violence will erupt as it has in the past.

4.7 City of a Thousand Temples

Interviews with Chinese residents also suggested that during the Suharto era Singkawang did not experience the prohibition of Chinese cultural expression in the public sphere to the same degree as other places in Indonesia. For example, not all Chinese characters were removed from the fronts of houses; those that were engraved into wood were usually allowed to remain. While all of the Mandarin schools were closed, Hakka continued to be spoken ubiquitously and the dialect was, in fact, strengthened considerably after the influx of Chinese refugees (who were all Hakka speakers) arrived in 1965 and ’66 from the rural inland areas. In addition to this, some small private Mandarin classes continued to be taught in secret in Buddhist temples as well as in the back of people’s houses despite the ban.

Chinese Folk Religion also continued, and like other places in Indonesian, Chinese people found a simple way to circumvent the Suharto-era ban on what is (somewhat misleadingly) labeled Kong Hu Chu and Tao in Indonesian. Chinese Folk Religion temples (Ind. k lenteng; Hak.
*pakkung miao* were redesignated Buddhist temples (Ind. *vihara*; Hak. *fotong*) by hanging a new sign on top of the old one. This was enough to signify them as Buddhist, one of the legitimate state-sanctioned religions at that time and if this was still not quite enough, the simple addition of a statue of Buddha was sufficient to convince the authorities of the place’s status as a *vihara*. The authorities who were themselves mostly Muslim and largely ignorant of the differences between Buddhism, *Konghuchu*, *Tao* and Chinese Folk Religion. Public Chinese rituals and festivals, including Chinese New Year (Ind. *Imlek*; Hak. *Ko Nyian*), Cap Go Meh (*Cang Nyit Ban*) (15th day of the first lunar month), the lantern festival, and Hungry Ghost Feeding day (Hak. *Chit Nyit Ban*) were mostly prohibited from public space. However, there is evidence that these rituals in actual fact continued to be practiced indoors, and during certain years (particularly election years) were permitted to take place under police supervision in a specially allocated field outside of town (Hui 2007; Sean 2013).

The preservation of Chinese language and cultural traditions during this period was helped by the small-scale, semi-rural and working-class nature of the population in Singkawang. Literacy levels are low; the local dialect and information about religious practices, food habits, health promotion techniques, etc. are passed down by word of mouth and by practice within families and among neighbors who live in close proximity. This takes place, like *adat* of other groups, with little government involvement or reinforcement from nationalist ideology, popular media, or the education sector. As a result, Hakka cultural practices have remained largely intact. Hakka Singkawang themselves like to identify their cultural practices as *kuno* (Ind. ancient) as compared to Chinese cultural practices found in other places in Indonesia, as well as Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. Within this self-narrative, people usually speak with pride about the ways that people in Singkawang have been able to preserve cultural traditions while such practices were lost on Mainland China (the sometimes real and sometimes imagined place of origin of these traditions) during the turbulence of 20th century politics and social transformations. Singkawang people talk about the loss of cultural traditions in other places, such as Jakarta and Hong Kong, as associated with processes of assimilation and modernization respectively. Some more critical individuals also identify these “*kuno*” cultural traditions as barriers to certain forms of development and modernization in Singkawang. For example, some individuals talk about the ways that “traditional” ideas about health and the body
act as a barrier to receiving Western medical prognosis and treatments. Others identify “traditional” gender ideology and gender roles within families as producing gender inequality and restricting, rather than empowering women in the Chinese community in Singkawang.

When people refer to “ancient cultural traditions”, what they are referring to is the fact that there is widespread adherence among the local Hakka population to a set of unique cosmological understandings and shared practices that can be traced back to communities and historical time periods in China from which migrants originated. These include a wide range of ideas and practices that fall into the following broad categories: astrology; feng shui; ghost and spirit belief; ideas about health, healing, and the body; spirit-medium-ship; Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) (including folk medicine, doctrinal TCM, acupuncture, and a range of idiosyncratic spirit-medium healing techniques); marriage customs; funerals rites; Buddhist and Chinese Folk religious rituals and worship; traditional Chinese holidays and festivals; after-birth health practices and taboos; luck and prosperity generating activities, and unluckiness avoidance techniques (Ind. tolak bala); family structure, hierarchy, naming, and residence patterns; food systems, purity, cooking, and food avoidances; gambling and games; gender, age, and kinship roles and ideologies.

The discourse which suggest that Hakka Singkawang have preserved, in an unbroken and unaltered way, ancient Chinese practices, belies the fact that many ideas and practices have changed significantly over time, mixed with other local traditions, been lost, and replaced by newer ideas and practices. Despite this fact, however, this reifying narrative gives authenticity and value to local self-perceptions of Hakka cultural identity vis-à-vis groups of others, including other Chinese Indonesian populations and other overseas Chinese populations. Traditional culture has become a resource, a cultural capital, with which people can identify, be proud of, stake claim to and put forth as an alternative to other forms of capital (both social and material). I am reminded of John Pemberton’s landmark study “On the Subject of “Java”” in which he destabilizes the notion that traditional Javanese culture has a material basis. He shows, through an analysis of its uses in New Order politics, the ways that ideas about traditional Javanese culture are culturally constructed and invoked to do specific kinds of work in the present. By studying the moments at which the idea arose he is able to show how the traditional Javanese
culture gets monumentalized, although never in a complete form. There is always something either unrepresented, or deferred for some future time of inclusion (Pemberton 1994: 289). Pemberton’s suggestion that the usefulness of invocations of the past are most directly relevant within the times and places in which they are invoked is an idea that I find most useful for my own research. What are the circumstances of the present moment that make claims to “ancient traditional culture” particularly meaningful and useful for Hakka Singkawang within the politics of belonging in Indonesia?

I argue Hakka Singkawang claims to ancient cultural traditions act as discursive reifications of things which are already part of people’s daily lived realities in Singkawang. It is possible to identify a series of cultural practices, ideas and ideologies that locals claim as examples of their “ancient Chinese culture”. For example, ancestor worship, cosmologies of gods and ghosts, after birth practices, logics of spirit-medium possession, and concepts of fate and luck. It would also be possible to empirically measure, through surveying the local population, the prevalence of these things. This could reveal a striking adherence to that set of ideas and practices. However, it would be unable to show the diversity of individual’s thoughts and understandings about these things. Nor would such an empirical survey represent the processes that individuals go through as they learn about these concepts and choose interpretations that are meaningful to them within the changing context of their lives. My purpose in focusing on this narrative of ancient cultural traditions is to show how these practices are being interpreted and how that interpretation is central to a process of identity making in which the practices of the daily life of Hakka Singkawang are transformed into something which has a broader social-historical significance. I want to show how this discourse of ancient cultural traditions acts, without suggesting that it is either as truly ancient or unchanging as people sometimes claim, nor lacking a material basis in people’s ideas and practices.

Practicing ancient cultural traditions is fundamentally about belonging, belonging to a tradition. As such they can help to legitimize and authenticate the Hakka population as members within a local tradition, a local adat, which exist alongside the adat of Dayak, Malays and others. Despite its roots to China and transnational connections with Hakka and Chinese communities in other
places, the particular historical configuration of Hakka Chinese Indonesian culture found in Singkawang today remains highly localized.
Chapter 2: Kampung Halaman (Ind. Home)

Rasa cinta saya sangat besar kepada Kota Singkawang. Singkawang adalah kota di mana saya dilahirkan, tumbuh dan besar. Meskipun kini tinggal di Jakarta, hati dan jiwa saya selalu tertambat di kota itu, kota yang indah, kota yang damai, kota yang penuh kehangatan kekeluargaan.

My love for the city of Singkawang is very big. Singkawang is the place I was born, grew up, and was raised. Even though I now live in Jakarta, my heart and soul are always yearning for that city, that beautiful city, peaceful city, city full of the warmth of family.

Kerinduan pada kampung halaman di samping mengasyikkan juga membawa duka nestapa. Yang terlintas dalam bayangan orang-orang perantau dan terpisah lama dengan kampung halaman adalah kampung halaman yang indah, kota kecil yang begitu bersahaja, dialek yang tak asing lagi dengan tiupan angin kampung halamannya, menyebabkan semua kerinduan kepada kampung halaman semakin menggumpal kental dan membuat kami berangan-angan tak terhingga, sekaligus halaman yang tercinta.

Longing for home in addition to happiness also brings sorrow. What happens in the imaginations of migrants and those long separated from the hometown…a beautiful hometown, a small town that is so understated, dialect familiar with gusts of the hometown…causes all longing for hometown to be increasingly thick and make us imagine infinitely that beloved place.

In the previous chapter I presented some of the expressions of Chineseness present in Singkawang, many of which are visible manifestations such as temples and architecture. These contribute to making Singkawang a unique hometown for many people and part of what makes people want to live there and return there after they have sojourned to Jakarta and overseas. However, visible signs of Chineseness are merely some of the aesthetic aspects of people’s identifications. The affective dimension of people’s experiences and their interpersonal relationships with family and friends contribute more significantly to their sense of belonging to that place, and while these aspects are harder to identify, they are no less concrete than those visible symbols of collective ethnic identity. In this chapter I want to introduce the Indonesian concept of “home” or “hometown” known as kampung halaman, literally translated as village front yard. The ways that people conceptualize their kampung halaman contain aspects of what

Castle and Davidson have identified as the intrinsic characteristics of home: familiarity, security, community, and continuity (2000). People’s senses of familiarity with “place” are central to what makes “home” feel homely (Hui 2007). This conceptualization and experience of home is therefore not merely a physical place, but also a social space in which one’s understandings of the world are shared with and valued by others. Home comes into being through people’s experiences, memories, imaginings, activities, and social relationships (Brah 1995; Jackson 1995; Mallett 2004).

When I started my research I did not know the word for “home” in Indonesian. I knew other, related words, such as *pulang* (Ind. to return home), which has a different meaning than the words *balik* or *kembali* (Ind. to return [but not to home]). I knew the word *betah* (Ind. to feel at home), because it had been taught to me during my language training in Yogyakarta, when my teacher would ask whether I felt *betah* at the homestay and in Yogyakarta. Being *betah* suggests a concept of home and homeliness, and it also suggests the opposite state, to not feel at home.

One afternoon I was reading a newspaper article about the number of vehicle accidents during the annual *mudik* (Ind. homecoming) during Ramadan. This was the first time I came across a reference to the word *kampung halaman*. *Halaman* means yard (and also page). I was familiar with that word. I was used to seeing Javanese women sweeping the leaves from the *halaman* in front of their small houses along the street the led to the Indonesian language school where I was studying. But to see the word coupled with the word *kampung* transformed its meaning significantly. The word *kampung* raises a multitude of meanings and connotations. There is *kampung* meaning rural village, i.e. *Desa*; There is *kampung* meaning urban neighbourhood; There is the idea of the *orang kampung* (Ind. villager, hick), which carried the derogatory connotation of being poor, unintelligent, simple and/or provincial (Newberry 2006; Silvey 2006). In addition to place, *kampung* (as well as *kampungan*), can describe a particular form of sociality, particularly the urban, working class sociality that exists in densely populated settlements. *Kampung* in this sense describes community (Newberry 2006). Jan Newberry, in her book about the relationships between the *kampung* and the state in Java describes the history of the meaning of the word *kampung* as “a transit from ethnic enclave and wealthy neighbourhood, to royal guild areas and protectorates of nobles, to village-like native quarters and conduits of administrative and political control, to walled-in slums and cohesive urban community” (2006:...
30). She goes on to show how the concept of *kampung* comes to evoke a “sense of boundedness, of external differentiation and internal homogeneity” (2006:31). It is important to understand these connotations and this history of transit, because, the term *kampung halaman* also exists in this complex semantic field.

Singkawang is a distinct cultural landscape that locals reproduce each year through events, holidays, and parades, as well as the quotidian rhythms of being in social and physical space. Just as the city belongs to them, they too belong to the city. By virtue of being born there, by being “from” there (Ind. *dari*), residents automatically gain a form of membership in the social groupings of that locality and the ways they are imagined. In Indonesia, this membership is expressed using the territorial metaphor of the *kampung halaman*, and while usually based on the fact of people’s lives (birth, residence, extended family), at times it becomes extended to include ideas and images about what an ideal hometown should be.

Uncovering people’s conceptualization of home is a challenge because these concepts are often based on emotional attachments that are often elusive to the outside observer. While conducting this research I had to regularly find new ways to phrase my inquiries in order to get people to reflect on the question “What is home?” Over the course of our developing relationships I would ask people the following questions: “Where is your home?” “Why is it your home?” “What makes something a *kampung halaman*?” “What makes you feel ‘at home’ here?” “Do you have any other places you call home?” “What does the concept of *kampung halaman* mean to you?” My participants often replied by telling me that Singkawang is their place of origin (Ind. *asalnya/ tempat asalnya*), their birthplace. It is where their friends and families live; where they grew up, went to school, had formative experiences and had first friendships and romances. It is where powerful memories from childhood and youth reside. It is where the food is familiar, delicious and where the climate and the landscape are known. It was also explained to me by my Hakka Singkawang informants that it is the place where the graves and bones of their ancestors reside. It is the place of their temples and their gods. It is a place where they know the streets and the landmarks of the landscape; they know where to find their friends, their favorite noodles, the vendor who sells the freshest pork meat, the best traditional healer for specific illnesses, and the spirit-medium who can most reliably predict winning lottery numbers, etc. It is where one is
referred to in the local Hakka dialect as Ako, Suk, Amoi or Ace (older brother, uncle, younger sister, older sister) by strangers on the street, where asking someone where the exact house they live in is as good as asking for their cell phone number, where a trip to the market is also a trip to a friend’s shop, where the protective amulet (Hak. pho) carried in one’s wallet for protection is made (and annually reactivated) by a local god and spirit-medium.

It is the experience of all this familiarity that first and foremost makes Singkawang feel like home. For a deeper understanding of people’s concepts and the experiences of home I had to go beyond posing these questions. I had to listen carefully for times when people spoke about Singkawang, what they yearned for while away, what they enjoyed when they returned, and what they noticed upon returning from overseas. Through each explanation I developed a deeper understanding of how central Singkawang is within people’s mental maps of the world. It is a physical, social, and linguistic space where people can belong precisely because they are seen to belong to it, they are members and collectively it is the members who construct the place through their experiences. It is a familiar place where the terms of belonging are understood, even when they are not ideal, such as during periods of stricter repression, or interethnic conflict.

In Indonesian it is the state of “being from somewhere” that constitutes one of the main meanings of kampung halaman. It can be said, therefore, that Singkawang is the kampung halaman of a large community of Hakka Chinese Indonesians, and the strong feelings of emotional attachment to this hometown constitute a specific modality of belonging. While these emotional attachments are compounded by Singkawang’s distinctively Chinese cultural characteristics, the city is also merely one of hundreds of thousands of other kampung halaman in Indonesia, and it is also the kampung halaman of the local Malay, Dayak, Madurese, Bugis, Batak and Javanese communities.

So what does it mean to have a kampung halaman in the Indonesian context? Is it simply an emotional connection or a place of memories and attachments? Is it only an experience, arising through meanings and activities in relation to others? Within the politics of belonging, which I identify as a politics of indigeneity, that mediate forms of membership in Indonesian society, it is essential to be able to demonstrate one’s legitimacy through origins. People are expected to have
a place where they come from. This is usually the village, town, or city of their birth, but it may also be the birthplace of a parent or grandparent. Certain hometowns may also intersect with other forms of group membership such as ethnic group, religious group, dialect group, or occupational group. For example, Tanah Toraja in central Sulawesi comes to signify the homeland or kampung halaman of the Toraja people despite the presence of others in that area. In the same way, Aceh has become synonymous with stricter forms of Islamic identity, and Medan with Hokkien Chinese Indonesian ethnicity, among other associations.

*Kampung halaman* thus has both real and imagined dimensions and it is passed down from generation to generation in a conceptual sense, if not a physical sense. When parents move to new places, such as Jakarta and other big cities, children who are born in these new places are often encouraged to identify with both places, creating everyday attachments to their birthplace and place of residence and more imagined attachments to the birthplaces of their parents or grandparents. Second and third generation Javanese and Madurese residents in Singkawang, for example, frequently identify with Madura or East Java as their *kampung halaman*, because these are their parents’ or grandparents’ birthplaces and also because these places signify the origin point of those ethnic groups as they are territorially defined within Indonesia’s ideology of ethnic origins. Whether it is a single village, or an entire island like Bali or Madura, or a region like East Java, parents often hope that children will not lose a sense of connection with their *kampung halaman*. Some children and grandchildren are taken to visit these places in order to develop a sense of identification while others who have never been there are told stories and encouraged to imagine these places as their *kampung halaman*.

Claims to territorial origins and forms of indigeneity constructed through attachments to one’s *kampung halaman* are expressions of a politics of belonging. This is particularly important for Chinese Indonesians still living with the legacy of being identified as “foreigners” who must continually demonstrate their local place-based attachments in creative ways and in order to overcome the perception that they are essentially and irrevocably from somewhere else. The concept of *kampung halaman* has become an axiomatic modality of belonging across Indonesia. People use the term and learn to think and experience things through this territorial metaphor and
through the politics of belonging, an implicit rather than explicit meaning attached to *kampung halaman*.

The idea that every ethnic group comes from a specific territory is a powerful ideology reinforced symbolically and through national education. Children learn from an early age that Javanese come from Central and Eastern Java, Sundanese from West Java, Bugis come from South Sulawesi, Batak from Northern Sumatra, Padang from the Padang region, Madurese from Madura, Balinese from Bali, Dayak from Kalimantan, and so on. Each of these *suku* (Ind. tribes) is seen to possess a geographically defined origin place or *kampung halaman* of their own, and while the distribution of ethnic and linguistic groups does partially conform to this schematic, the idea also disavows the reality that there are people of all *suku* living all over the archipelago (away from their 'kampung halaman'), many for generations. These are groups with a culture of *merantau* (Ind. roaming, sojourning), such as Bugis, Minangkabau and Chinese, but also those who have moved as part of government transmigration programs, or have gone to other places in search of work, or sought the cosmopolitanism of the cities, or moved for marriage, or governmental professions such as police, military, and civil servants who have limited choice about where they are located, sometimes fixed in place, sometimes moving frequently. This ideology that confines ethnic groups to defined regions thus masks an enormous amount of movement and mixing. It also masks high rates of intermarriage which have created hyphenated identities and joint communities. Nonetheless, the imagined territorial origins of ethnic groups constitute a powerful imaginary which is further strengthened by social forms, including indigenous *adat* systems, such that places are thought of as the heartlands of specific groups who possess their own language, culture, and governance. This reinforces the idea that autochthonous origins are the only true and legitimate form of belonging and the emotional and nostalgic attachments that people forge with their *kampung halaman* can be seen, by extension, as performances of these autochthonous origins.

Linguistically, using the term *kampung halaman* also has another meaning. It evokes an image of a pastoral village: romantic, nostalgic, and pure. A simple Google image search yields several pages of photographs of rural hamlets (Ind. *desa*) surrounded by rice fields, palm trees, and gently sloping hills. While the expansive city of Jakarta is the *kampung halaman* of millions of
people, the term on its own has come to signify a rural village that is relaxed (Ind. santai), slow-paced, and maintains a traditional small-scale society and culture. It is imagined as a clean, green and harmonious place, which is decidedly lacking forms of modernity. The city stands in opposition to this image and represents the modern, urban and cosmopolitan existence, which is seen as crowded, polluted, corrupted, and with a stranger-sociality based on its large scale. In this symbolism, the kampung halaman becomes a place where people can return to a familiar social and natural landscape idealized as unchanged and uncorrupted by the vagaries of modernity and urbanization. There is a developmental nostalgia built into this concept of home; kampung halaman allows people to flirt with the idea of easier, simpler, pre-modern times.

While there is a tendency to construct romantic notions of the kampung halaman, on the ground what is more common are the prosaic aspects of people’s ongoing relationships with their hometown, the concrete and nonidealized interactions. People who live far away from their kampung halaman (including both elsewhere in Indonesia and overseas) often maintain close relationships with these places through friends and family, and by way of frequent trips home. Every year during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan millions of Indonesians pulang kampung (Ind. return home) to celebrate with their families. This constitutes one of the largest annual movements of people in the world and is an expression of this modality of hometown belonging. To pulang kampung means one has a place to belong and to return to and this can also be seen as a proxy for belonging to the nation. To pulang kampung is to be received by the small-scale society of those places as they are romanticized; it is to be accepted and reunited with one’s origins, with family, friends, food, and familiarity.

Chinese Indonesians also make an annual homecoming (Ind. mudik) when they pulang kampung every year to celebrate Chinese New Year (Ind. Tahun Baru Imlek; Hak. Ko Nyian). In Singkawang, these trips can last several weeks or months and generally last until after Cap Go Meh. Returning home for the lunar New Year also takes place in China, with the number of people traveling home during the “Spring Festival” calculated to be in the millions.\textsuperscript{52} Additionally, there are two other annual periods when Hakka Singkawang return to their

\textsuperscript{52} Last Train Home, dir. by Lixin Fan (2009; EyeSteelFilm).
The first period is the grave worshipping that takes place in the third month of the lunar calendar (Ind. *Sembahyang Kubur/Ceng Beng*; Hak. *Kaci*) and the second period is for the grave worshipping and Hungry Ghost Feeding that takes place in the seventh month of the lunar calendar (Hak. *Chit Nyiat Ban*). During these two periods, thousands of people return home from Jakarta and overseas to conduct the elaborate grave worshipping rites. Children and grandchildren are taught how to do the grave ceremony or are simply taken around their parents’ *kampung halaman*. These visits are an opportunity to relax, spend time with friends and family, and enjoy the pleasures of home, first and foremost of which is to find delicious local foods: *kai fon, jam mian, chau ban, choi ban, lujak, ha koi, lo hai, hoi sim* (Hak. chicken rice, soup noodles, fried noodles, dumplings, fruit salad, fermented shrimp, crab, sea cucumber).

Additionally, some individuals from Jakarta make frequent trips to Singkawang for business purposes and to maintain social networks, attend celebrations at Chinese temples, participate in the activities of mutual-aid and alumni associations, and increasingly, take part in local politics (discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

The frequent trips home to Singkawang are not only part of the Indonesian practice of *pulang kampung*, but are related to a broader Chinese practice of maintaining ties with one’s ancestral village (Man. *祖乡 zǔ xiāng*). Chinese migrants brought this cultural pattern with them to Indonesia and parts of it have continued to be practiced throughout the centuries despite the social, physical and temporal distance from mainland China. While it is contextually very different, it is still useful to look at the trends happening in China to understand some of Hakka Singkawang patterns of village-return.

Recent research on the sociology of hometown returnees in China focuses on two main groups of people. The first group encompasses the millions of temporary workers who return to their rural villages after stints working in factories in the cities of the Southeast. The second group is comprised of overseas Chinese who make visits to their ancestral villages in China. Individuals in this group make short visits to see what life is like in those villages, to make various kinds of investments, to help out with social development projects, and to maintain or build connections with locals. The dynamics between individuals in overseas Chinese communities and their ancestral village in China are being analyzed in terms of the ways that collective memory,
nostalgia, moral economies (Kuah-Pearce 2011), and cultural heritage projects (Louie 2004) promote emotional attachments and help to articulate cultural identities based on ancestral origins, kin, clan, and local Chinese culture and ethnicity. Kuah-Pearce (2011) argues that an ideology of moral duty is based on a sense of responsibility to preserve collective memory in overseas Chinese communities and thereby promote a shared cultural identity. This sense of responsibility inspires people to do philanthropic acts. Charitable projects may take the form of social or infrastructural development projects, but are often carried out under the auspices of place-based, clan-based and temple-based networks and affiliations. These studies are based on the lives of American-Chinese (Louie 2004) and Singaporeans (Kuah-Pearce 2011) who are rediscovering their ancestral villages as China is “rising” prominently as an influential player in the global economy and as an influential international social and cultural force.

In Singkawang, few members of the Chinese community embark on such return trips to ancestral villages in China. However, a similar dynamic exists locally, in the Indonesian context, wherein prominent individuals who have become wealthy in Jakarta or overseas return home to Singkawang periodically in order to maintain their connections and perform their social status as benefactors and VIPs in local events and development projects. Based on the dynamics of these trips home, I disagree with Kuah-Pearce’s thesis that hometown returns are primarily about creating and maintaining a collective identity. Rather, I observe the charitable acts that take place during hometown returns as central to a system of social reproduction in which social status accrual is also a dominant driver of people’s actions in addition to a desire for preserving collective memory (Kuah-Pearce 2011). These actions are often framed in terms of a need to articulate a shared cultural identity and to transfer emotional attachments to place to future generations. However, it is also the case that wealthy, high-status individuals return home to participate in the moral economy of village development. These forms of hometown participation work simultaneously as direct expressions of connection to the hometown and routes to obtaining forms of social status collectively recognized amongst peers. Experiencing collective recognition of one’s achievements and one’s social status is a strong motivation for returning. These return trips are important occasions for social reproduction precisely because of the visibility of the social status dynamics between returnees and locals, youth and senior members of the community (discussed in chapters 3 and 6).
5 Kampung Halaman Over Three Generations

Alim (the informant that I introduced in the previous chapter whom I first met at the café) is the son of parents who were both born in a small town in the interior of the province of West Kalimantan. They moved to Singkawang before the rural expulsion of Chinese from those interior areas in 1967 and Alim and the rest of his eleven brothers and sisters were all born in Singkawang. Alim’s own three children, however, were born in Jakarta, where he had moved to work shortly after high school. Alim spent over twenty years living in Java but has recently returned to Singkawang with a strong desire to become involved in local politics and hometown development. During the mayoral race in 2011 Alim helped me to document the competition between the two rival Chinese candidates. At this time, I spent many hours at his office, asking follow-up questions about the day’s events.

One afternoon, after returning from a political rally, I was sitting in the front room of his office flipping through the latest issue of the magazine Info Kalimantan while waiting for him to finish some business with another guest. As usual, the office was busy with constant visitors (friends, neighbors, relatives, and acquaintances) coming and going, hanging out, talking, and seeking Alim’s help and advice. It appeared that Alim had quickly proved himself to be a capable individual who could help people in need, problem-solve on the spot, manage and organize all kinds of meetings, events, and activities.

On this particular afternoon, I wanted to deviate from our usual political gossip and talk to him about the concept of the kampung halaman. I wanted to ask him what kampung halaman meant to him, what he thought it meant to others in Singkawang and also in Indonesia in general. I began the discussion by simply stating that I thought that the notion of the kampung halaman seemed pretty important in Indonesia and then left it to him to elaborate. This is what he said: “Yes, yes, you’re right. The pull of the kampung halaman is so powerful here. People really love Singkawang. Chinese people love Singkawang. But there has been a big generational change, you know. Let me explain it to you.”
It sounded as if he was going to start a long story, so I quickly flipped open my notebook, grabbed one of the pens and hunched forward in anticipation, poised to write.

“There are three groups,” he began. “The first group is people like my father. He is 80 years old. He can only speak Hakka. Even though he was born here, he still imagines China as his kampung halaman, even though he has never been there!” Alim laughed and smiled. “This is the older generation. When they grew up they still learned to think of China as their home. They went to Mandarin school maybe. Some people, like my father, can’t really speak Mandarin anymore, but before, here many people could. At that time, those people, they really still imagined China. They got that concept from their parents, maybe their parents’ parents even.”

He took a pause, opened a package of L.A. cigarettes and then fumbled around below his desk, searching for an ashtray.

“Hey, you know what people say here when someone dies? Con cung ket53, literally that means return home to China. So people still think that way. When they die they go to China. China is the home… But now that has changed. People like me, my generation, people who grew up in the Suharto era, they’ve really changed their thinking. For us, for my generation the kampung halaman is Singkawang, definitely Singkawang, and Indonesia, not China. The connections with China have expired. This is now the kampung halaman.”

“Oh I see,” I said. “And the third group?”

“Ah, yes, well that is my children who were born in Jakarta. The younger generation. You know we bring them home to Singkawang as much as we can and every time we bring them here, we always tell them that we are pulang kampung. We always tell them about Singkawang and hope that they will also think of Singkawang as their home, but it is hard too. It is complicated for them because they were born in Jakarta, and their friends are there and their school is there. My children can speak Hakka, because we speak Hakka with them, but so many other children born

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53 Hak. return to China; Ind. pulang Tiongkok; Mandarin: Hui zhōngguó 中国.
in Jakarta cannot speak Hakka anymore, because they are with a babysitter all day while their parents work, and because all their friends and neighbors are speaking Indonesian and Jakartanese. You know…Bahasa Gaul (Ind. slang). Jakarta is like their home, but I think that they still consider Singkawang to be their kampung halaman.”

As Alim said this he trailed off and it was clear from his expression he was not too sure where his children imagined their kampung halaman. The next thing I knew, when I looked up from my notebook, Alim was on the phone to his eldest daughter in Jakarta, who was eight years old. After a bit of smalltalk he asked her directly, “Claudia, where is your kampung halaman?”

I could hear her voice coming out of the cell phone. She sounded confused but finally answered, her response sounding sort of like a question, “Ah, Jakarta?”

Alim was surprised. “Jakarta! But what about all those times we brought you to visit Singkawang and we told you we are pulang kampung? Don’t you know you are from Singkawang? This is Mama and Papa’s hometown…” he followed up quickly. He seemed surprised and also a little bit sad and embarrassed.

“Why are you asking me these questions, Papa? I don’t understand. What is this all about?” His daughter seemed a bit upset and confused, so Alim changed the subject.

This kind of situation—the intergenerational negotiation of the kampung halaman—is not specific to Chinese Indonesians or Hakka Singkawang, but common for many Indonesians who are born or grow up away from the birthplaces of their parents. Parents often try to cultivate within their children a sense of connection to and identification with their kampung halaman through return trips, storytelling, relaying memories, local foods and other items moving between places and recruiting potential spouses for children from their home village. However, the notion of the parents’ kampung halaman becomes more of an imaginary idea and less of a concrete place to identify with the longer children spend time in their new home; the place where they grow up, go to school, and have formative memories quickly gains greater significance and eclipses the imagined kampung halaman of parents and grandparents.
I had a long conversation about this problem with a 49-year-old Madurese man named Fendi. His grandfather was born in Madura but moved to Singkawang as a young man in the 1940s. Fendi’s father was born in Singkawang around 1945 and Fendi in 1965. Fendi’s children and grandchildren have all been born in Singkawang. Fendi has visited the island of Madura a couple of times, but struggles to find a sense of connection there. “We don’t really to feel like Madura is our kampung halaman anymore. We really want to. But if we go there, we just can’t feel it. The connection is changed. If we think about kampung halaman we have got to admit it is Singkawang. This is where we were born. This is where we know. But then we get to thinking. We start to feel bad. Why and how did we abandon the kampung halaman of our forefathers? We don’t feel good about that. We should not do that. But truly we can’t feel it.”

This sense of filial responsibility acts as a powerful force for many people, particularly Hakka Singkawang, who are socialized from a very young age to respect and obey older family members and ancestors, and are often compelled by these relatives (both the living and the dead) to pulang kampung. However, as Fendi’s reflections reveal, there are limits to the intergenerational transfer of the kampung halaman. The migration process specifically challenges those inherited sentiments because as people move they begin to form new attachments to the places they live. In turn, their concept of home changes as the imagined connections to the previous generations’ kampung halaman fade and are replaced by their own physical and social experiences of daily life.

5.1 Leaving the Kampung Halaman

If Singkawang is such an important home, why is it that so many people leave? This was one of the key questions that I sought to answer in my research. How are the mobility patterns and practices of the Hakka community rooted in the social reality of Singkawang but also extended

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54 Fendi refers to himself using “we” (Ind. kita), a common speech convention which allows the speaker to symbolically include their interlocutor and avoid referring to themselves directly and singularly.
beyond its limits by both people’s transnational imaginings and their experiences of living overseas? Singkawang is a unique place and the particular combination of place, dialect, and culture group found in Singkawang is impossible to find and difficult to re-create anywhere else. But many people only discover this fact once they leave. The character of Singkawang and how people relate to it as a place emerges partly through their juxtapositions and comparisons with life in Jakarta or places overseas. So what happens to people’s concept of the *kampung halaman* when they engage in long-range migration?

I did not originally plan to study migration. The first time I visited Singkawang in 2008 for preliminary fieldwork I was interested in an altogether different topic. At that time, I wanted to know whether or not any Chinese Indonesians who had been chased out of the interior of the province in 1967 were moving back to reclaim the houses and land that had been appropriated from them during that conflict. I sat in cafés and tried to nose around this topic with the people that I met, but my query yielded few stories. I learned, anecdotally, of a tiny trickle of people moving back to those areas, one or two individuals according to Singkawang residents. In the smaller towns in the interior, Dayak locals told me that there were “many” (Ind. *banyak*) Chinese people who had come back and proceeded to count them on one hand. If less than five people are considered *banyak*, then I am not sure what constitutes *sedikit* (Ind. few).

What I discovered instead was a much larger phenomenon: domestic and overseas migration. In the polite small talk that began each conversation with a new person in a café, on a bus or in the street, I began to learn about the extent of migration. I found myself frequently nodding and repeating what people told me in order to reinforce it in my memory. “Oh, your sister is in Hong Kong… your cousin is in Taiwan… your younger brother is in China… your older brother is in Philadelphia… your son is in Jakarta… your daughter is in Australia… your brother is in Malaysia.” After hearing about all these people overseas, I began to ask people directly if they had ever been overseas. In fact, it was the first question I learned how to ask in Hakka dialect, “*Nyi sit hi chut ket mo?*” (Hak. Have you ever been out of the country?) After that, a picture of where people had been and returned from began to slowly take shape in my mind.

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55 Questions such as where are you from? Where do you live? How old are you? How many children do you have? How many siblings do you have? Are your mother and father still alive? etc.
In 2010, I returned to start my extended fieldwork, this time with the purpose of studying these Hakka Singkawang migration patterns and practices. I expected to find people looking outwardly, thinking and acting “transnationally”, oriented toward new places, new homes, and new lives. My research questions were not just about whether people wanted to go back to their villages in the interior anymore, but whether they wanted to go back to villages in China, or go to new places and plant the seeds of new kampung halaman. I expected people to be investing physically, socially, emotionally, and temporally in their new migration destinations and because of this expectation I was surprised when I found that people still had such a strong orientation toward home, toward Singkawang, toward what they were calling their kampung halaman. Where were the parachute children (Pe-Pua, Rogelia et al. 1998)? Where were the flexible citizens (Ong 1999)? Where were the ideal East Asian immigrants (Ley 2010; Ong et al. 1996) that I had read so much about?

Johan Lindquist has written extensively about the of process, arguing that merantau has become a central part of Indonesian society in which villagers from across the archipelago use temporary migration to seek economic development and new forms of modernity in their lives (Lindquist 2009:11). This is part of a society wide dream of joining the middle class which, he argues, is a privileged site of the Indonesian nation in the 21st century context. He explains how low-skilled labour migrants find employment in factories in Batam, an Indonesian island of the coast of Singapore, with the hope of generating upward social mobility. In the rantau, or the space of migration (Lindquist 2009: 10), they face challenges and moral dilemmas, and the ways they cope with these challenges reveal an emotional economy which spans the distance and relationships between Batam and their home villages. This emotional economy is based on the experience of states of pride and shame (Ind. malu) while living less than ideal lives in a state of becoming. Lindquist identifies this experience as a temporality known simply as the belum (Ind. not yet). While living in conditions considered liar (Ind. wild, unregulated, unofficial), migrants in Batam come to realize their position as members of a global underclass, a far cry from their middle-class aspirations. Lindquist studies this process from the position of Batam, an islandat once remote and underdeveloped and tightly linked into the global economy as a special economic zone in Southeast Asia.
In the chapters that follow I present the forms that *merantau* takes in one specific community, showing how culturally scripted ideals about how to best achieve middle class status animate individuals as they make decisions about their mobility. While part of a broader Indonesian process of creating social mobility through physical mobility, there are also a set of specific conditions and ideals that make Hakka Singkawang mobilities, motivations for mobility, and preferred outcomes different than that of other communities. This is framed as a desire to “become a boss”, to convert money and experience gained through *merantau* into entrepreneurial enterprises back at home. What I discovered is that the process of *merantau* acts as a driving force in the construction of Singkawang as the *kampung halaman*, as a physical place, a social space and an imaginary. Unlike Lindquist, I studied mobilities primarily from the perspective of the ‘village’, or origins point, resembling more closely Dierdre McKay’s study of ‘global Filipinos’ from the vantage point of a village in Ifugao province in the Philippines (McKay 2012). This positioning provides an entirely different view. One that allows the stakes of the emotional economy of *merantau* to be viewed from a diversity of perspectives, not merely that of migrants, but also friends, family and neighbours of migrants back at home as they plan, imagine, leave and return. It allows us to see how *merantau* is connected to other social systems and patterns of social reproduction involved in the creation of overseas of transnational communities.

The people from Singkawang I stayed with in Jakarta and overseas all loved to talk about their *kampung halaman*. Indulging in nostalgia, reminiscing about old times, childhood memories, ghost stories, gossip, and food were common topics of conversation. There was something about being “away” which brought the character of home into sharper focus. A yearning for certain aspects of home started to arise. The experience of being a migrant, of being out of place, of having to learn how to live in that new place and understand different terms of belonging acted as a constant reminder of the limits of one’s belonging. Home was contrasted to this experience of being away. Home was the familiar, the place where the terms of belonging were known and comprehensible. It was the unquestioned *tempat asal* (Ind. place of origin) and it held a place in people’s minds directly opposite from the places they found themselves living as migrants. Those places were foreign, their place within those societies often marginal, temporary, and precarious. But people in Singkawang were eager to leave. They were excited, scared, and
expectant. Before embarking on their sojourns, their destinations had already been built up in their imaginations, filled with images of the urban, the modern, and the developed (Ind. *maju*). These images were imbued with hope, the hope of prosperity and a feeling of potential.

Just as the participants in this study had anticipated leaving, once overseas, they came to anticipate returning almost as quickly. The horizon had shifted once again. The unbearable limitations and difficulties of belonging, the conditions of life, and the many differences of life overseas served to raise the image of home up into a central place in the imagination. It became almost a fetish to think about home, and daydream about returning home. Within their imaginings, the qualities of home got exaggerated and romanticized. Many people lasted barely six months overseas before returning with nothing, explaining that they were not *betah* (Ind. comfortable; at home), or that it wasn’t *cocok* (Ind. matching, suitable). Friends and family would simply nod or shrug, accepting that explanation for their return.

Instead of concentrating on emigration, or building transnational or cosmopolitan lives, I found some people planned to migrate with the idea of returning home somewhere in their minds. In particular, the idea of a virtuous return, coming back proud and wealthy to experience the comforts of home that newly acquired social status afforded. Quite often, temporary and permanent returns home to the *kampung halaman* were incorporated into these plans from the onset. More commonly, however, it was only after experiencing life away, whether in Jakarta, London, Philadelphia, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Taipei, or Batam that the fantasies of being “away” and entering a kind of transnational elite, gave way to the realities of daily life and the memories and joys of home took on gigantic proportions. At home in the village, young people dream of going overseas, but once overseas they dream of returning home, and sometimes this cycle repeats several times, such that a stint in Jakarta is followed by a return to Singkawang, and then a trip to Taiwan, and then another return to Singkawang and then away again to Jakarta or another country, and so on. From this pattern I saw how people experienced a constant sense of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction as the place they want to be is always just beyond the horizon. Such a process allows us to understand the ways that home is constituted through mobilities.
Chapter 3: Khao Miang Shui (Hak. To Test Fate)

The first time I met Ahin was at a Chinese temple in a remote forested area on the outskirts of Singkawang. Two of my friends, Akim and Amin, had invited me to join them to visit the resident spirit-medium there, Fui, a high school friend of theirs. Fui is a young and newly established spirit-medium and both of my friends wanted to ask him about some problems they were having, which they described as psychological. When we arrived at around 8:00 p.m. it was already dark and there were two men sitting in candlelight at a small wooden table in front of the temple.

Akim and Amin went into the temple while I sat down and introduced myself to these two men: Ahin, a 32-year-old man from Singkawang and Effendy, his 50-year-old friend visiting from Sumatra. They had just finished their own consultation with Fui in which they had requested from his patron deity a lucky number to play in the next day’s lottery.

In Singkawang there are hundreds (perhaps thousands) of illegal lotteries, and lottery ticket vendors are everywhere and can range from young girls, to old men and women. The biggest lotteries use the numbers from Singapore’s weekly draw and this was what Ahin was planning to play. But not all spirit-mediums give out lottery numbers because not all of the gods who enter spirit-mediums are skilled at predicting lucky numbers. Furthermore, not all gods and their mediums believe that it is ethical to gamble. So you have to search for a match: a spirit-medium whose patron god has a gift for knowing lucky numbers and is willing to suggest a number for you.

Ahin and Effendy were fortunate that night to have found a match with Fui, who, while under possession of Ciu Sian (Hak. Liquor God; Ind. Dewa Arak) had a vision of the numbers 6642.

My two friends, Akim and Amin, lit a handful of incense sticks and placed one in each of the urns in the temple before beginning their consultation with Fui. Ciu Sian had already entered Fui, contorting his face and altering his voice and mannerisms. Succumbing to the wishes of the god, Fui drank liberally and smoked cigarettes while he told stories and laughed out loud as he explained to Akim and then Amin the nature of their psychological problems and how they
should best be overcome. I was watching this scene from outside the temple where I was chatting with Ahin and Effendy.

I started to tell Ahin about my research about migration and I asked him if he had ever left the country. He told me he had. He’d lived in Malaysia, Hong Kong and Korea. In fact, he’d just got back from working in Hong Kong. As one of six siblings, he said, it was very hard growing up. His family was poor, did not own property and lived in the rural hinterlands of Singkawang, not this area we were in, but one similar to it on the other edge of Singkawang. All of his brothers and sisters were either in Jakarta or overseas. Ahin had been in Hong Kong that past year, serving noodles in an all-night food stall, 6 days a week, 12 hours a day. He said he’d loved it. He’d learned the business. Now he wanted to open his own noodle shop in Singkawang but he hadn’t saved enough capital, so he was going to try to go back to Hong Kong and work again, this time with the single purpose of saving money. I asked him why he’d gone to Hong Kong in the first place. Why not just find a job in Singkawang?

“Khao miang shui” (Hak. to test fate; Man. ming 命) he replied and then he gave me a big grin. This was the first time I’d heard the expression “khao miang shui” but it was not the last. I looked over into the temple and saw my friends lying on the floor, as Fui, or rather Ciu Sian, was instructing them in meditation and breathing techniques. I still had a long time to chat so I began to probe further into the meaning of “khao miang shui”.

In this chapter I explore what it means to test one’s fate and unpack the ways in which people talk about what they are trying to accomplish through merantau (Ind. sojourning). Discourses about migration constitute (and reinforce) a powerful logic about what is collectively considered a model of ideal adulthood and how it is best achieved. Put simply, this ideal is to own a business or to “become one’s own boss”. This goal is so powerful and pervasive that it fuels the widespread temporary migration of people who undergo periods of intense work in order to save money and learn skills in preparation for opening their own businesses. This goal of business ownership is so forceful that it often precludes people from imagining or entertaining other ideas or options. In the pursuit of this ideal people take risks, do things that may not be in their best interests and/or reject other work possibilities that exist for them. They make temporary and long-term sacrifices, and travel great distances often with little promise of employment.
Many studies have observed the strong aspiration to own businesses within Chinese communities (Oxfeld 1993; Wong 1985; Verver 2013) and offer various explanations ranging from essentializing cultural interpretations to more instrumentalist approaches (Verver 2013).

However, there are few studies that actually document how business ownership is constructed as a cultural ideal and inculcated in youth. This study begins to fill that void by showing how the desire to dan sa co (Hak. work for oneself; Ind. usaha sendiri) is passed down to children, perpetuated in the environment, and reinforced by family and peers to the extent that it takes on the qualities of being not merely one of many possible ideals but in fact a habitus, a way of practice and being in the world, even if the goal is never achieved. Donald Nonini has made a similar argument by showing the ways that lower- and middle-class Malaysian Chinese become localized as specific subject vis-à-vis discourses of knowledge and power. The ways these individuals use their strategic mobility to transcend these disciplining regimes, he argues, constitutes the construction of a new habitus (Nonini 1997). My study pays attention to the expressions that people use to talk about what they are doing and examines those expressions alongside the practical steps they take to actualize their migrations.

By undertaking these journeys and returning to Singkawang to open businesses, people are constructing themselves according to a model of ideal subjectivity promoted by various narratives and regimes. These regimes work through the institution of the family and sites such as the pos where groups of friends and cronies congregate day after day. It is within these spaces and through these social relationships that collective ideals, which I identify as, “the efficacious son”, “the self-sacrificing daughter”, “the righteous patriarch”, “the industrious wife”, and the “shrewd and lucky businessman” come into being and energetically circulate. Family is often emphasized as a source of disciplining regimes for Chinese subjectivity. Less attention has been paid to the role of various forms of community such as the village, the neighborhood and the social network56. In Singkawang, gossip, rumor, competition, and comparison among friends,

56 A recent exception is Julie Chu’s “Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination” (2010). This is an ethnography about the social and cultural context for human smuggling told from the perspective of a small town in Southeastern China. The author enmeshes herself in the village, gaining access to individuals and families involved in smuggling rings. In so doing she is able to develop a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the small town context in which this transnational mobility makes sense and leads to social mobility.
neighbors as well as strangers form another important arena through which the disciplining regimes of the subject play out.

6 Khao Miang Shui

*Khao miang shui* (Hak. testing fate) communicates to others that one is in the process of trying to sculpt one’s life under complicated conditions, which are recognized to hold both great potential but also constraints. Constraints stem from material factors on the ground, and from the perceived limits of what is possible given one’s fate. Fate is conceptualized as one’s personal life signature, aspects of which are decided by god(s) and astrology and are beyond one’s control. People use the notion of “testing fate” as a shorthand to explain the larger projects that are under way in their lives. As such it is a broad and encompassing concept that allows people to be appropriately vague. It expresses their ambitions without coming across as arrogant, overconfident or bad-luck seeking. In response to more concrete questions about plans and goals people also explained, straightforwardly, that they *merantau* in order to *cari kehidupan lebih bagus* (Ind. look for a better life), *chim liu* (Hak. look for/gather money), and *chim kin nyiam* (Hak. look for/gather experience) as part of the process of *biен theu ka* (Hak. struggle to become a boss; Ind. *berjuang menjadi boss*).

Discourses about becoming one’s own boss, and testing one’s fate, give meaning to the practical arrangements that people must make in order to travel to Jakarta and overseas, find employment, housing, food, friends, and opportunities. While these discourses rely on a specific notion of what an ideal successful adult life should look like, based on the collective valuation of wealth, independence, and proper codes of conduct in hierarchical relationships, the practical arrangements that people make in their process of trying to attain this ideal rely heavily on relationships with family members and friends, i.e. one’s social networks.

In this chapter I explain the most common practical arrangements and then describe the imaginative resources that make them possible. I call these ideas and images “resources” because
they act as the raw materials upon which people project themselves and move themselves into
imagined if not actual futures. These are the processes of self-making in which individuals
confront and negotiate the disciplining regimes inherent in the ideal of becoming “the efficacious
son”, “the self-sacrificing daughter”, “the righteous patriarch”, “the industrious wife”, and the
“shrewd and lucky businessman”, that I have identified.

6.1 Merantau (Ind. Sojourn) to Jakarta

6.1.1 Ten Chin Chit Co (Hak. Follow Relatives to Work)

Sunny barely lifts her head from her cell phone as I approach the counter. It doesn’t matter
anyway because she knows I’m not a customer. She knows about my research so she just
continues what she is doing: texting and playing on BlackBerry messenger. Perched on a high
stool behind a shiny glass display case filled with cell phones and accessories, every day is much
the same for Sunny, and much like this. When a customer comes in Sunny looks up from her cell
phone and stops texting for a moment, or perhaps she slips off her stool and goes to stand nearby,
watching them look at the merchandise with a dull, vacant expression on her face.

Sunny is 16 years old, but her pale complexion and tiny stature make her look more like 12. She
left Singkawang for Jakarta when she was 14 and has been a shop girl (Ind. jaga toko) for the
past two years for her aunt Kian, along with two of her brothers and two of her cousins. The
family lives in a three-story ruko (Ind. rumah toko, shop house) behind this busy electronics mall
in West Jakarta. They wake up each morning and go to work together. While the older male
cousins are busy selling stereos and other electronic equipment Sunny has been assigned to the
cell phone kiosk.

“Why did you stop going to school after middle school?” I ask her.

“I didn't like school,” she replies. “I was already ready to work.”
Sunny’s grandfather was a Mandarin high school teacher before his profession was eliminated by the nationwide ban on Mandarin language in 1962. Her father never had the opportunity to study Mandarin formally and his Indonesian is also less than fluent. In fact, he was only able complete a few years of elementary school because his family’s living situation demanded that he find employment early in his childhood. The son of a Mandarin teacher, (one of the few nonbusiness professions that command a modicum of social status and prestige in this Chinese community) he himself is functionally illiterate, incapable of reading or writing in Mandarin or Indonesian. He is a fluent Hakka speaker, a good storyteller with an excellent. Sunny, while quiet and shy in person, has a boisterous texting life, using primarily Bahasa gaul (Ind. slang) mixed with Hakka and the occasional trendy Mandarinism. Her own language abilities are like a time capsule of the changes in language that have taken place in Chinese families over the past 40 years in Indonesia. As a young person in Indonesia she is perfect for working this cell phone kiosk, her knowledge of the technology being both tacit and expansive.

“What do you want to do when you are older?” I inquire.

Sunny shrugs. “Usaha sendiri (Ind. work for myself), I guess.”

Sunny’s situation is the most common arrangement and is referred to in Hakka simply as ten chin chit co (Hak. follow relatives to work). Young people sojourn to Jakarta to live and work with a relative, usually an aunt, uncle or an older more established sibling. These youths may be as young as early teens or be high school or university graduates in their twenties. Some work in electronic shops, building supplies stores, restaurants, cell phone kiosks like Sunny, or clothing wholesale outlets in Tanah Abang. It all depends on the relative’s business and business sector. There is also one particular industry—the silk-screening and small-garment industry (Ind. Sablon dan Konfeksi)—which has (until recently) been dominated by Hakka Chinese from West Kalimantan and is concentrated in the neighborhoods of Jembatan Lima, Jembatan Besi, and Padamangan in West Jakarta. Youth who have relatives in this industry, a substantial percentage of Hakka Singkawang, are easily slotted into various entry-level positions, gaining experience, connections and making small amounts of money.

When youth ten chin chit co they often find themselves in an ambivalent situation in regards to challenges, opportunities and responsibilities. Working and living with a member of one’s
extended family, particularly with a paternal aunt or uncle or an older brother or sister, is a well-established pattern and is based on relationships of trust, rather than contract (Wijaya 2007). The bonds of family generate an increased sense of obligation and responsibility, both on the part of the aunt or uncle to look after their niece or nephew, and on the part of the niece or nephew to ensure that they work hard and respect their elders. While information about how the young relative is doing in Jakarta travels back to the parents in Singkawang, so too does information about the uncle or aunt. Youngsters hoping to experience more freedom and independence by living at a greater distance from their parents in fact face subtle but constant surveillance.

As Kian’s niece, Sunny’s job is guaranteed by the obligations of family in a way that the other non-relative employees’ jobs are not. However, family obligation does not assure a non-exploitative working arrangement (Ong 1997). Young relatives, such as Sunny and her brothers, who may be working very hard and/or for very little remuneration may not feel authorized to question or negotiate their conditions of work due to a sense of responsibility to respect older relatives. The opposite problem may also arise. Youth, such as Sunny and her brothers, may not work very hard, or make mistakes, or fail to come to work, and aunts and uncles, such as Kian, may not feel they are in a position to fire them. Furthermore, aunts or uncles may have only taken in a niece or nephew because a poorer sibling in Singkawang has begged them, or pressured them to do so. This results in a situation where there may in fact be little work that needs to be done by that niece or nephew (i.e. there are already enough employees), and perhaps also a lack of funds to pay them. This can create systemic underemployment for many members of the family business. Hundreds of youths like Sunny who merantau to Jakarta to work with relatives find themselves negotiating this terrain, balancing the opportunity to work with the responsibilities of family relationships. They learn how to work, learn certain skills, and begin to understand various industries. And yet, they must constantly navigate between not taking the job for granted and not being exploited as younger, lower-status family members. Working with family members creates ambivalence for others as well.

Ami and her husband have a busy mini market in Singkawang. I often visited their store and watched the way they cheerfully greeted the shoppers who fill the store each evening, picking up daily sundries on the way home from work. One day, Ami came to my house to deliver some
food I had ordered from their store. She sat down to have a cup of coffee with me and I was finally able to talk with her candidly about having a family business. “What is it like to work with family members?” I asked her.

She rolled her eyes in frustration and sighed. “There’s the good and the bad,” she said. “Chinese people like to work with their family members because they feel they can trust them. But it is not always easy. My sister is helping out in our store right now. I can trust her, but sometimes she doesn’t come to work. This is the problem of working with relatives; you can’t force them to work hard. But if we have a fight about it, after I get mad, it is over, she doesn’t hold a grudge, not like another employee.”

“I didn’t see your sister yesterday. Where was she?” I asked.

“At home!” Ami exclaimed. “She’s just lazy. She doesn’t want to be responsible. She just doesn’t want to know. But when she needs money, then she comes and works again. It’s hard to deal with. I feel *pusing* (Ind. dizzy).”

On another occasion I was able to ask Ami’s husband a similar question. “If your business is so busy and you are so short of staff, why don’t you invite your nephew to work for you?”

“Ah, for what? The problem in Singkawang is not lack of human resources it is the quality of those human resources. Yes, he could work for me, but there is so much he cannot handle. It is more work to teach him and then fix the mistakes he will make. *Biarin saja* (Ind. just let it be).”

While adopting family members as workers is common and imagined to be based on trust and closeness among kin, in reality it is a fraught terrain in which individuals feel compelled by sometimes contradictory hopes, expectations, and obligations. Having family members with businesses in Jakarta clearly has many advantages. It opens up a new market place. It provides access to opportunities for young people to work and gain experience and small amounts of money. However, these advantages must be constantly weighed against the politics and power relations that play out in families. Family networks are the axiomatic form of social connection
that the Hakka Singkawang use to pursue business and work. However, there is also an important minority opinion suggesting it is better to work for a non-relative. Some of the key participants in my study confided that working for a non-relative provides them more power to negotiate and more freedom to leave a job.

6.1.2 Anak Buah Bos (Ind. The Boss’s Subordinate)

It took Jerry a while to build up the confidence to talk to me, but once he did, he had a long story to tell. We were at a beach near Singkawang with a group of school friends, all of whom were in their early thirties and all of whom had worked in Jakarta in their early twenties. Some continue to work for others in Jakarta, some have started their own businesses there and some have returned and opened businesses in Singkawang. This particular occasion represents a fairly typical scene—an informal reunion of school friends taking place during one of the biannual periods of grave worshipping when family members return home to visit the graves of their ancestors.

On this particular day these school friends brought beer and snacks, made a picnic on the beach, swam, took photos, gossiped and reminisced about school days, playfully calling each other by their childhood nicknames. Like me, Jerry was with them, but not one of them. Neither a boss nor a school friend, Jerry, was merely an employee. While he accompanied them to the beach, he remained distant from them, not fully included in the festivities. He did not drink, he was not privy to the inside jokes and he remained in the background sitting alone further away on the sand. I went over and sat next to him on a log on the beach and began what would be the first of our many long conversations.

In Singkawang, it is very common for people to have nicknames as schoolchildren, and these nicknames last well into adulthood, even until people are in their fifties and sixties. Returning friends inevitably remember those nicknames and continue to call their friends by them as a way of expressing camaraderie and nostalgia for school days and youth.
Jerry is from a very poor family from a village about 25 minutes outside of Singkawang. He works as an accountant and an assistant for one of these young “bosses”, as Jerry refers to them. His boss sells luxury watches in Jakarta and Jerry is careful to speak respectfully and deferentially about him, pointing him out to me in the group of school friends swimming in the water. While only slightly older than Jerry, his boss comes from a middle-class, property-owning family from Singkawang’s city center, an important distinction which in part accounts for their different social status. Jerry feels very grateful for the fact that his boss has given him this opportunity to work, a sentiment he repeats many times over during our conversation.

All of Jerry’s nine siblings are currently working in Jakarta and, according to him, for Hakka from Singkawang sojourning to Jakarta after middle school or after high school is not really a choice, but an expectation. “Life in the village is hard,” he said. “My parents were very mean to me, they hit me, I hate them,” he confides. “But Jakarta is hard too. Before I met my boss I was just waiting for something wonderful to happen to me. Finally, he came and took me in. He rescued me,” Jerry said.

Jerry’s situation is an example of another common route to working in Jakarta, which is working for a non-relative boss. This could be a friend or an acquaintance that has already become a 'boss' (i.e. has already started their own business.) The young person works in a shop or another kind of business and learns the trade in an informal mentorship capacity. This new underling may start out doing menial tasks but has the potential to rise up into more important and greater responsibility-holding positions (at least that is what people hope for). Stories circulate among youth about generous bosses who eventually help to establish their best workers in their own businesses (perhaps branches of the boss’s existing enterprise), or give them the start-up capital to open their own business. Whether these stories are actually true seems of little relevance, for the hope that this could happen is enough to drive youth to work hard, and prove to their boss that they are disciplined, loyal, and, most importantly, trustworthy.

According to a group of 30–50 year olds who lived in Jakarta in their twenties and who formed the majority of the participants in my study, the most important thing to do when you are taken under the wing of a big boss is to immediately, and then constantly, prove your trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is highly valued and frequently talked about. It is an important virtue that people
must cultivate if they want to expand and maintain their network of friends and business partners. This is particularly true because Hakka from Singkawang do business without the use of contracts and therefore rely on trust and word-of-mouth agreements in most cases. Furthermore, the social patterns of Singkawang’s small-scale Chinese society (which stretches into neighborhoods of Jakarta) are characterized by high rates of gambling, gossip, and interrelatedness, making it even more imperative for people to manage their social reputations and appearances (Ind. *jaga image*). If a person has a reputation for being untrustworthy, it leads to difficulties and alienation later. As I inquired more deeply into this idea of trustworthiness, the theme of gambling often arose and a particular example was most often given. If someone is known around town to go into debt with many people and never pay them back, it will be very difficult for that person later, not only if they want to gamble or borrow money again, but also if they want to be employed. People will not trust them and therefore, people will not want to help them. Trustworthiness in the context of work, however, has no stable meaning, referring most generally to the condition of being able to do what you say you will do.

Working as an anak buah (Ind. underling, subordinate), just like Jerry, is another common route that young people take when starting out in Jakarta (and sometimes overseas) and “*cari kehidupan lebih bagus*” (Ind. look for a better life). Being taken on as an anak buah of an established boss can create a special kind of relationship. This relationship is different from the relationship between aunt or uncle with niece or nephew and different again from the kind of relationship an employee might forge if they had applied for a job anonymously through a newspaper ad, for example. The boss-employee dynamic is blurred by a few special features of the relationship. The anak buah might be a friend of the boss\(^\text{58}\) from Singkawang. They may have a close relationship, and be of similar age. They may be teman sekolah (Ind. school friends) and this history and friendship status is preserved while they are working together as boss and anak buah. It is common for anak buah to live with the boss, to eat together, to drink together, to sing karaoke together, to go on trips together (all of which are usually paid for by the boss). The anak buah becomes part of the boss’s entourage—his core group of followers who flock around him, help to “service” him, all the while eating and drinking for free and hoping that proximity to

\(^{58}\) While Jerry’s status as an underling is typical, he has not become as close a friend to his boss as many other underlings do, stemming from the fact that they were not originally school friends and Jerry’s general lack of confidence and tendency to *minder* (Ind. defer status in relation to others due to low self-esteem).
this successful person will be beneficial for them, and that some of the boss’s prosperity and success will spread to them.

The uniqueness of this relationship is also apparent when compared with that of other employees. If the boss has many employees, it is usually the case that the Singkawang anak buah are in an inner circle of friends, as distinguished from the non-Chinese employees who will often do the less desirable jobs, be paid less\(^{59}\) and are not trusted with large responsibilities or handling money. Whereas anak buah work their way up to do bookkeeping and ordering, the non-Chinese, or non-hometown employees may be asked to tend to the front of the store, with little opportunity of advancement. In Jerry’s case, even though he is not as close to his boss as some of the other anak buah who are teman sekolah (Ind. school friend), his boss trusts him, let’s him do accounting, and always invites and pays for him to pulang kampung, something that would rarely happen with the non-Chinese or non-Singkawang employees.

Working for an established business owner, or “bos” (Ind. boss) is also different from working for a relative, because the relationship dynamic is governed by different principles. A young employee, such as Jerry, may have more freedom to make requests because the pressure of maintaining the hierarchy of familial ties is absent. Jerry used to work late into the evening but he didn’t feel safe going home after dark, so he asked his boss if he could start earlier in the morning, and go home before sunset, a request which his boss agreed to easily. Making such a request from a relative might not be possible.

However, being able to negotiate the terms of work and make requests does not imply the absence of hierarchy. The hierarchy inherent in the bos-anak buah relationship is a hierarchy based on social status and deference rather than the ideology of filial piety (Man. 孝 Xiào). The boss is respected for having already achieved the status of being a business owner. He has become a paternal figure (a patriarch) by becoming a boss. As in other avenues of Chinese society in Singkawang social status is acquired and recognized on the basis of wealth and business success (not primarily through education, religious expertise, political ideology, or other

\(^{59}\) Others have noted similar patterns of ethnic discrimination. See, for example, Efferin and Hopper 2007, Ong 1999, Tong 2005.
kinds of achievements). It is marked by deferential acts conducted by groups of lower-status people toward a higher-status individual: a higher-status individual is “serviced” (waited upon, driven around, catered to) by others; is introduced to strangers as a big boss; is given the best seats and positions; is named in public, often using a full Mandarin name, with the name frequently recorded for posterity in guest books, certificates, invitations, and magazines. Individuals who consider their social status low may be too embarrassed (Ind. *malu*) to go near these high-status people and will intentionally avoid them (Ind. *minder*), while others may be brave enough (Ind. *berani*) to flock around them, hoping to benefit from their wealth/success. These deferential acts and acts of “braveness” help to strengthen and perpetuate the goal of becoming a boss, which is central to the plans of young people in becoming ideal adults, attaining social status, and participating in social reproduction among Hakka Singkawang.

In “Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia”, Benedict Anderson elaborates Weber’s notion of charisma by emphasizing that charisma is not an intrinsic characteristic of a person, but a quality that is projected onto a person by a group of followers (1990). Charisma, he explains, is located “firmly in the perceptions of particular, historically and geographically bounded followings” (Anderson 1990: 78). Anderson reworks Weber’s concept by showing that the concepts of power underpinning the concept of charisma have a similar root in a divine cosmology, thus making Weber’s division of charismatic domination and traditional domination problematic. Anthony Milner, in an analysis of Malay political culture, extends the idea of charisma being located in the perceptions of a group of followers (1982). He argues that the Malay political leaders on the eve of colonial rule attempted to hold on to their power in order to hold on to their followers. He frames the relationship between charismatic leaders and followers in terms of a state of being, the condition of having a *raja* (Ind. king) or what he called *kerajaan* (Ind. the state of having a king) (Milner 1982). His argument further developed the idea that the charismatic character of leaders in the region was the result of a dynamic between a group of subjects who recognized and deferred power to a form of leadership and personality, and so the leader made constant displays of charisma in order to cultivate that leader-follower dynamic. This condition of having a *raja*, he argued, was an idiom of social life (Milner 1982).
Hakka patterns of sociality in Singkawang have a similar charismatic leader/group-of-followers dynamic. This takes places on a small scale, with people who have made their fortunes in Jakarta return home to an entourage of friends and family. It happens with politicians, such as the former Mayor of Singkawang, Hasan Karmen. It happens with spirit-mediums, who have regulars who act as the *panitia* (Ind. committee) of their territorial temple cults. It also happens with the leaders of voluntary development associations. Returning home to experience the social status gain that one has made while in Jakarta (or overseas) whether returning from studying, marrying or working, is part of playing with the possibilities of being able to enter into a dynamic of leader/followers, playing with the possibilities of having that concept of charisma activated by friends and others. Anderson’s emphasis on the particular and historically bounded nature of groups of followers is important at the local level where the signs of Hakka “charisma” are different from other locales. For example, returned from the “haj” amongst Muslims in Singkawang (and elsewhere in Indonesia) corresponds to a social status change and is an important moment to create new kinds of relationships with family, friends and neighbours. Although Chinese in Singkawang understand this, doing the Haj is not part of their system of value, and so the social status gains and potential charisma of a returnee is not perceived. Rather, the system of social reproduction in which Hakka youth seek entrepreneurial enterprises is not perceived in the same value terms in the Malay, Dayak, Madurese and other communities of Singkawang. While individuals may know of the ‘big bosses’ when they return home each year at Cap Go Meh or Sembahyang Kubur, the social status and charisma they come to embody is not recognized or valued in the same way, or to the same extent as the group of Chinese followers who gather around these individuals. Identifying the ways that power works through charismatic leaders in the Chinese community in Singkawang reveals the extent to which this community is one of many Indonesian communities, embedded in, and influenced by the local cultures and social milieu as much as it is influenced by cultural patterns which originate in mainland China.
6.1.3 Going Alone

There are also those who attempt to become their own boss on their own without help from family or friends. Ahin’s story, which began this chapter, is an example of this route as he has independently taken steps to work overseas many times in order to incrementally improve his life with the goal of opening a business in Singkawang. Many people try to become successful on their own but it is very challenging. I provide another account about Heri, who first went to Jakarta with the hope of “making it” on his own, as an example of how people try to take this route and the difficulties that they may face.

Heri sits behind a desk at the rear of the shop with a rag next to him that he uses to wipe the glass display cases periodically. “What are you looking for, miss?” he calls out to a middle-aged woman wearing a bright orange headscarf who just entered the store.

“Colored pencils. Do you have any?”

“Of course. Why not? How many dozens do you need? Is six dozen enough?” he asks as he winks at me, letting me in on his joke.

She smiles and he smiles as well and lets out a loud chuckle as he walks over to show her the colored pencils.

Every time I visit Heri’s shop he is smiling, laughing, and joking with his customers. It is a busy, centrally located stationery store, open seven days a week and very popular with civil servants who like to buy newspapers, file folders and use the photocopier. As Heri flirts with the woman in the orange headscarf, I peruse the back of his tidy and tightly packed store. Despite the tiny space, the walls are stacked ceiling high with books, papers, office supplies, maps, and a few toys, games, and musical instruments.

The first time I came to his shop I just wanted to buy a few small notebooks to use for my fieldwork. I had not intended to stay very long but Heri was so friendly we ended up talking for over an hour. “Where are you from and what brings you to Singkawang?” he began. I explained
my research and told him a bit about myself to which he replied, “Oh, so you are interested in
migration, eh? I used to live in Taiwan. I also lived in Jakarta. My sister married in Taiwan too.
She is still there. So just ask me. What do you want to know?” he said and smiled. I smiled back
at him and then I began to shower him with questions. About twenty minutes later he went into
the back room and brought out another chair. He put it in front of his desk, slapped the seat hard
with his hand and said, “Qing zuo” (Man. please sit down).

Heri is one of three siblings from Singkawang. He is extremely hardworking and diligent, never
taking time off and rarely closing his shop. His business is profitable and he has managed to save
enough money to buy two other properties in Singkawang. However, things have not always
been easy for him. Heri recounted for me periods in his life that were very difficult. Likewise,
Heri’s older brother, who now runs an internet café, also had to work very hard for his success,
but has managed to save enough money to buy two properties in Singkawang. While the two of
them were “struggling to become bosses”, their sister married a man from Taiwan where she
now lives with her children (I discuss cross-border marriage in Chapter 5).

The third time I visited Heri at his shop he started to tell me the story of his struggles. “After
high school I really wanted to go to Jakarta to study, but my father would not approve. My father
and I were very close. He didn’t want me to leave. He wanted me to stay in Singkawang with
him. I really wanted to go. I had this urge. I wanted to be different than my peers. I didn’t want
to work in konfeksi or sablon (Ind. garment and silk-screening industry). I wanted to find my
own way. But my father forbade me to go.”

I sat quietly and listened attentively to his story, recognizing he was telling me something
personal, something serious and something important about his life. “I was adamant,” he
continued. “I had 300,000 rupiah saved and I bought a boat ticket from Pontianak to Jakarta. I
told my father I would not return until I was rich and I left! Can you imagine that?” He smiled. “I
didn’t know anyone there. I didn’t have anyone to receive me. I didn’t have a place to stay. I
didn’t have a job! I just went. When I got there I rented a room in a rooming house and found a
job working for an inner-city bus company as a ticket collector.”
"It was so hard. It was impossible to make money. I worked all day. I worked all night. I only slept for two hours a day on the seats in the back of the bus. The room that I rented was only used to store my clothes, because I never had a chance to go there to sleep."

“In Jakarta I only ate tofu. It was so susah (Ind. difficult), but I was too malu (Ind. embarrassed/ashamed) to ask my father for help. After a long time, my father came to Jakarta looking for me. When he saw how thin I was, he started to cry. I will never forget that.”

"After that he took me back to Singkawang. The next time I went away to work, first to Singapore and then to Taiwan, I was sure to come home successful.” He ended with a laugh. But this was not the same kind of laugh as he had shared with the women with orange headscarf. It was a serious laugh, a nervous laugh, a laugh that made me realize the full impact of the risk he had taken by going to Jakarta on his own as a young man.

Young people who try to go to Jakarta alone without any help from family connections or friends are often trying to express their independence and strength of character. They hope to create a personal success story and return triumphant with the capital needed to establish a business, support aging parents, get married, and start a family. Taking an independent route, however, may also be the result of a lack of necessary connections to work with family or friends, or indicate that one is in disagreement with parents about future plans.

Going it alone, while much less common and often considered a deviant path, particularly if it contradicts the wishes of parents, is also considered to be extremely brave (Ind. berani; Hakka kam), because one must confront one’s fate (Hak. miang sui) head-on. It suggests that one is fearless, going somewhere without having a promise of work and residence, and this fearlessness is valued, even if the journey is unsuccessful. These particularly courageous struggles become important parts of an individual’s life narrative, the stories they tell about how they got to where they are now and also the stories that other people tell about them.

To “follow relatives to work” (Hak. ten chin chit co), to become the underling of an established boss (Ind. menjadi anak buah bos) and to “go it alone” are the three main routes that young people take to go to Jakarta to start the process of becoming a business owner. Of these three, the first route, ten chin chit co, is the most common. Many of the individuals in the group of 30–50
years olds that I interviewed had worked with family members in Jakarta, and most had worked in the garment (Ind. konfeksi) and silk-screening (Ind. sablon) industries. This is a well-established social pattern that has been passed down over several generations, but how is it currently being imagined? What do today’s youth imagine themselves doing? How do they think about and talk about this period in their lives when they are so mobile? And what can their experiences tell us about the ways that this form of social reproduction shares both continuities and discontinuities from the youthful mobilities of their parents and grandparents?

7 Discourses

When I asked young people about their mobility they routinely responded by saying that they were chim lui (Hak. looking for money; Ind. cari uang/duit/modal) and chim kin Nyan (Hak. looking for experience; Ind. cari pengalaman), with the ultimate goal of dan sa co/co shenli (Hak. work for oneself; Ind. usaha sendiri). Young people dream of becoming their own bosses by starting their own businesses. When I asked my 30–50-year-old participants what the process of leaving to work in Jakarta is all about, they tell me that in retrospect it is a time when young people are struggling to become bosses (Ind. berjuang menjadi boss). They tell me that this is a trial, a time of hard work, self-sacrifice, and suffering. In my interviews with young people in Jakarta, regardless of the route they have taken, stories abound of the hardships that they must face during this stage of life. Young people have to endure difficult working conditions, long hours of work, little money, little entertainment or free time, and long periods of unemployment or underemployment with little money. They are frequently stressed, depressed, and confused about the future. Youth quickly realize how slow and difficult it is to save enough money to invest in one’s own business, not to mention trying to figure out which kind of business to open. Many people’s most poignant memories of these hard times have to do with having to go without food.

Akim worked in Jakarta for seven years before coming back to Singkawang to open a small materials store. He worked in an electronic store and a clothing store. He said that he tried to
work in silk-screening but quit because he could not endure the fumes from the chemical solvents used in the silk-screening process. “Life in Jakarta was very difficult (Ind. susah). All I could eat was rice and broth,” he told me.

“There were many very difficult times,” Ajan said. After dropping out of school his father stopped supporting him, and his older brother’s business failed. He opened his own small garment business, but frequently failed to make a profit (Ind. rugi). “There were many days when I could not eat. I was very skinny at that time. I still remember going to the market and buying one fish. I salted it myself and then I cut it into tiny strips and I ate only one strip a day. I couldn't always eat rice. At that time my waist was slim, my face was gaunt.”

“Jakarta—”, Ajan recoils “—I almost couldn’t bear it. I once had to endure (Ind. tahan) one week without any money. Imagine that. Jakarta is difficult. I couldn't tahan. I had to pulang kampung.”

These experiences of hardship and struggle are so common they find their way into songs in the local Hakka music industry. One particular song tells the story of a young man’s struggle to become rich and successful with money borrowed from his uncle to start a silk-screening business. All the main themes that people use to talk about what they are or were trying to accomplish in their sojourns to Jakarta are represented in this song: hard work, hard times, testing one’s fate, filial piety, and struggling to become one’s own boss.

Figure 10 and 11: Silk-screening (Ind. Sablon) and Garment-Making (Ind. Konfeksi)
**Sablon**

Nyin kong sablon, thang to an ho chon,  
Thang phen jiu kon, toi pan chon,  
Jin teu mo sit fon, han oi pun kung nyin lon  
Malam minggu piong co con  
Sablon cang koi, mo an mang fat choi  
Ng pha khu khu co ten loi  
She jin fai oi phi  
sit fon han pong lang fon koi  
jit ha mo lui theu na hoi  
jit sim loi co, pok jiu nyit chon to  
kan chia nga shuk, cia pinjam lui pun ngai co  
He mo chon to, kai miang sui ng mo  
he boi co jiu pun nga shuk hiong siu  
tai nyi chut ket chit ka lau o ciu  
ho tet nga shuk tui ngai jiu an ho  
mo si ngai co kung, shi boi co teu lo

**Silk-screening**

People say silk-screening is very profitable  
It is said you can profit 50%  
Silk-screen until you can’t eat, then you must pay employees  
Saturday night go home early  
Just opened silk-screening, cannot make it rich too fast  
Not afraid of difficulty, just work  
If the silk-screening is damaged, I must replace it  
Can only eat rice with fermented rice  
If I have no money the head feels itchy (idiom: rub head in confusion)  
Wholeheartedly come to work, hope one day to become rich/successful  
Thanks to my uncle for lending me money to do this business  
If I’m not successful, the reason is my fate is not good  
If successful and rich, I will give my uncle a good life/happiness  
Take you (uncle) to another country, we will take a trip to Australia  
Fortunately, my uncle is good to me (lends me money)  
If not, I will be working for someone else until I’m old

This song can be seen as an artifact of the process that young people undertake as they attempt to self-style themselves according to the ideal of business ownership. The disciplining regimes that structure their subjectivity and constitute a distinct habitus are clearly expressed within these lyrics, as are the complex and ambiguous feelings associated with having to struggle to become a boss, having to endure hardship and self-sacrifice under conditions of competition, insecurity and familial obligations.
7.1 Tangan Kosong (Ind. Empty-Handed)

The song describes a common experience of the hardships that people must face in those years of working to try to save enough money to start a business of their own. But what is the success rate of these young workers and how do they make sense of their struggles? Participants described to me how parents and elders often gave them advice about how to be successful, and outlined the particularly bad habits that one must avoid in order to effectively save money to start a business.

Before Akhiong left for Jakarta (without his father’s permission), he remembers an old schoolteacher giving him advice about how to become successful. This man explained the “five truths” (Hak. ng jong tai cin), also known as the five ways one can become bankrupt: sit, cok, piau, tu, ciu (eating, clothing, prostitutes, gambling, and liquor). Akhiong recounts it like this, “He told me that to avoid bankruptcy and in order to save money one must not eat luxurious foods too often; one must not wear expensive clothing all the time; one must not go to prostitutes; one must not gamble; and one must not drink too much. These, the man said, are the easiest ways to lose money and become too lazy to work.”

These five truths are widely known, and represent moral and practical ideals about how best to live while trying to achieve the goal of success through wealth and personal enterprise. But despite being talked about from time to time, they are rarely adhered to in any systematic way. People will occasionally use this older, proverbial wisdom to explain successes and failures, but there is also a more casual language used in everyday talk. When individuals assess the factors leading to success or failure in business, an important distinction is marked between those who go to Jakarta tangan kosong (Ind. empty-handed) versus those who go with start-up capital or assistance from their parents or other relatives. In both cases, the need to work hard is considered paramount, but according to the dominant logic, those who go to Jakarta tangan kosong are more likely to be successful overall, than those who go with money from family. The reason given is that an empty-handed person must work harder for their success, and they must find their own experience (Hak. chim khin nyiam). Whereas an alternative working logic could consider capital from a family member as a competitive advantage, in Singkawang the logic is the opposite. To come from a place of means can, in fact, hinder one’s ability to become successful (or so the discourse goes). Such individuals, people say, may not know how to work very hard or may be
inexperienced because, instead of enduring long periods of working for others, they go straight into business for themselves. Whereas those who come from nothing, are forced to work harder and endure a bitter life, are thought to become the most successful and to appreciate their success more. This is the local equivalent of the Mandarin concept of eating bitterness (Man. 吃苦 Chī kǔ), an ethic through which individuals are encouraged to endure periods of hardship only to enjoy the benefits of that hardship at a later time (Loyalka 2012).

Richard, a 19-year-old computer programming student from Singkawang who I met in Jakarta explained it to me like this: “You know there are two kinds of rich guys in Singkawang: the first one is the one who works day and night for it, and the second one is the one who inherits the wealth from their parents. Usually the first one, that’s the good one…because that one already knows how hard it is to find money.”

Karla, a 23-year-old shop girl I met in Jakarta, also reiterated this sentiment: “Many of the rich people in Singkawang who are given money by their parents are not successful, because they don’t have any experience…also maybe they don’t really work hard.”

Of course, people also recognize that one must look on a case-by-case basis at all of the factors and conditions at play, including the potentials and limitations of one’s fate.

Whether or not someone is considered tangan kosong can be seen as a class distinction. It indicates whether or not one comes from a family who owns property or successful businesses. Embedded in the notion that those who are tangan kosong (i.e. the have-nots) have an advantage is a logic the supports the underdog. It recuperates the position of the poor, provides inspiration and a narrative of hope from which working-class Hakka can imagine their route to the top even in the face of multiple challenges. As I will show in the following chapter about transnational migrations, this discourse is just one of many of the recuperative discourses that Hakka people use to talk about themselves under conditions in which their sense of self is potentially undervalued vis-à-vis others. In Chinese society in Singkawang rags-to-riches stories find fertile ground, precisely because of the desire to preserve a sense of hope that people who are tangan kosong can develop (Ind. maju) and become big bosses. It is a story that encourages people to work hard, and believe in the power of their own efforts even under the most unfavorable conditions.
7.2 Se Se Shenli Cang Co Kong [Hak. Even a Small Business is Better than Working (for Someone Else)]

“Fortunately my uncle is good to me (lends me money). If not, I will be working for someone else until I’m old.”

The last lines of the song are very important: they speak directly to the ubiquitous goal of working for oneself. The idea of working for someone else, especially for life, is very unappealing for the Hakka from Singkawang (despite the fact that many people work for others because they have not been able to start their own business). Becoming one’s own boss (Hak. dan sa co) is such a strong cultural priority for Hakka from Singkawang that it is sung about in songs and forms the content of widely known idiomatic expressions such as “se se shenli cang co kong” (even the smallest business is better than working for somebody else). This preference is explained in terms of one’s ability to make money, to make profit. If you are your own boss, it is reasoned, there is no limit to the amount of work you can put into your enterprise, and by extension no limit to the amount of money you can make, whereas if you work for someone else these things are limited (Ind. terbatas). Of course, there are real limitations to the amount of money that people can make, particularly in the shop-house trade in Singkawang, but in the context of this explanation people rarely factor those limitations into the equation.

Framing the preference for business ownership in this way, in terms of profit maximization, only tells part of the story, and is not based on empirical successes in business ventures. Being a business owner, particularly if you are wealthy, raises one’s social status as compared with the condition of working for someone else, or working as a farmer, rickshaw driver or clerk, for example. The people who are considered community tokoh (Ind. big men) are people who own successful businesses. These business owners, or “bosses”, also become leaders and members of voluntary social development organizations, temple committees, alumni associations, and local
branches of national religious *adat* organizations. They are known by name and reputation; they are invited to speak to the press about current issues, and they are invited to weddings and birthday parties as honored guests. Since the advent of regional autonomy and the reentry of Chinese into politics in Singkawang, being a boss is also a necessary prerequisite for joining local politics and running for mayor (discussed in Chapter 7). So while people explain their desire to work for themselves as the best possible way to become rich—a common, righteous and unproblematic goal among Hakka Singkawang and other groups of Chinese Indonesians—the pursuit of social status, which is intimately linked to wealth, is rarely acknowledged.

While it is generally considered great to be rich, the ways that one acts as a rich person in social relationship with others is a matter that is under constant scrutiny and moral regulation.

“You know most people in Singkawang dream of becoming a rich guy,” Richard explained to me. "But if a Singkawang man becomes rich, and he is not very kind, people don’t like him. You ever heard of the store Sinar Suci? The boss is like that and nobody likes him. But if the boss is nice, people like to hang around him, maybe they hope the rich guy will treat them to eat or something."

To become rich, particularly if you started off *tangan kosong*, is considered a great thing. However, if, in the process of becoming rich, you alienate or forget your friends, consider yourself above others, refuse to associate with poorer people, avoid certain places, wear fancy designer clothing, or act excessively stingy, you will be labeled *sombong* (Ind. arrogant), which is no small matter. A respected *tokoh/bos* is invited to events and followed around by a group of lower-status people, but if that person is considered *sombong* they will face considerable alienation from groups and activities, which, in turn, will close off future opportunities for business deals, status accrual, and connection building. While becoming a boss is considered ideal, and becoming rich is considered righteous, it is important that individuals do so in proper ways. The process of becoming a big boss, therefore, is governed by a set of informal rules about behavior and responsibilities. The discourse about being *sombong* is one of the ways that the

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60 There are many such organizations in Singkawang. Some of the more prominent religious organizations include *Majelis Adat Budaya Tionghoa* (MABT) (Ind. Council of Customary Chinese Culture), *Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia* (MAKIN) (Ind. Indonesian High Council of Confucianism), and *Majelis Tridharma Indonesia* (MTI) (Ind. Indonesian Council of the Three Dharmas).
behavior of rich people in social relationships with less rich people is monitored. However, there are other ways as well.

Singkawang is full of posts or pondok (Ind. gazebos), which are places where groups of friends regularly hang out together, particularly at night. I spent a lot of time at these posts during my fieldwork because they are a center of social activity in which patterns of interaction can be observed and where you can meet people and hear a constant stream of daily talk. On one occasion, after several months of hanging out at one particularly popular post, I noticed something unusual. There was a new person hanging out. Everybody seemed to know him and my friend introduced him to me as a big boss and as a man who had a lot of information that could help me with my research. I promptly interviewed him on the spot, talking for several hours about topics ranging from history to economics, politics, family, and ethnic relations. The next night he was there again and for about five consecutive nights in a row. Each night he drank until his speech was slurred and eventually passed out on the wooden benches of the post. Routine and excessive drinking among some people is not unusual behavior so I just assumed that he was a new member of the group. But on the sixth night when he arrived everybody started to leave. Not at the same time, but in a staggered way. After thirty minutes, only he, my neighbor and I remained and my neighbor promptly suggested that we leave as well. After we left I asked my neighbor why everyone had left and this was what he said: “You know that guy is rich. He has a big house on Sudirman Street, he owns a café and a store, but he comes here every night and drinks until he is drunk and he never brings anything. He never contributes. So earlier in the afternoon, we, the regulars at this post, decided that each time he comes we will all leave, so that it is not a nice environment for him. Hopefully he will eventually stop coming here to our post. He is wealthy but he is stingy (Ind. pelit).” After that night I rarely saw this man at the post again. Their collective shunning appeared to have worked.

A few weeks later a similar incident of ostracization took place, but this time with a regular to the post, who was well-known, but poor. He went to the post almost every day. When he was there he always made sure to regularly fill the glasses of the big bosses and he was frequently sent by the “sponsor” to buy more beer or ice or food. But he had been recently getting drunker and drunker and had had a few violent clashes with people over petty disputes. In response, the other regulars collectively decided that they would ban him from the post. Unlike the shunning
technique of the previous case, this time they simply told him that he was not allowed to go there anymore because of his violent behavior. I was quite surprised by this because despite his poverty, he is an old man, and waited faithfully on the younger, wealthier bosses.

I decided to talk to him about what had happened. It was difficult. He was embarrassed. But I knew him quite well. His house was only two blocks from the house where I live in Singkawang, and he was one of the first people I met during my preliminary research. Initially, when I spoke with him he was devastated by this alienation and had tried to plead to be included again, but it was no use. Several months later, I ran into him in the market and asked him about the situation. He said he had come to realize that the only way he would be included again was by somehow being able to reestablish trust with people from the post and prove that his behavior had changed. That's what he was trying to do.

Wealthy individuals have a responsibility to share with others by buying food and drinks, and less wealthy individuals who receive these things have a responsibility to defer to those big bosses as well as do the groundwork to make things happen. Among friends who congregate at posts, everyone knows who is wealthy and who is not, who is a big boss, a small boss, a worker, a drunkard, a gambler, a fabulist, an unemployed person, etc. Big bosses give money to the less wealthy members of the group and tell them to go fetch more beer, or ice, or cigarettes or bong (Hak. snack foods consumed while drinking). These less wealthy friends may also escort their richer friends home if they are too drunk to go alone. One rather elaborate post has a communal kitchen, a toilet and its own a supply of arak (Ind. rice liquor), tajok (Hak. herbal rice liquor) and tea. There is no formal system to keep these daily necessities stocked; it is simply understood that everyone should contribute what they can, in rough proportion to how much money they have and how frequently they come. Periodically, they will join together for more formal projects, such as building new tables and chairs or buying a wild boar to barbeque, at which point they will make a collection and pool money. But again, it is the big bosses who are expected to contribute the most. Individuals who fail to fulfil the responsibilities consonant with their level of wealth run the risk of being excluded, as in the case above.
For young people who *merantau* in Jakarta and struggle to become their own boss, the process of achieving this goal entails not only saving money and gathering experience, but also learning the social etiquette that goes along with the status of being a boss.

People actively cultivate non-*sombong* personalities and habits in order to avoid the risks involved in what could be called a moral economy of *sombong*. The most important way to do this is by properly maintaining relationships with extended family members, school friends, neighbors, and less successful cronies. This applies to a large number of people; both wealthy and poor people go to great lengths to avoid being considered *sombong*.

Ajan is a 46-year-old man from the city center. When we met, he had already been back from America for two months, but he still had not seen all of his friends yet. When he does run into someone he knows who he hasn’t seen in a long time he sometimes tells them that he just got back from Jakarta. “Why don’t you tell them that you were in America?” I ask.

“I don’t want them to think that I’m *sombong* because I didn’t come to see them right after I got back. I also don’t want to sound *sombong* by saying I was in America, because so many people will be jealous I was in America.”

Akhiun is from Singkawang, but lives in Jakarta. He has several successful businesses, including a couple of kiosks in Tanah Abang and he owns a few properties, both in Jakarta and in Singkawang. I first met him at a post on my street in Singkawang where I was hanging out in the mid-afternoons. He was on a trip back to Singkawang for grave worshipping. On that trip he told his close friends that he’d bought a house in a gated community (Ind. *perumahan*) in a large city in Java and he invited them for the housewarming and *selamatan* (Ind. ceremonial reception). His close friends had become my main contacts, at this point, and I was also invited to join the group. The *selamatan* was a small gathering. There were eight people from Singkawang, Akhiun’s wife and two children, his sister, and the architect who Akhiun had commissioned to build the house. A Javanese man, Pak Adi, and his assistant were invited to preside over the small *selamatan* ceremony and the necessary foods were prepared by Akhiun’s sister who lives in the same city and is married to a Javanese Chinese man. During the prayer, Pak Adi, the *pawang* (Ind. ritual specialist) looked around in confusion and embarrassment and then eventually had to ask out loud who the owner of the house was. The architect, who was dressed
in neat black pants, and fine white tailored shirt, pointed to Akhiun who was sitting rather far away in the corner and was wearing his usual outfit: a baggy gray T-shirt and a pair of old basketball shorts. He did not look like a wealthy man. He did not look like a successful businessman or the owner of a large luxury mansion. He had none of the usual outward signs of wealth common among businessmen in Java—no tailored pants, no button-up shirt, no tight belt with cell phone holster, and no gold rings with precious stones. His style is intentional. This is another way that people can avoid being considered sombong. Some people, such as Akhiun, deliberately adopt a humble manner and style which does not alienate or create obvious distinctions with less wealthy people.

Another participant in my research once remarked to me that “in Singkawang you can’t tell who is wealthy and who is poor. You never know by looking at people, because everyone dresses the same, everyone dresses casual. In Jakarta it is different, you can tell the rich Jakartanese; they dress fancy and go to shopping malls.”

8 Fate

Although there is a powerful logic that compels people to work hard and to believe in the power of the individual to sculpt a prosperous future out of very little start-up resources, it often happens that people undergo long struggles to become their own boss, but ultimately fail to achieve that status. So, how are such failures explained? Just as people imagine their working stints in Jakarta (and abroad) as a process of khaomiangshui (Hak. testing their fate), so too do they imagine fate as one of the most common explanations for success and failure.

However, fate is only one of several factors. Other factors may include bad luck, bad decision-making, bad habits, lack of a strong work ethic, competition in the market, or the location of a business, to name a few. Among these factors, fate represents one of the processes in which people must directly engage. Paying attention to people’s talk it becomes evident that fate is something people grapple with and test via the sojourns of their early working years. To explain
success and failure based on fate is to describe one’s position in this ongoing struggle. However, the concept of fate can also be used to accentuate or minimize other factors at a given time. If a person has been successful, fate is frequently cited as the overarching reason for their success, cutting through and trumping other factors. While this individual may be a savvy businessman, or he may be smart, or hardworking, one thing that can be said for sure is that his fate is good. Fate, in this type of description, is an umbrella statement which covers other aspects as well. However, when someone is not successful, the use of the concept of fate in the explanation is a bit different. An individual may be able to preserve the sense of having tried, having worked hard, having struggled, but ultimately because their fate was not good, they were unable to succeed. According to this kind of explanation, fate is interpreted as merely one of the aspects that can lead one to success or failure, but one that has the power to trump other factors.

Can you change your fate? This question usually stirs groups of people into energetic debate. One prevailing viewpoint is that fate would not be fate if it could be changed. It is seen to exist outside of one’s control. It is seen as cosmically predetermined, written by God, or imprinted in astrology, my participants all explain to me. Despite this predetermined nature, action, work habits, as well as an individual’s behavior are seen to play a determining role in how fate manifests. So fate is understood both as something fixed and predetermined, and also as something that individuals must manifest through their actions, thus the notion of khao miang shui (testing your fate).

It is clear that there are two different ways of thinking about and talking about fate. First, there is the widespread popular belief in the existence of fate as an abstract concept. Second, there are the more mundane daily uses of the term fate as a shorthand expression to explain other, unknown causes of success and failure. For example, when people say, “my fate is bad” or “his fate is good” they are providing a shorthand explanation which masks many details that may or may not be known to the interlocutors. It is something that people can say without having to go into detail about the complexities of the circumstances. Someone may say that their fate is bad, and that’s why they went bankrupt, while they and their interlocutors may be well aware that they have a gambling problem, or that the market got flooded with foreign products, or there was a drought, or the store was in a bad location, etc. These other details need not be mentioned, because, after all, they are already ultimately embodied in that bad fate.
Fate is a complex concept in Chinese folk culture. It is used in multiple ways: it may be used in sarcastic jokes, in mundane ways to comment upon the material circumstances of oneself or another, or as a more cosmic explanation for why things have happened or turned out the way they have (Harrell 1987). Steven Harrell argues that, in addition to these things, fate is also a folk ideology, which legitimizes hegemonic relations between elites, petty-capitalists, and peasants, by using the concept of cosmic predetermination to make a “humanly constructed system” of inequality unquestionable and seem like the natural order of the universe (Harrell 1987).

However, there is a contradiction which he and other scholars (Oxfeld 1991) have identified. This contradiction arises from the recognition that while fate is a common belief, people are not fatalistic in their actions and behaviors. Rather than resigning themselves to the fact that the outcome is outside of their control, people are actually highly productive, and have a highly developed ethic about work, frugality, and planning (Harrell 1987). This is what Harrell calls the entrepreneurial ethic. He skillfully shows, through an analysis of the prevalence and popularity of “fate-figurers” in Taiwan, how the existence of such an ethic, in tandem with folk concepts of fate, is a “powerful tool of hegemony” and a more “sophisticated ideology of oppression” because lower classes lack the conceptual frameworks to question power relations, and are also actively self-managing and productive citizens (Harrell 1987).

Harrell’s analysis is useful for understanding the dynamic between fate and work ethic, as well as understanding how people explain calamities and good fortunes. However, the argument that fate is a folk ideology that sustains hegemonic social relations is hard to extend into the Indonesian context. The main reason is because social relations of domination exist society-wide in Indonesia, whereas Chinese folk concepts of fate are localized within the social relations of the Chinese community. Hakka Singkawang seldom extend Chinese concepts of fate to rationalize the systemic privilege, power, and abuses of power of elites in the broader Indonesian context; for that level of analysis—the societal level—there are different discursive strategies to explain what Harrell calls “humanly-created systems” of inequality. Many of my Hakka Singkawang participants complained incessantly about the hegemony of Islam, Java, and various politician-tycoons in Indonesian society, usually in the context of discussions about why Indonesia is corrupt, why social inequality is growing or why Indonesia continually fails to develop socially, politically, and economically. Generally, there is a marked conceptual distinction between fate in the realm of the personal, and fate in the realm of the society.
Whereas in the context of imperial China the position of elites may have been legitimized based on the notion of fate (Harrell 1987), in Singkawang Hakka Chinese rarely extend such interpretation to societal elites in Indonesia. People do, however, explain the success of local elites, as well as the wretched circumstances of non-elites with fate. While it is not entirely accurate in this context to view fate merely as an oppressive ideology of domination, it is nonetheless true that the concept of fate encourages people to accept their lot in life, no matter how bitter it may be.

9 Conclusion

Every year, thousands of Hakka youth from Singkawang sojourn to Jakarta (and overseas) as the first step toward the larger long-term plan of becoming a business owner. It is rare to meet a Chinese youth in Singkwang who wants to pursue a professional career or enter a different field of work. It is because of its ubiquity that this goal of business ownership ought to be recognized as more than just an economic strategy; it is a culturally informed priority, a benchmark of achieving adulthood, which is linked to local forms of social status. Being self-employed is a highly valued social position. Community leaders, politicians, and famous locals are all successful business owners. They are the role models that thousands of youth try to emulate each year.

Shortly after graduating from either junior high school or high school, young people start making plans to go to Jakarta. These plans range from those that have been years in the making to those that are more spontaneous. Parents often take a central role in helping their children pay for the cost of flying to Jakarta, helping them find a job with a friend or relative, and a place to live, either with their relatives or in a low-cost rooming house. This is not unique to children who merantau; for those who stay in Singkawang, parents also play a central and critical role in making decisions about their lives.
Young people’s plans and decisions are primarily made in the context of the family, not in the context of individual desires. While children’s desires and aptitudes are taken into consideration, decisions are ultimately contingent on the desires and choices of parents, particularly the patriarch in the family. The patriarchal, authoritarian family structure draws significant ideological backing from Confucianism, as is it popularly conceived at the local level. The authority of this family structure is clearly present in the fact that children must seek approval from their parents, particularly their father, for nearly every decision they make regarding money, travel, work, and study. What children can and cannot do, where they can and cannot go, and whether or not they are given money to do so, are all heavily constrained first and foremost by parents’ notions of what is appropriate and by the financial means of the family.

Hengky is a 17-year-old high school graduate who speaks English in addition to Hakka, Indonesian and a little bit of Mandarin. He just moved to Jakarta to study computer programming at a small college. He lives in a kost (Ind. rooming house) near his school in West Jakarta with other Chinese people mostly from Pontianak, but he has a sister who lives in a suburb and comes to check up on him each week. I often chat with Hengky online and we exchange perspectives about Indonesia, Hakka culture and Canadian culture. He has many questions about the West, and they often reveal quite a lot about life in a Chinese family in Singkawang and in Indonesia. During one of our chats Hengky asked the following questions and made the following comments: “If you go somewhere without asking your father first, does he have the right to scold you and punish you? Also, I’ve heard that there (‘the West’) if we’ve reached 17, parents have no right to order around their kid. Is that true? I think Western people are very independent. That’s the exact opposite of us, hehehe. We have to ask permission for everything. We even have to ask for permission to go to grocery store, even one which is nearby…before we eat, we have to ask for permission… If we want a girlfriend, we have to get the OK from our parents first.”

This hierarchical arrangement of parents over children is normalized at every level, such that it is expected, and rarely questioned in any substantial way. When issues arise over conflicting interests of children and parents they are usually dealt with within the context of this existing hierarchical arrangement. This hierarchical relationship stays relatively unchanged for the length of the life of the parent and even beyond with the soul of the deceased parent. However, once children start making their own money, then they can start to establish a modicum of
independent decision-making, although even this is often limited well into one’s thirties, as well as while one is working overseas. A major part of becoming a boss, and achieving a state of ideal adulthood, is related to becoming financially independent, and the social-status gains that having money brings into the context of the family. It is the financial independence, in large part that allows a person to transform aspects of their relationship with their parents and siblings from a dependent role to a decision-making role. Marriage and having children, the other important benchmarks of adulthood, also help to raise one’s social position in the family and establish one as a decision-maker; however, marriage and children, without one’s own business and income, are seldom enough to achieve that status.

Filial piety is strongly upheld both as an ideal and in everyday practice in Singkawang. Young people know that they must respect and obey their parents. However, if their parents are too controlling, they also develop ambiguous and conflicting feelings toward them.

Susanto dreams of becoming rich and says that his ultimate goal in life is to be able to support his parents so that they do not have to work anymore. He says he wants their life to consist only of “sit, soi, and o” (eat, sleep, and defecate i.e. do not have to work). But Susanto says he also hates his parents sometimes. He has told me many times about how badly they treat him, and how much they control him and limit his freedom. They order him around and insult him. He says they treat him like a baby, like he is incompetent. At 17 years old, Susanto is a bright, ambitious, and self-motivated young man, but he is also angry and sometimes feels like he can’t take it. After graduation he wanted to study international business in England but that was not possible because his parents didn’t have enough money and would not allow him to travel far from Singkawang. Susanto now studies human resource management in Malaysia.
Chapter 4: Going Overseas

I had arranged to meet Acun at a bubble tea kiosk in the Shida night market, in Taipei. It was an extremely popular kiosk serving “monster ice”, a bowl of chopped mango covered with a mountain of shaved ice and then drenched with sweetened condensed milk. I stood in front of the ice shaving machine watching the young women behind the counter crank out one bowl after another, handing each one over to the next customer in the long line that snaked its way out into the street. People took their monster ice inside to a small seating area where they had to wait, like vultures, for the next available stool to open up so they could swoop down and perch for a few minutes to enjoy their sticky sweet desert.

A friend in Singkawang had given me Acun’s phone number and told me to contact him once I arrived in Taiwan. It was probably obvious to Acun from my accent over the phone that I was not a native Indonesian or Hakka speaker. Likewise, it was easy for him to identify me in the crowd as the foreign woman standing oddly in front of the ice-shaving machine. I was waiting and watching, having arrived slightly earlier than necessary as I always do, a habit which I couldn’t seem to break no matter how many times I was subjected to jam karet (Ind. rubber time). That day, however, I was lucky that Acun arrived exactly at the time we had specified.

“Do you want ice?” he asked.

“No, thanks. But, do you want ice? I would love to treat you,” I replied.

“No. I don’t like sweet things,” he refused. “Are you sure you want to see my place? It’s really not very nice.”

When I explained my research to Acun on the phone I asked him if he would give me a tour of his neighborhood and show me where he lived. He had agreed in theory, but now he seemed to be feeling uncertain. I tried to reassure him, being as casual as possible and hoping to set him at ease.
“I’m sure. It’s no problem. I really want to see how people from Singkawang live here in Taipei. Let’s just relax. Let’s go to the 711 convenience store first,” I said.

“Ok,” Acun said, appearing less apprehensive.

It was too crowded and noisy in the night market to talk or even to walk side by side. The narrow street was full of shoppers. Mandarin pop music was pumping out of many stores, and young women wearing tall platform heels and skimpy short-shorts were standing next to the opened doors, calling out the sales promotions to the people passing by. I followed behind Acun, who darted skillfully in and out of the crowd, knowing precisely where the next opening was for us to sneak through. At the convenience store I bought beer, soft drinks and potato chips to share with Acun and his roommate.

Acun’s rooming house was very close to the night market, but we had to make a convoluted series of turns down tiny alleyways before we arrived at the five-story walk-up. I probably couldn’t have found it easily on my own. His apartment was on the third floor and consisted of four bedrooms, a tiny kitchen and a bathroom. Each bedroom was being occupied by one or two young men, most of whom were students. Acun’s room, which was the first door on the left, was shared with a friend from Singkawang. We took off our shoes and entered the room, Acun closed the door behind us. It was tiny, no larger than seven feet by ten feet. His roommate was there, sitting on a bamboo sleeping mat, which was unrolled on the floor in one corner. In the other corner, separated by about two feet of space, was Acun’s sleeping place, which consisted of a large, flattened out cardboard box on the floor. There were two big towels lying in a pile next to these sleep mats. Acun sat down and I sat down quickly as well, opening up the bag of drinks and snacks and placing them on the floor between the three of us.

Acun introduced me to his roommate, Aheng. I explained to them that I had been living in Singkawang, conducting research about migration. I told them that I wanted to interview Singkawang people who were living in Taiwan. They nodded; “Silakan,” (Ind. please, go ahead) Aheng said.
“Why are you guys here?” I asked, starting our conversation with this general inquiry.

“I came here to work,” Acun replied. “That is all I want to do. I am ready to work. But I can’t find a job. People said it was easy to find a job here, but now it has become difficult. I had a job at first, but then they asked me to leave. The reason is that there are more raids these days. The employers don’t want illegals anymore. The employers are scared just like us. We used to hang out in the park. You know the one next on the other side of Shida night market? There used to be so many Singkawang people there, but now the police do raids there too, so we are not brave enough (Ind. tidak berani) to go there all the time. Now we must meet indoors.”

As Acun was talking I took a look around the room. It was practically empty. There were some dirty clothes on the floor in one corner and some odd items, like papers and plastic bags stuffed into a drawer in a built-in cupboard at one end of the room. Other than that the room was barren. As Acun was talking, Aheng leaned over and opened up a can of beer and placed it in front of me and then opened another one for him. He took out a package of Marlboro cigarettes from his coat pocket, removed one and began smoking. The cigarette box was tossed on to the floor where the beer and soda were lined up neatly between us. Acun, seeing this, quickly leaned over, took a cigarette and started to smoke. Their room, which already reeked of stale cigarette smoke, began to fill with fresh smoke. I took a swig of beer, pulled out my notebook and pen and started to write down the things that Acun was telling to me.

We talked for about two hours that first night. I asked them about how they came to Taiwan, about their hopes and dreams, about traveling, working, and sending money home. We talked about Singkawang and Indonesia, about their families, about kung fu movies and about gambling. The following week I met up with Acun in a café in the night market and he introduced me to some more people from Singkawang. Three months later, before I had to leave Taiwan, I invited Aheng and Acun out to eat Taiwanese hot pot. By that time Acun had found a job in a Korean restaurant in a different night market across town, while Aheng, who had previously been working for his sister’s husband (a Taiwanese citizen) as a dishwasher, had decided that he could no longer bear living in Taiwan. He was working in a factory that manufactures rice cookers to save money for a ticket home.
Back in Toronto, in my cubicle in the Department of Anthropology, I began to slowly analyze all the data that I had collected in Singkawang, Jakarta, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. One afternoon, I opened up a box of artifacts I had gathered during my fieldwork which included magazines, pamphlets, invitations, newspaper articles, and VCDs. One of the VCDs had a handwritten note with it. It was from my Hakka teacher in Singkawang and it said that I could use these local Hakka songs to continue studying the language. I started to go through each track on the VCD, translating the contents and practicing my pronunciation. That was when I came across the following song and I realized just how similar the story of this song was to Acun’s predicament. Both capture the attraction of going overseas, the desire to find a better life, to begin working and making money so that one can prosper and can be valued by others based on that prosperity. Acun’s experience and the words of this song both illustrate how the idea of “overseas” is particularly construed by Hakka Singkawang as a place of possibilities with the promise of upward mobility. However, this song, like Acun’s experience, also captures the common migrant experience of disappointment as of the reality they face overseas falls short of their hopes and expectations. I will be describing the meanings represented in this song throughout this chapter.

Figure 12: Image from the Music Video for the Song “Chut Ket” (Hak. going overseas).

Mo Kung Cok
Co Mai, Ngai co nyin boi an choi ko
He san keu jong khu, Jiu pun nyin khon mo
Have No Work
Why? I have become a wretched man
In Singkawang it is hard, looked down upon by others
Thinking it is better to go overseas, so that I am not despised here
After I am overseas, I am more difficult/sad than before
I have no work, I just sit like this
Why did I think to go work overseas?
If not for the reason, because I am hoping for a better future
Whether I want or not, I must be patient and wait for a job
I am here with a friend. Every day I go out and search for work
Why until this day, I still have not found a work vacancy
I feel stressed here, so I go to the casino
I lost all my money, I want to buy rice but have no money
Every day I sleep late at night, each day it gets harder and harder to pass the days
I stay up till the wee hours every day until my face becomes old and I am older
When there is heaven, then there is earth, when there is money, then there is a wife
If I don’t get enough money, some money, I will remain a bachelor

In the previous chapter I discussed the ways that Hakka youth from Singkawang merantau (Ind. sojourn) to Jakarta in order to find money and gain experience with the long-term goals of becoming a business owner. This plan involves returning to Singkawang where the wealth, prestige, and social status that accompanies being one’s own boss can be experienced and validated among family and peers. In this chapter I focus on people who merantau overseas for the purposes of work and study. The majority of these individuals are temporary labor migrants who travel with the same goal as those who merantau in Jakarta: in order to cari kehidupan lebih bagus (Ind. looking for a better life) by improving their economic circumstances in the short
term as well as saving enough money to return to Indonesia to start a business. A small percentage of these individuals also travel with the ambition of eventually being able to attain a kind of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship, which is best exemplified by members of a different group of overseas Chinese business elite. These transnational ambitions are largely fantasies, often vague and rarely supported by the necessary financial, educational, social or logistical backing. Nonetheless, these fantasies constitute a powerful motivation for migration, whether or not people’s lived realities ever come to fruition.

Most of these migrants—who imagine that their travels can lead them into more cosmopolitan and transnational lifestyles—go to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Korea, and Japan as temporary foreign workers and students; once in those places, they are usually received by the local population as various kinds of “Others”. Rather than be able to integrate into the local population, they are identified as Hakka, overseas Chinese, Indonesian, Southeast Asian, poor, rural, backward, migrants, or some combination of these labels. Being identified as one of these groups—one usually associated with a lower status vis-à-vis more dominant groups in these societies—occurs despite the fact that Hakka people from Singkawang ostensibly share certain aspects of the same ethnicity (Chinese) as some members of the local populations where they live as migrants. Their reception, as various kinds of lower-status “Others”, has an impact on their sense of self and contributes to the innumerable limitations they face in their engagement within these new societies. The initial alienation that some migrants endure and the barriers they face living and attempting to participate within these societies, in certain ways, also significantly undermine their original aspirations and fantasies about becoming more fluent and more cosmopolitan transnational citizens. Ultimately, this experience leads people to reexamine their identities and origins and readjust their plans and expectations accordingly.

One common way that these migrants respond to the hostile reception they face overseas is by making essentializing characterizations of the host population, characterizations that rely heavily on stereotypes (i.e. Singaporeans are arrogant, Mainland Chinese are rude, Japanese are disciplinarian, etc.). Such characterizations are inherently comparative and reveal some of the ways that migrants have come to imagine themselves in relation to others. While many of these characterizations of self and other are based on ideas of cultural, ethnic or national
characteristics, the migrants’ essentializing portrayals of people in these societies is also in part derived from socioeconomic differences and interdialect-group antagonisms.\textsuperscript{61}

The experience of social marginalization overseas has also contributed to a particular kind of self-portrayal among many migrants, one which accentuates the uniqueness, goodness, and integrity of Hakka Chinese Indonesian culture from Singkawang. They portray themselves as maintaining traditional Chinese culture, strong kinship and family structures, and unique and efficacious religious practices. They describe themselves as loyal and fraternal, and they engage in group solidarity practices and mutual aid among friends. While to some degree such descriptions reflect the realities of Singkawang’s relatively “traditional Chinese society”, they also reflect certain ideals that have emerged from the experiences of being judged as various kinds of “Others” while living as migrant workers overseas. In this chapter I explore the impact of “us” versus “them” constructs on the self-perception of Hakka Singkawang, and explain how this self-perception contributes to a schism between the hopes and fantasies people have about their transnational engagements and lifestyles on the one hand, and the realities of their lives overseas on the other. Other scholars have written about similar dynamics. For example, James Ferguson, in his ethnography of the Zambian Copperbelt, explains how people struggle with the allure of the cosmopolitanism which is located in places beyond their rural villages, but find it difficult to create permanence and meaning in those places, and end up relying on a strategy of networking between village and urban life (1999). In my work, I argue that the schism between fantasies and realities is linked to the fact that people from Singkawang are limited in their ability to develop the flexibility and openness needed to engage in host societies in ways that align with their cosmopolitan fantasies. These limitations, in part, constitute an inherent parochialism that is brought from home, but in part, are also a product of certain conditions of social marginalization that are experienced as migrant workers overseas.

\textsuperscript{61} In Singkawang, there are often sterootypical characterizations of others groups of Chinese Indonesians, and Chinese in other nations. For example, ideas circulate that portray Hokkien speakers or Cantonese speakers as somehow essential different. These groups may be known by their dialect, such as the Teochew speakers who form the majority of the population in Pontianak, or by their place of origin, such as Medan Chinese. The politics of subethnic group and dialect identities is perhaps most acutely felt by Hakka Chinese, who have long been characterized as an essentially working class minority.
In this chapter I focus on a broad spectrum of people who have spent periods of time living overseas. This includes labor migrants, exchange students (who are often also temporary workers, or go from being workers to students, or students to workers) as well as business and recreational travelers. There are thousands of people from Singkawang working and studying abroad, primarily in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, but also in England, American, and Australia. Labor migrants are the largest group among them. While temporary migration does sometimes lead to more permanent emigration, particularly for people who marry overseas (see Chapter 6) as well as the small minority of individuals who are able to generate enough material capital and cultivate the right kinds of social and cultural capital needed to actualize their cosmopolitan fantasies, the majority of migrants return to Indonesia.

10 Practical Arrangements

The first time I went overseas I went with a tour from Jakarta. The tour went to Hong Kong, China and then Korea. I took the tour and then when I arrived in Korea I just left. My uncle was already there. He picked me up at the airport and I left the tour, hehehe, kabur (Ind. disappeared). My uncle was working in construction. He invited me to join him, but I couldn’t endure it. It was too cold. I got a job indoors working in a workshop making furniture, but I was still too cold. All the time I was wearing thick clothing. Then I heard from my friend about his job in Japan. He worked in a factory making packaged food. He said it was really good living there. So I decided to join him. I went back to Jakarta and then directly to Japan. I did not go home to Singkawang, straight to Japan. For almost two years I was in Japan. I lived with my friend and he helped me to find a job in the factory area. But eventually I got caught by the police and I got deported. I had to stay in the police station for one night, then they took me to my rooming house to get my things and then they took me to the airport. You know the police station is really nice, and the police are very polite. I got more food in the police station in Japan than in Indonesia, hahaha. This is because in Japan they have human rights (Ind. Hak Assasi Manusia). Back to Jakarta, waiting, waiting, thinking where do I want to go? Back to Singkawang. Mo theu lu (Hak. idiom meaning no work/no prospects, literally no big road). So I try for Hong Kong.

This is an excerpt from one of my interviews with a migrant from Singkawang. While each person’s story is unique, by sitting down and talking with so many migrants I was able to see larger trends taking place. In this section I want to explain the main patterns of Hakka
Singkawang migration overseas, showing how transnational mobility is used to pursue upward social mobility in Singkawang.

Although it is primarily young adults who go overseas to work temporarily, there are also people in their mid-thirties to late forties. These people leave as early as upon completion of junior high school, when they are still teenagers, and sometimes continue seeking employment overseas into their forties. Both men and women seek work abroad. Currently, there are more men than women but the ratio is changing quickly as more and more women seek work overseas pursue studies abroad. This shift is the result of changing gender roles and expectations in families in Singkawang and the changing status of women in Indonesia, as well as the increasing role of older sisters and female cousins (who have married foreigners) in hosting their younger female relatives to work and study in other countries (see Chapter 5).

Labor migration is usually temporary and often cyclical, with individuals spending periods of time in multiple countries often interspersed with return trips home to Indonesia (Jakarta and Singkawang) in between. These trips overseas may be as short as six months, particularly if someone finds it difficult to feel betah (Ind. at home) away from Indonesia, or may stay up to ten years. Many of the people interviewed in this study spent a couple of years in several different countries; Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, for example. The reason individuals work in multiple places is usually related to the constant search for better wages, working and living conditions. Once having worked overseas for a period of years, people may face unemployment at home again after their return and still have not saved enough money to open their own business. This is a primary reason for going overseas to search for work again, I am told. While many people go back to the same countries, even returning to the same jobs (if they have established good relationships with their employers), others choose to go to new places, either because they hope to find better paying jobs, or want to join friends and relatives, or because they had previously been arrested or deported from a prior overseas location. Additionally, some people opt to move from country to country, seeking employment because they are still unmarried and interested in broadening their life experiences. The easiest destinations to access are Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Korea and Japan, while America, Australia, and England are farther away, more difficult to enter and more expensive. Singapore, while close to Singkawang and lucrative in
terms of wages, is not a popular destination for Singkawang residents seeking foreign employment. This is largely because the policy environment is considered too strict, competition for jobs too rigorous and the reception of Hakka Singkawang in Singapore is less than ideal because of class, sub-ethnic and dialect group antagonisms.

In Taiwan, employment is divided into two main unskilled labor sectors. The first is manufacturing which is located primarily in the semi-industrial suburban areas of Taipei and Kaoshiong. The second is the casual service sector, usually food preparation, or tending kiosks in the night markets, as well as working in automotive garages. These jobs are often located in more urban areas such as central Taipei. Service sector jobs require some Mandarin language ability, whereas factory jobs, by and large, require less. Those entering service sector jobs tend to be younger and usually study Mandarin for a short period of time before working. Those who work in factories are older and usually start working as soon as they arrive, learning to speak enough Mandarin or Taiwanese Hokkien in the workplace through interactions with their bosses and co-workers. There are usually a few other Indonesian workers, often Chinese Indonesians from Singkawang and Pontianak, in the same factories and these people quickly become a social support group for one another. People who study Mandarin for longer periods of time and people with higher education, usually university degrees from Indonesia or Taiwan, can find more skilled employment in offices and in Indonesian-owned businesses located in Taipei and Kaoshiong. However, this is a small minority of the total migrants, the majority of which constitute the largely unskilled labor force aforementioned.

In Hong Kong, there are fewer manufacturing jobs and people tend to find work in food preparation as well as elder care, whereas in Korea people work almost exclusively in manufacturing and construction, which requires little language ability. In Malaysia, where language is less of a barrier, people can find jobs in a wider range of services and labour jobs in cafeterias, garages, as drivers, as dishwashers, as waiters and in construction or road work. In Australia, England, and America, people from Singkawang, along with other working-class Chinese migrants from other countries, often find jobs in Chinese restaurants, usually owned by Cantonese-speaking restaurant owners from Hong Kong. These restauranteurs often have an established transnational labor recruitment and labor organization system, and provide food and
housing for their workers. Others find employment on campuses or in service sector jobs if they are living there as students.

In addition to labor migration, there are also many young people from Singkawang who study abroad. There are three distinct groups of overseas students. The first group consists of young people who are usually from wealthier families and who have been sent to private Christian high schools in Singkawang or larger cities in Java. They have top marks, have studied English and have taken the necessary internationally standardized tests to make them eligible to enter foreign universities. For these students, a high quality and prestigious education overseas is the goal, and their parents (who often lack formal education themselves) have intentionally taken steps to provide their children with more educational opportunities as a social mobility strategy. These young people often study business, commerce or economics, and dream of leaving Indonesia to find glamorous lifestyles and high-paying jobs in cosmopolitan cities such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, London, Sidney, and New York. However, the ability and desire to carry through with these plans is limited by family expectations and by social and cultural credentials. Members of this group usually rely on educational agents in Singkawang, Pontianak and Jakarta to broker the process of applying to universities overseas. Shanthi Robertson has written about a similar group of overseas students that she identifies as “middling transnationals” a class of people “in between unskilled and highly vulnerable labour migrants and elite and resourced global knowledge workers” (2013: 160). Her theorization of transnational students is useful for understanding the complexities and ambiguities in their societal engagements and transnational trajectories.

This in-betweenness denotes some contradictory experiences of class and labour market positioning for student-migrants, and problematizes the very idea of the “skilled” migrant. Postgraduate-qualified technical experts can find themselves washing cars or picking fruit for a living, and entrepreneurial and creative class workers can find themselves enrolling in cookery and hairdressing courses to gain access to migration options. Their middling status also contributes to situations of flexibility and compromise, for while they have resources to seek out transnationally mobile education and career options for themselves and their families, these aspirations often involve considerable risk and considerable financial and emotional investment. The choices student migrants make under the
constraints and opportunities available to them with the neoliberal immigration regime are driven by desires for mobility, opportunity and experience, but also by family obligations and strong emotional and symbolic attachments to the different places they call home.

(Robertson 2013: 160-161)

The more elite overseas students from Singkawang resemble Robertson’s group of “middling transnationals” in that they display “contradictory experiences of class and labour market positions” which are deeply influenced by personal aspirations and family duty as well as “strong emotional and symbolic attachments” to the kampung halaman. Susan Lim, the 22-year-old daughter of a close friend and informant of mine in Singkawang, studied English and graphic design in Sydney for five years. After graduation, she decided to return to Singkawang and open a beauty parlor rather than look for work in Australia or Jakarta as her father (but not her mother) had encouraged. Missing her parents, and wanting to reunite with her high school boyfriend, Susan returned to open a small business in Singkawang. She expressed pride in the fact that the styling of the space, the techniques used and the training of her employees reflected the standards and esthetics she was exposed to in Sydney. Robertson’s idea of “middling transnationals” is useful for describing the group that Susan is a part of, however, it less useful for understanding the lives of a slightly lower socio-economic segment of the overseas student population. For these migrants (discussed below) the experience of working illegally coexists with the experience of studying as international students and the aspiration to build lives that resemble those of more elite transnationals. This complicates the notion that one is either elite, unskilled and vulnerable, or “middling”. I prefer to focus on the processes that people experience as they come to terms with their changing selves in multiple contexts, that have both possibilities and limitations, and in the context of these changing statuses, as student, worker, migrant, marriage migrant, daughter, wife, mother, returnee, etc.

The second group of students, are lower class. They travel both to study and with the goal of finding work overseas. These people usually go to Taiwan, enter the country on student visas, and are registered as Mandarin language students at language universities in Taipei. There are those who study and work simultaneously, in order to maintain their student visa status. There
are those who study only briefly, then drop out of school to work full-time, thus nullifying their student visa status and remaining in the country as illegal workers. Finally, there are those who work part-time and study part-time or study full-time, excel at Mandarin and eventually transfer into other kinds of degree programs, such as business or commerce, which are taught in Mandarin. Those who have little intention of studying Mandarin for an extended period of time use the pretense of the student visa merely as a way to enter Taiwan. These migrants usually come from poorer families and have not been sent to private Christian schools, although for these families, both studying Mandarin, and accessing the Taiwanese labor market provides increased social status and is part of a multigenerational social mobility strategy. Unlike the wealthier group of overseas students who receive financial assistance from their families while they are away, this second group of young people are frequently sending remittances home to Singkawang and their ability to return is often tied to their own finances while overseas.

A third group of young people are those who study Mandarin at universities in Guangzhou, China, as part of a scholarship program sponsored by Chinese social development associations in West Kalimantan. These scholarships cover tuition and living expenses for three-year Mandarin training programs, with the goal of creating a new young generation of Mandarin teachers for the province (Hui 2007). The scholarship comes with the stipulation that these students return to teach Mandarin in the vicinity of Singkawang after graduation. People who are selected for these scholarship programs (unlike those who go to private Christian high schools to study English and eventually attend foreign universities) can be from very poor families in rural areas who have managed to excel in private Mandarin programs and graduated from public high schools or technical schools. Also, unlike those young people who seek employment in Taiwan under the auspices of studying Mandarin, the Mandarin scholarship students must be very serious about their studies and maintain a high grade point average; their goal is not simply basic spoken Mandarin, but complete literacy and an ability to teach Mandarin as a foreign language. They study full-time and the visa and scholarship restrictions do not permit them to work. For these students, business ownership, or becoming one’s own boss is not a primary goal. Rather, the goal of becoming a teacher and obtaining the social status of the Mandarin literati propels their motivation.
There are several factors influencing the ways that individuals choose overseas destinations for working and studying. One important determining factor is whether or not one has friends or relatives in a given location. Nearly all of the people interviewed in this study had at least one primary contact person in the overseas location. This person was able to provide them with the information they needed in order to mentally and logistically prepare for going overseas. This person may have picked them up at the airport, hosted them until they found a place to live, helped them find a job, helped them buy a phone or a phone card, and generally assisted them in those first few days or weeks while they were learning how to navigate the new society. People also often go overseas with a friend so that they are not alone during this initial adaptation period. Of the 63 people interviewed in this study\textsuperscript{62}, only four individuals went overseas without any previous contacts from Singkawang or Indonesia. These people constitute the exception that reveals the more common pattern. These four individuals went either to America or Australia, and described the period leading up to their departure and the adjustment period overseas as extremely traumatic, full of fear, sadness, anxiety, and doubt. They recounted the difficulties they faced once in these overseas locations: not knowing where to go, where to live, how to find a job, how to find food, and how to communicate with people. For those with existing connections overseas, making the journey is less scary, more readily imaginable and more logistically feasible. During my fieldwork in Taiwan, there was a constant stream of newcomers from Singkawang joining their friends and relatives. They would quickly be integrated into the social networks already established there, and would rely heavily, at least initially, on more established friends to help them find accommodation and work. Thus, the vast majority of Hakka Singkawang migrants choose to go to places where they have existing connections.

In contemplation of their selection, people also look at the economic factors of the various potential destinations. For many individuals the goal of working overseas is first and foremost about making money, saving money, and remitting money back home. As such, finding a place that offers high wages but has a low cost of living is identified as an important balance. A person with contacts in various overseas places may choose to go to the place that they have heard offers the best wages, or is easiest to find a job. Information about work, how to find work,

\textsuperscript{62} This is the number of overseas workers and students that I interviewed and does not include the women who married overseas or people who went to work in Jakarta.
wages and the cost of living is a constant source of interest among people planning to go 
overseas or those living overseas. Information, almost exclusively acquired from friends and 
relatives, is the main resource that people use to make decisions about their mobility. People are 
constantly weighing various factors. For example, the wages and working conditions in Hong 
Kong are considered to be very good, but it is known to be difficult to find a job. The labor 
market in Korea is excellent, there are entire streets dedicated to seeking foreign laborers. 
However, language barriers exist and one must endure cold winters in Korea. Australia and 
America are prestigious and offer high wages, but it is more difficult to obtain a visa and 
practically impossible to enter illegally. Among these various trade-offs, Taiwan has emerged as 
a convenient compromise location because the wages are significantly higher than those in 
Indonesia, but the cost of living is still low and the policy environment is relatively more relaxed 
than Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Furthermore, many people have existing family and 
friend connections in Taiwan. There are also language and culinary similarities which make it a 
more comfortable choice.

In addition to ones’ social connections, economic factors, and policy or legal environments, 
people are also influenced by labor and educational agents who play a significant role in 
brokering people’s mobility. There are many different kinds of agents operating in Singkawang 
and in Indonesia more broadly. These agents occupy a unique social niche that relates to a 
broader Indonesian practice of using a pengantar or calo (Ind. agent or a go-between) to broker 
and facilitate travel and other transactions (Lindquist 2012; Shiraishi 1990). Among Hakka 
Singkawang, there are a wide range of informal agents (Hak. kai sau nyin/ can kao) who make 
small amounts of money for their role in introducing people, brokering information, and 
providing services (Hak. ta khang theu). For the purposes of this discussion about overseas labor 
migration and study abroad I will not discuss all of the various agents; instead I will focus on 
three main types of agents who play a significant role in influencing and organizing people’s 
mobility.

The first types of agents who play a central role in people’s mobility are travel agents. One of the 
primary routes that people take in order to work illegally overseas is by joining a package tour 
and entering the foreign country on a tourist visa. Once in the country, they do not use the return
ticket and stay on, overstaying their visa. In some cases, these people take the tour first and then stay on to find work and housing, whereas in other cases they are picked up directly from the airport and immediately start living and looking for work in the new country. Travel agents provide the tickets, tour packages, and are usually also responsible for obtaining the tourist visas for all the members of the tour ahead of time. These travel agents are fully aware of the fact that many of the tourists have no intention of returning to Singkawang or Jakarta, although they do not talk openly about the prospect with those who purchase their tours and tickets. Essentially, these travel agents act as informal facilitators for Indonesian citizens to enter foreign countries to work without work permits. The government has closed some of these travel agencies because they had such high rates of travelers of doing just that.

Labour recruiters usually conduct business in a single country or single city and often only supply labor to a single employment sector. For example, a labor agent may specifically recruit people from Singkawang to work in Kuching, Malaysia, in food courts, or may recruit people to work in Brunei in restaurants and bars. These agents frequently rely on their social network to recruit people, but unlike the free assistance provided by friends and relatives who are already overseas, labor agents take a commission from each individual they place in a job. These people also act as pengantar accompanying people across-borders and delivering them to their overseas employers. The primary role of these agents, like marriage matchmakers (discussed in Chapter 5) and cross-border healthcare agents, is to provide introductions, broker information, and facilitate the mobility of individuals who lack information and connections.

Finally, educational agents and agencies, based in Pontianak and Jakarta, and more recently in Singkawang, help people who want to study overseas navigate the administrative process. This involves a series of consultations which may start a few years prior to going overseas. The agents

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63 There are several agents operating in Singkawang and Pontianak which transport patients to medical centers across the border to Kuching, Malaysia. These agents have an official relationship with a medical center in Kuching and receive commission for bringing cross-border patients. They also organize travel, accommodation, food, and visa services for cross-border patients. Once in the Malaysian hospital they can help to translate from English and Malay into Hakka, however, they also are frequently networked with doctors who can speak Hakka, Mandarin, Hokkien, Malay and English. Cross-border patients from Singkawang are grateful to be able to receive health services communicated in their local Chinese dialect, and to have an agent who can take them from their door to the hospital in Malaysia and back again.
provide information and advice about which language proficiency test to take, which universities to apply to, and which specific programs of study to pursue. The choice of which foreign university to attend is largely determined by the universities that the educational agents are most familiar with or have a working relationship with. The agencies are responsible for overseeing the person’s application, visa, and examinations, and they provide information to parents about the cost of tuition, accommodation and living expenses. These educational agencies often have English language schools, which sometimes employ foreign English teachers, that prepare young people for taking international standardized exams. The educational agent will either prepare the individual’s student visa, or accompany them to the embassy if they are called for an interview. These agents also play an important role in facilitating potential overseas students’ imaginings of what life abroad might be like. This is similar to the role played by marriage matchmakers who help to convince prospective brides of the pleasures and possibilities of cross-border marriage. By showing photos of cities and campuses and describing the exotic foreign delights that can be found there, these fantasy brokers play an important part in the burgeoning dreams of cosmopolitanism that young people entertain.

The vast majority of temporary labor migrants from Singkawang I interviewed work overseas illegally (Ind. gelap, tidak resmi), having entered the foreign country using either a tourist or student visa. These migrants rarely join the official Indonesian government sponsored TKI/TKW programs, which is the most common route taken by different ethnic groups in other cities and, unlike Indonesia’s largely female official overseas workforce, Hakka Singkawang almost never work as domestic cleaners and nannies. People with tourist and student visas who have the primary goal of working overseas are said to lari (Ind. run) from their tour group, or kabur (Ind. escape; leave) from school. As illegal aliens, people who have overstayed their visas, or broken the conditions of their visa, they are left in an insecure state in the host country. In some places, including Taiwan, Korea and Malaysia, there are periodic raids in which the police enter businesses or public parks and ask to see people’s identity cards. Failure to produce an identity card can result in imprisonment, fines, deportation, or a black stamp in one’s passport, which prevents them from returning to that country for a period of time, usually five to ten years. The severity of these punishments varies considerably from country to country, and from time to time. Some individuals have had terrible experiences which deterred them from wanting to work
overseas again, whereas others laugh about their experiences, and consider it part of the process of working illegally.

Migrants live with the fear that they could be arrested, fined, and deported and they adjust their behavior to cope with these threats. While I was conducting research in Taipei, the police began conducting periodic raids in a small park near to the Shida night market. This is the park that Acun was referring to, a lively hangout spot for young people, including university students and workers from Singkawang. After several raids, in which people were asked to show their identity cards, the group of Singkawang migrants who spent time there began to shrink as people no longer felt safe in that space. They switched to meeting at a nearby café or simply getting together in rooming houses, like the place where Acun and Aheng live. During this period of increased enforcement, some of my informants would occasionally not show up for work. They told me that they would be called by their employer early in the morning and be told not to come in because of the possibility of a visit from the police. Much like the way information about jobs and wage and living arrangements is shared, stories about being stopped by the police, arrested, fined or deported abound and circulate frequently. Everyone wants to know what can be done to avoid being caught and how to behave if one is caught. Many people have their own story about being arrested or about a narrow miss, but the conditions and severity of the experiences vary widely.

Ahin, who I met at the temple in the forest, the man who first introduced me to the concept of khao miang sui (Hak. testing fate), has a particularly powerful story about his experience working illegally in Malaysia. While working as part of a construction crew, widening a road, the police approached him. He didn’t have a work visa and his boss was not there to vouch for him or the other illegal workers. He said that they were taken to a prison camp in Johor Baru. This was not a single cell lockup in a police station, but a holding area, like a deportation center. As he spoke about the conditions of the camp he recoiled in disgust. There were more than 30 men in a single room. They went 30 days without being able to take a shower. Everyone was appalled. He said that he became the informal leader of the group of Indonesians. People trusted him. There was a strong sense of camaraderie and people worked together. They were planning
to rebel because the conditions were so bad they couldn’t bear it any longer, but right before their plan to do so they were released and repatriated to Indonesia.

I met another migrant, Amin, at the post nearest to my house in Singkawang. He spent two years in Japan before being deported. He arrived with a two-week tourist visa, which he got from joining a tour sold by an agent in Jakarta, but he never returned with the tour group. He had many friends who were already in Japan at that time. They picked him up from the airport, helped him find a place to live and organized employment for him. The job involved an elaborate scheme to cheat pachinko machines\textsuperscript{64} using mirrors and magnets. It was very risky and he said he lived in constant fear of the yakuza, the Japanese mafia. But Amin represented himself as a tough man, a risk taker. He had street smarts from living in rough areas of Jakarta and working as a self-proclaimed preman (Ind. thug). After Amin was arrested by the police he was taken to the police station where he was kept for three days. He refused to tell the police where he lived in order to protect his ten other roommates who were still living in the rooming house. After three days he was escorted to the airport and sent back to Indonesia. He complained about not being able to shower or change his clothing during that time, but he also said that the police station was very comfortable and the food was good. It was like a hotel. No handcuffs were used and the police were extremely polite to him. Human rights are highly developed in Japan, he observed, a sentiment repeated by others.

\section*{10.1 Dreams and Realities of Working Overseas}

In the previous chapter I began to explain the widespread desire among Hakka Singkawang to seek wealth and success through business pursuits, and to somehow chart a path through the multiple challenges that constitute Indonesia’s struggling social and economic reality. In fact, the hope of attaining a certain modicum of wealth in one’s lifetime is shared throughout Indonesia and is part of the popularization of the images of middle-class lifestyles. By extension, achieving

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{64} Pachinko is a kind of Japanese mechanical arcade game in which players accumulate balls that can be exchanged for money or prizes.}
this middle-class status is linked to a desire to be a part of an ideal form of modernity which is shared internationally, and takes specific local forms. Little about the goal of prosperity is unique to Chinese Indonesians. However, for Hakka Singkawang, the ideal route to attaining this goal is often framed in terms of becoming one’s own boss rather than becoming a civil servant, developing a professional career, or working for someone else.

Several historical and cultural factors have contributed to this preference. The Chinese ethnic minority in Indonesia has been excluded from professional and government sector jobs at various times (Hui 2007), and was favored by but also limited to business, managerial and middlemen roles under the Dutch colonial regime and then during the post-independence, nationalist governments (Fasseur 1994; Reid 2001; Suryadinata 2004). These colonial and nationalist era policies have left a powerful legacy (Fasseur 1994) which continues into the present. It is further reinforced by ideals that originate within the Chinese community and promote the idea that there is inherent value in business ownership. The ways that this valuation gets assigned is evident in the ways that people talk about their aspirations, about the successes and failures of friends and family members and about the activities and accomplishments of famous Chinese Indonesians such as Liem Sioe Liong and Phang Jun Phen65 (who is specifically valorized because he is Hakka from West Kalimantan). These tycoons are businessmen who have been able to translate their financial success into cosmopolitan lifestyles complete with the material and social forms of prestige that this entails (such as multiple residences, multinational social and business networks, children studying overseas, etc.).

Overseas migration is linked to the aspiration of starting a business and those who go overseas with hopes of attaining, in the long run, a more cosmopolitan transnational citizenship, are particularly influenced by the allure of the lifestyles of these Indonesian Chinese business heroes,

65 Liem Sioe Liong (Indonesian name: Sudono Salim) was a businessman and a capitalist. Before his death in 2014, he was one of the richest Chinese Indonesians and one of the richest Southeast Asians in the world. He started life as the son of a farmer in a small town in the Fujian province in China, and later he immigrated to Indonesia and got involved in the clove trade. He eventually formed the Salim Group, one of the largest holding companies in Indonesia. Similarly, Phang Jun Phen (Indonesian name: Prajogo Pangestu) is a successful Chinese Indonesian businessman. He was a timber tycoon, who owned the Barito Pacific group which sold timber from Kalimantan during the 1970s, 80s and 90s. He is Hakka Chinese Indonesian from a poor family in Bengkayang, West Kalimantan.
many of whom lead transnational lives. The desire to become an entrepreneur is continuously reinforced by the plans, hopes, behaviors and choices of relatives, friends and neighbors in Singkawang, to the extent that most people pursue the same goal of business ownership. This sociocultural pattern is well documented (McVey 1992; Weidenbaum 1996) and it is also the result of businesses being owned and operated by families and often passed down to children and grandchildren. Businesses, particularly small-trade, shop-house businesses are a common type of inheritance, complete with the physical space, business partners and networks, and the skills and experience needed to run the business.

One of the easiest and fastest ways for people without capital to kick-start the process of establishing a business is to work overseas in a labor market that is significantly more lucrative than Indonesia. The sight of neighbors return home with money saved by working overseas, enough money to be able to start their own businesses, acts as an important inspiration and model for others. However, the shop-house trade-based economy in Singkawang is saturated and people find it increasingly difficult to actualize their aspirations to become successful local traders. As participants in my research explained to me, the problem is that more and more similar types of businesses open up, but without more people shopping or accessing services. This creates more competition that forces the bottom line down, and further restricts the amount of money individual shops can make. Over the past two years there has also been an expansion of Indomaret and other mini-market chains into Singkawang as well as the construction of a shopping mall which is home to a large supermarket 66. Population growth, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, has also put additional pressure on family businesses, which can no longer support all members of subsequent generations. The economic saturation and stagnation of the town is frequently discussed, and young people readily articulate their confusion (Ind. pusing/binging; Hak. an fun/an hin) about what sorts of businesses could be viable, even if they had the start-up capital to invest in them. It is also in relation to this context of economic involution that

66 The previous Mayor, Hasan Karmen, has resisted allowing the Indomaret franchise from operating in Singkawang as a way of protecting local shop-house mini markets. However, this policy was removed and in 2014 over 30 branches of Indomaret opened up practically over night. In the same year, the first mall was opened in Singkawang, complete with the Indonesian department store Matahari, as well as a large Hypermart grocery store. The mall was built by PT. Pulau Intan, a company created by Pui Sudarto, a Hakka Singkawang man who has made his fortune in Jakarta. Small businesses in Singkawang now have to compete with these other players.
going to Jakarta and overseas has emerged as a major alternative to staying put in Singkawang. Foreign destinations are idealized as places of plenty, plentiful in terms of wages, opportunities, and connections. Places where one can not only get enough capital and thus achieve the possibility of becoming a business owner, but also get the experience and inspiration (or innovation) needed to creatively overcome the local economic challenges in Singkawang or Jakarta if one returns.

Leaving Singkawang is associated with several different possible goals, each of which involves different configurations of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship. These goals also involve taking different routes. First and foremost, people work overseas in order to save money to return to Singkawang and make a success of themselves. Second, people study abroad (sometimes working part-time) with the hopes of entering into a different labor market sector, or being able to enter into a different, more professional workforce overseas. These individuals usually choose to study accounting, economics, finance, commerce, and business management, as well as English and Mandarin. Any course of study which they imagine will translate into careers in international centers of business and finance, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, and New York. Third, people go to Jakarta and overseas in the hope of making connections that they imagine have the potential to lead to future opportunities. Just as young people actively try to be taken under the guidance of a relative, a wealthier or more successful friend, or established boss in Jakarta, they also seek to create relationships of mutual trust and rapport with overseas bosses. They know that, in the short term, this will provide both an income and work experience, and, in the long term, can potentially provide the capital and connections needed to become a businessperson in the same industry or an adjacent industry, or possibly in some transnational capacity of an existing business.

The hope of becoming wealthy and successful through one’s own pursuits and business ventures is a widespread goal among even the poorest of the Chinese population in Singkawang. However, it is primarily individuals from families of slightly greater means, (i.e. those who already own houses, businesses, and cars and can afford to send their children to university) who explicitly entertain the idea of one day becoming economically successful in ways that could lead to cosmopolitan transnational citizenship. And yet, it is not only these wealthier individuals.
Labor migrants also imagine their work experiences abroad as steps leading toward a richer, more glamorous, more worldly, and more prosperous life (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Kothari 2008; Silvey 2006;). Their lives and lifestyles overseas constitute a unique form of transnational engagement, with its own forms of cosmopolitanism, akin to what Appadurai calls “cosmopolitanism from below” (Appadurai 201). “Cosmopolitan scripts”, Appadurai argues, are not reserved for the domain of elites but also “drive the politics of families, the frustrations of laborers, [and] the dreams of local headman” (Appadurai 1996:63). However, Morley makes an important observation that despite the circulation of these scripts, “the forms of cultural capital with which people can refashion their identities are unequally distributed,” (Morley 2001:427). The schism described in this chapter is directly related to these two observations: 1) that people are influenced by cosmopolitan scripts and 2) they do not necessarily possess the cultural capital required to transform imaginings that are based on those scripts into realities. As Pierre Bourdieu so thoroughly demonstrated in Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984), cultural capital is linked to social mobility and access to power within a society. Taste is not based on objective characteristics derived from objects or aesthetics, but constitutes a series of cultural codes and competences which are also markers of class and intrinsic to social class relations in societies. The question of “taste” is intimately implicated in the performance of cosmopolitanism. As such, to become cosmopolitan involves acquiring a series of cultural codes and competences that can make sense of things and experiences that would otherwise not be meaningful.

Susanto lives with his parents and sister in a two-story shop house in Singkawang. By day they work in the father’s bakery downstairs, and by night they sleep together in a single bedroom upstairs. The bakery is small, but busy and strategically located in the center of the city. Although Susanto’s parents only received an elementary school education, both he and his sister are now studying at university in Malaysia.

The first time I met Susanto he was 17 years old and about to graduate from high school. I asked him what he wanted to do after graduation and whether he would take over his father’s business. He replied quickly and confidently that he planned to be an international businessman. He would not continue to run his father’s business. Instead he would make his own business that would
have branches and offices in many countries around the world. He would live in a mansion and drive a Mercedes. “What will this business be,” I asked him. “Do you have any ideas yet?”

“No, not yet,” he replied. “I have to go to business school first.”

It is now two years later and Susanto is studying human resource management in Malaysia. He speaks fluent English, Mandarin, Indonesian, and Hakka and aspires to add Spanish to this list of languages. He represents a small minority of young people who are from families with the financial means to send their children to study abroad. However, the cost of tuition and living expenses places a large financial strain on the family’s resources, and Susanto’s living conditions in Malaysia are significantly less luxurious than he originally fantasized. Although he imagined that he would be able to rent a detached two-story house in the city and live with a group of friends who would each drive their own cars to school each day, the reality is significantly different. He shares a small single room with only one bed with another male student from Indonesia in a shared apartment near the campus. He cannot afford to eat in the modern food courts that boast Western foods and other foods not available in Singkawang. Instead, he must limit himself to eating “economy rice” (low cost Chinese food buffet) in order to stay within his daily budget.

The subject of Susanto’s original fantasy—an international businessman—is made in the image of an elite overseas Chinese transnational businessman akin to the stereotypes that Aihwa Ong and others describe in “Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism” (Ong et al. 1997). This is the wealthy, well-connected individual, adorned with the symbols that both constitute and communicate this status: multiple houses in multiple countries, multiple passports, luxury cars, a transnational business network, Rolex watches, expensive brand-name clothing and jewelry, etc. While it is not difficult to understand the allure of this kind of figure, particularly for poorer, or lower middle-class individuals, the fantasy does not consist of merely the material conditions of wealth. There are several immaterial qualities involved in this fantasy that make it an interesting case to analyze in terms of its role in the construction of people’s aspirations. Aspirations which ultimately guide the trajectory of lives and lead to risky overseas migrations.
Material symbols of wealth and status are powerful because they flag the immaterial social status and cultural capital (Strassler 2008) that go along with them and make them possible; being able to travel, being accepted and taken seriously outside one’s home, being able to negotiate cultural differences with ease, and being able to transcend that which is local. These are qualities that scholars such as Ulf Hannerz (1990) identify in theorizations of cosmopolitanism. Hannerz (1990) speaks of the cosmopolitan as someone who is flexible, open to a plurality of cultures and demonstrates a willingness to engage in these cultural forms. This is someone who can adapt and who can travel between cultures. Likewise, Arjun Appadurai, in his discussion of “cosmopolitanism from below”, observes that cosmopolitanism is usually assumed to involve “a certain cultivated knowledge of the world beyond one’s immediate horizons… the product of deliberate activities associated with literacy, the freedom to travel, and the luxury of expanding the boundaries of one’s own self by expanding its experiences” (Appadurai 2011). Noel Salazar (2012) describes how people use their knowledge of the world beyond Indonesia to cultivate cosmopolitan selves without even needing to travel outside Indonesia. Karen Strassler describes the specific role of Chinese Indonesians as cosmopolitan cultural brokers who can “translate their privileged access to extra local flows of information and goods into cultural and other forms of symbolic capital” (2008: 398).

Despite living in a geographically and economically marginalized area of Indonesia, people in Singkawang are nonetheless powerfully influenced by the images and ideas of perceived cosmopolitanism that circulate in the media and mix with reports from the overseas experiences of friends and family members. Together this information constitutes a popular imagination of what could become anyone’s transnational future. Overseas Chinese transnationalism, of the sort exemplified by Aiwa Ong’s Hong Kong business elite as well as the image of “rising China”, have implications for other ethnic Chinese communities as well. For example, in Singkawang, through “imagining oneself as part of a globally significant, transnational Chinese diasporic community” (Dawis 2009: 35), one can find, or at least imagine, a kind of symbolic inclusion that may be lacking at home (Ang 2001). Perhaps more powerful than the forms of symbolic inclusion are the ways that these images can become models for the economic and professional successes that constitute the dream life. Individuals in Singkawang position themselves in
relation to the circulating images about rising China and Chinese transnationalism, and this positioning directly impacts people’s identifications and the formation of group subjectivities (Dawis 2009). However, when people try to put this imagining into practice, when they attempt to make themselves into the successful transnational subjects of their fantasies, a schism or disconnect emerges between what is imaginatively created and what is practically possible given their idiosyncratic social, cultural, economic, and geographical position. What emerges from this disconnect is a complicated set of behaviors, experiences, and adaptations, related to food, and perceptions of selves and others, or “us” versus “them”, which I unpack below.

One of the biggest barriers to integration and enjoyment overseas is the fact that what they imagine is often in conflict with the realities of actually going abroad. While individuals think and hope that they will like new things, such as foreign foods, manners, behaviors, they often discover that they don’t. The result is feelings of discomfort and disappointment that cause people to begin to reimagine what they want, or start a longer process of learning how to manage differences. These are processes of self-realization and personal growth that intersect with an ideology of cosmopolitanism and take place in transnational encounters. While some people from Singkawang entertain fantasies of becoming elite cosmopolitan transnational subjects, most people are ultimately limited in their ability to develop the flexibility and willingness to engage with the plurality of cultures they experience outside their hometown and outside Indonesia. Partially this inflexibility is a direct response to being poorly or negatively received in the host places, or at least, a perception of being poorly received, as lower-status Southeast Asians, Indonesians, Hakka, or foreign workers. In response to being treated and labeled as various kinds of “others”, people become less willing or interested in developing the skills and openness required to thrive in the new societies. However, this inability to develop flexibility also comes from peoples own inherent limitations and lack of experience living overseas. The same fetishism of difference, ideal of universalism, the notions of universal human ethics that underpin Western, middle-class notions of cosmopolitanism do not form the basis of Hakka Singkawang subjectivity. Negative judgments of the other and positive evaluations of one’s own group, is best viewed as both a coping strategy that helps to deal with the differences experienced while living overseas as it allows the preservation of a sense of self-worth under conditions in which that worth is called into question.
When began interviews I was initially very surprised by how negatively people evaluated the places and people they encountered overseas. Having already heard so much about people’s dreams and fantasies while living in Singkawang, especially the dreams of young people, such as Susanto’s, I was struck by the obstacles they encountered as people sought to adapt to life overseas. At first it seemed as if people from Singkawang were actively resisting the new things encountered in host societies. Initially, I saw this as a form of parochialism and localism, akin to what Hannerz (1990) identifies as the opposite of cosmopolitanism (1990). However, I gradually began to see how these negative evaluations are a coping strategy that protects and preserves the image of the self, and the integrity of one’s own culture while living in a marginal position. Furthermore, the practice of making judgments, negative and positive, is also always a way to demonstrate one’s own ability to observe and discern things. Judgments act as a way to recuperate a sense of self that might be under attack in the new conditions of life overseas. By making judgments of people, places, and things, individuals are also asserting their tastes, tastes which have their own cultural codes and competencies that must be learned.

10.2 Food

People go overseas with all sorts of hopes, imaginings, dreams, and preconceived ideas about what they can and will be able to do there. But when asked about what they experienced in those places after the fact, these hopes have often been transformed into complaints, dislikes, and ambivalences. Some people actively dislike food abroad and miss the food from their hometown. This comes up frequently when they talk about life overseas. During my research, Hakka Singkawang frequently mentioned the unique local flavors, ingredients and styles of cooking from their home. In fact, a strong desire for food from home is a common experience for most groups of migrants living overseas and has led to the creation of networks of restaurants, shops and supermarkets catering to specific ethnic niches and tastes. What is striking, in the case of people from Singkawang, is the extent to which they say that the food they encounter in the new overseas locations is not only bad and not delicious, when compared to food from home, but that
they cannot eat it (Hak. *sit ng gan*). They complain incessantly about the food in other places, making both implicit and explicit comparisons with their own foods. The inability to find food that is suitable (Ind. *cocok*) for them both contributes to and can be seen as a manifestation of other kinds of limitations and barriers to engaging, integrating, and being able to feel at home (Ind. *betah*) in the new society.

Lily is 42 years old. She was born in Singkawang and pursued studies until high school before starting to work in an insurance company. She is now a democratically elected member of the local people’s representative assembly and makes fairly frequent overseas work trips to places like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Australia. She is a well-known and well-connected individual who has significant political aspirations at the local level. She considers herself an adaptable person who can move between various circles of people.

The first time I met Lily I asked her about her overseas travel experiences. In direct response she asked me if I like to eat bread dipped in olive oil. I said I did and she shook her head, grimaced and laughed. She said that when she worked at the insurance company she had won a trip to Italy as a bonus for achieving her sales quota, and that she absolutely cannot eat that bread dipped in olive oil and vinegar. That was her first time going overseas. She said it was very hard to find food. It was very hard to find rice. That was the only thing she told me about her trip to Italy.

Alang is a 46-year-old mother of 4 children. I first met her in Singkawang, but later, when I was conducting research in Taiwan, I met her again. She came to visit me and to visit her nephew who was studying Mandarin at a university in Taipei. She is an energetic and independent woman who loves to travel. She has been on tours to Europe, Asia, and America. She and her husband have managed to prosper economically in Singkawang via several entrepreneurial pursuits. The family runs a garage that fixes and changes tires of trucks that pass through the city. They invest in property in the city, trade stocks in the Indonesian stock exchange and own two bird-nest cultivation houses. They live in the center of the city, own a large house and a car and have enough money to send their children overseas to Australia and Singapore to study. Alang prides herself on having such exotic foreign things as red wine bought in France and cheese bought in the Netherlands and olives from the Mediterranean. Despite owning these
things, talking about them, and showing them to me proudly, she has not developed a taste for
them nor does she want to. They are simply symbols of her overseas adventures, her freedom to
travel, and her level of wealth and social status.

When we were out in Taipei it took over an hour to choose a place to eat. Alang rejected most of
the suitable choices that her nephew and I suggested, making disgusted faces or simple shaking
her head. Finally, we were seated in a busy restaurant in a popular shopping arcade in the city
center. It was crowded and lively and seemed to serve a variety of Taiwanese and northern

“No.” She shook her head.

“How about pork?”

“I don’t eat pork.”

“What?” I asked in astonishment, “You don’t eat pork?”

“I don’t eat pork in Taiwan, it smells, it stinks.”

“Oh, I see. How about dumplings? Chicken dumplings?”

“Ok,” she replied. Her nephew also ordered some tofu soup and some fried bitter gourd with egg.
When the food came she looked at it with suspicion and disappointment. After a few mouthfuls
of soup, and a single dumpling, she turned to the bitter melon and scooped some on to her rice.
She ate as though she had to force the food down, her face revealing how thoroughly
disappointed she was with the flavors. After a very short time she claimed to be full, but
continued to poke around with her chopsticks at the remains of the dishes we had ordered. Her
nephew and I swooped in and finished up the leftovers and quickly asked for the check, hoping
to salvage that night’s adventure with a trip to Taipei 101 and another night market.
The next day, Alang decided to cut her stay in Taipei short. Obviously this had a lot to do with her difficulty finding food that she could eat. Many times I watched her struggle to communicate what she wanted to order in restaurants and then leave without having eaten any of the food, visibly disturbed and distraught at how different the reality of the cuisine was in comparison to her expectations. She also constantly sought recognition and verification from me about how much better the food is in Singkawang than in Taiwan. When I met Alang again back in Singkawang, she was planning a trip to Canada and asked me repeatedly whether or not she would be able to find rice once she arrived, expressing her ongoing anxiety about food.

Food may seem trivial, or obvious, but food preferences and attitudes communicate a lot about people’s experiences overseas and are directly implicated in the processes of developing cosmopolitan sensibilities (Liu 2010). Food is intimately connected to the affective dimensions of people’s senses of belonging, memory, and nostalgia (Mannur, 2007; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002; Raman, 2011). However, there is still a lot that is unknown about the precise mechanisms through which food and belonging become so deeply entangled. Jon Holtzman (2006) wants to know how “real or perceived resilience in food ways speak to understandings of the present and imaginings of the future”, particularly in relation to concepts of the past (p.363). For studies of migration, this important question must be extended across transnational space in order to shed light on how food mediates migrants’ experiences of being in and belonging within multiple locations. Mannur (2007), for example, explores this theme by explaining how the identity politics of Indian immigrants in America are expressed through nostalgia for imagined culinary pasts that are linked to national and ethnic identities. According to her, culinary concerns, which were initially of little importance, take on greater significance in new host societies as food and food memories allow individuals to imaginatively re-create connections to their former homes. This also occurs among Hakka Singkawang migrants in their communal commiseration about food. According to Saunders (2007), “eating and talking about eating are both communicative acts…creating new understandings of the ways in which food shapes those who eat it” (p. 204). Narratives about food can be used to create a sense of community, both real and imagined, even across transnational space (Saunders, 2007). Communication and practices related to food and eating are also ways to mark distinctions between groups of people along lines of class, ethnicity, and other forms of identity. Talking about food (in the form of complaints about food overseas and praise for food from home) with other people from Singkawang is best seen as a social act.
A form of communication that strengthens group identity and allows people to reconnect imaginatively with home while they are away.

For Hakka Singkawang overseas, the logistics of getting food that one likes is often difficult because of language, cost, and taste barriers. People have a limited budget for food and face challenges when trying to order food in foreign languages (English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, etc.). This generates disappointment which leads to cooking at home, or only eating in the cafeterias of the factories where they work, the schools where they study, and generally not venturing far from these familiar locations. For wealthier people such as Lily and Alang, money is less of an issue than the limitations of one’s palate. The food can be ordered in broken English or Mandarin, and the food can be paid for, but it cannot be enjoyed, or at least not yet. A problem arises when people want to be able to eat these “exotic” foods and want to like the taste, but discover they don’t. Some of the more sophisticated individuals even know enough not to admit that they don’t like these things, preferring to keep it a secret, or make the necessary modifications in order to make them more palatable (such as mixing wine or Hennessey with Sprite or Coca-Cola, or adding fermented shrimp paste to Taiwanese take-out food, or substituting the olive oil on French bread for chocolate sprinkles). More commonly, however, people abandon their fantasies about the pleasures of exotic foods once they discover they don’t care for them. In this context, a discourse about the superiority of the food from home gets developed and acts as something of a cipher for the experiences of the migrants abroad. This discourse about food is also common in Singkawang where people regularly perform their ability to make extremely subtle distinctions between foods. They demonstrate their discerning tastes by saying how these noodles are delicious, while these other ones are not delicious, or this soup is too salty and that soup is not salty enough. Making observations about minute details of local food (standardized foods with limited ingredients, rendering them practically identical) is a common pastime. I have heard conversations about food and particularly about fish and fish varieties go on for hours at a time. In addition to performing one’s ability to make judgments based on discerning tastes, these evaluations also help to construct boundaries between social groups of eaters.
Ubiquitous complaints about foods overseas reveal people’s inadaptable palate, and their inability to develop the flexibility needed to consume new things, a major part of becoming cosmopolitan and transnational. Images of elite businessmen talking on cellular phones, dining on gourmet food in executive airport lounges en route from one country to another underline the following personal traits: mobile, flexible, confident, at home anywhere in the world. Not liking new foods, and not being able or willing to cultivate a taste for new foods, constitutes one of the front lines where people must come to terms with the practical limits of their ability (and, subsequently, their desire) to actualize their transnational fantasies. Food becomes a major factor influencing further decisions about where to live and work. It is often in relation to disappointment around food, coupled with the difficulties of living in states of marginality, that people decide that returning to Indonesia is their best choice. Of course, this decision has many other factors, including the limitations and frustrations of trying to convert skills, knowledge, experience, and social and cultural capital into a meaningful marker of success beyond Singkawang and Indonesia, as well as coping with the pressures of family responsibilities.

The ability to find food that one likes and to develop “a taste for” the food away from home also becomes a marker of cosmopolitanism. For those who can cultivate flexible tastes, this ability becomes a hallmark of their success in living and integrating into the host society in multidimensional ways. These more adaptable migrants become important culture brokers for others who have just arrived, slowly introducing them to new places, new foods, and new experiences which they would not have known about, or been brave enough to explore on their own. These individuals are usually those who have stayed overseas the longest, some of whom have official work permits, have been sponsored by companies, or received permanent residency. For those who stay living overseas for long periods of time but remain limited in their ability to develop a palate for local food, there are also now small companies, as well as networks of friends and relatives, that mail food from Singkawang to other places in Indonesia and overseas.

\[\text{In Hong Kong and Taiwan, there are special Indonesian food stores, some of which have buffet-style dining areas. Some of these stores are run by people from Singkawang, or West Kalimantan, and carry or make the Singkawang foods which migrants overseas most crave, including wheat noodles with pork (Hakka jam mian), fried rice noodles, (Indonesian kwe tiaw goreng; Hakka chau pan) as well as snacks such as durian candy (Indonesian durian dodol). Fermented fish paste, fish sauce, different kinds of curries and sambals as well as pork meat and pork fat are more}\]
10.3 Marginal Reception Overseas

The majority of overseas workers from Singkawang are living and working illegally (Ind. gelap [dark]; tidak resmi [not official]; Hakka si theu si het [expired visa]). They live in low-cost rooming houses, often with many people sharing a room and sharing a bed. They have low wages, live frugally and try to remit money home to their parents and siblings, or save money for their return trip home. They often cannot speak the local languages, and have to adjust from living in a small provincial town or rural area to living in a large city.

Living overseas as illegal migrant workers involves a certain degree of pariah status that limits the extent to which people can engage in the host society. People are often afraid of being discovered by the police, being asked to show their identity cards on the street, being at the mercy of employers who sometimes withhold wages or hold on to their passports, or being forced to communicate in a language foreign to them. The experience of living in the presence of these possibilities, as well as people’s marginal economic status and the goal of saving money and sending money home, powerfully shapes the kinds of daily activities that are possible. But the economic and social marginality that migrants experience is not the only source of disappointment and hardship. There is the further issue of not having one’s combination of ethnic and national identity recognized in the new society.

Ajung is the father of four children and has a computer servicing business in Singkawang. He lives in a small house on the outskirts of the city, with his wife, children and his father-in-law. He is an avid gardener and likes to go fishing regularly.

When he was 18 years old he went to work illegally in Korea. This was directly after the Anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta in May 1998. He got to Korea via a tour group from China. He worked in several different factories there for two years before moving to Taiwan and working illegally likely to be sent directly to individuals by relatives or friends using special remittance parcel services that link Singkawang with popular destinations overseas.
for three more years. He said it was easy to get a job and easy to make money in Korea, but it was very cold, language was always a barrier and he never went out, even when he was invited. He only thought about saving money and he didn’t want to be caught by the police. Ajung’s journey was directly linked to the economic and political situation in Indonesia at the time of Reformasi as well as to his desire to save enough money to return to Indonesia to start his own business.

In addition to his experiences of insecurity abroad, Ajung clearly articulated another common problem that Singkawang migrants face: “In Indonesia, there are problems from Islam and problems from Malays. They don’t consider us (i.e. Chinese Indonesians) to be real Indonesians. But when we go overseas to Taiwan, and Hong Kong, the Chinese there don’t consider us to be Chinese, they think we are Indonesians.”

Andy has had a similar experience. He is 19 years old. He is studying accounting at a small university in the UK. On a trip home for the summer he tells me that there is a lot of discrimination in England. According to him, people there don’t like the Chinese, so when he meets white people he tells them that he is from Indonesia and speaks Indonesian. He intentionally and strategically downplays the ethnically Chinese part of his identity. However, when he meets Chinese people, he tells them he is Chinese from Indonesia, and that he can speak Mandarin and Hakka. In these cases, he intentionally downplays his Indonesian identity, which he feels ambiguous about as do many other Chinese Indonesians, and he plays up the ethnically Chinese part of his identity, hoping to find more acceptance and common ground by doing so.

This situational and relational shifting is a daily experience in his life. By day, Andy is the only Asian student in his small university class, and by night, he works in a local Chinese restaurant. With the customers in the restaurant and his fellow classmates he speaks English, but with his boss, who is Cantonese from Hong Kong, and with the other Chinese staff at the restaurant he speaks Mandarin.

Andy is in a unique and advantageous position as a young person who had the opportunity to study Mandarin. This was not the case for many older people who grew up during the Suharto
era, or New Order, when Mandarin Language schools were officially banned by the government. This older generation is known as the lost generation, because they were denied the ability to study Mandarin, which is perceived as an important part of becoming a Chinese person, even in overseas Chinese communities where Chinese dialect languages are dominant in the home and marketplace. The politics of speaking or not speaking Mandarin have generated several problems for people who want to work overseas in places that have a majority ethnic Chinese population, as well as those that envision a more cosmopolitan, transnational future for themselves. This gets expressed as anger at the Indonesian government, along with embarrassment, and a sense of personal failure and frustration at not having one’s Chineseness recognized and affirmed by other groups of ethnic Chinese. Chinese Indonesians frequently contrast their situation with that of the Chinese in Malaysia, most of whom are fluent and literate in English and Mandarin as well as Malay and Chinese dialects.

Afui is 40 years old. He lived in the United States for six years working as an elder care assistant. After his application for permanent residency was rejected, he moved to Hong Kong. He worked in a nursing home there, caring for elderly people there as well. He loves the allure of living overseas. He loves the cleanliness, the order, and the sensation of living through four seasons a year. He said he would have liked to stay in Hong Kong and become a permanent resident like his sister and brother have done, but his plans were cut short because he was called home to care for his aging mother.

He told me that when he goes overseas and he cannot speak Mandarin he feels ashamed. He feels embarrassed and he feels as if he is not a real Chinese person. Once, he told me in frustration, “I am so fucking angry. The Indonesian government is so stupid. They don’t think far. They don’t want us to develop. It is because of Indonesia that I cannot speak Chinese.”

Amin is 32 years old. He only received an elementary school education but taught himself Chinese from speaking with elderly people and watching satellite TV broadcast from Hong Kong and Mainland China. He worked in a factory in Malaysia for three years. He said that the Malaysian Chinese consider Chinese Indonesians stupid, uneducated and unable to speak Mandarin. He told me a story of how he was able to impress a crowd of people at a meeting of a
mutual aid group he joined in Malaysia by volunteering to give a public speech in Mandarin. According to him, everyone was amazed to see a Chinese Indonesian speaking Mandarin. This automatically increased his status and allowed him to make friends and connections.

10.4 Negative Judgments of “Others”

In response to a feeling of being judged by members of host populations overseas some Hakka Singkawang migrants construct essentializing characterizations of the hosts (i.e., Singaporeans are arrogant, Taiwanese are aggressive, Chinese are rude, etc.). These negative stereotypes are best understood as convenient shorthand expressions that distinguish “us” from “them”. I will show how they are part of a broader recuperative discourse that helps to rescue the position of the self under conditions of marginality.

Erwin lived in Jakarta for ten years before returning to Singkawang. He now has a successful mobile phone store and several side businesses and earns enough money to make occasional short trips to Malaysia and Singapore. I went on a fishing trip with him and a bunch of his friends. It was nighttime and we were building a fire and preparing to barbecue some fish on the beach when our conversation turned from food and fishing to the difference between people and places. I asked how many people had been to Malaysia and one person replied by saying that Malaysians are arrogant (Ind. *sombong*). This led to a lively debate as people each compared their personal experiences and opinions. Finally, everyone reached agreement: Malaysians and Singaporeans are arrogant. Erwin summed it up best with this statement. “I don’t like people there. You can’t mix with them (Ind. *susah bergaul*). They are so arrogant. They think they are better than us. Also, in Malaysia and Singapore they don’t distinguish between Indonesian and Chinese Indonesian. Sometimes they mistake us for “Indonesian Indonesians” (read: *pribumi*).

Negative evaluations of people overseas are frequently a result of people’s negative reception abroad, or at least the perception of being negatively received by the local population and the experience of living as non-citizens and foreign “others”, limited in their ability to move around
and engage in the host society. Such characterizations are inherently comparative, reflecting how these migrants have come to imagine themselves in relation to others. While judgments are framed as ethnic or national group characteristics, they also index the difficulties of fitting in that are based on socioeconomic, dialect and sub-ethnic group differences, and the frustration of not having their identity recognized and valued.

While not having their Chineseness recognized is a common problem, another problem arises when their sub-ethnic identity is recognized but negatively evaluated and characterized in relation to others. The majority of Chinese from Singkawang are Hakka; Hakka is both a dialect and a sub-ethnic group designation that carries its own particular characterizations and stereotypes. Although these vary greatly based on historical, geographical, and intergroup relations, in general Hakka have been associated with working class socioeconomic status, labor intensive jobs, a lack of education, and a gypsy-esque, wandering, or peasant-type lifestyle. Hakka women are further stereotyped as working-class, hardworking, and promiscuous or sexually available. Of course, these characterizations are only made in relation to other Chinese groups, such as Cantonese, or Hokkien, which are usually characterized more favorably, as being refined, cultured, hardworking, educated, and enterprising. When people from Singkawang travel to countries with other groups of Chinese people, the politics of these sub-ethnic group stereotypes play out in terms of how they are perceived by locals and therefore who they feel comfortable associating and communicating with. In fact, these politics play out in the Indonesian context as well, as reflected by negative judgments and animosity between the Hokkien Chinese communities in North Sumatra, the Jakarta Chinese and the Hakka communities in West Kalimantan. As a way of interrupting or countering negative stereotypes of Hakka sub-ethnic identity people frequently cite the fact that some famous people including Sun Yat-Sen, Deng Xiaoping, and Lee Kuan Yew were Hakka. Furthermore, they characterize themselves as hardworking and brave sojourners, reflected in the Mandarin name kejia ren, or “guest people” who live and wander outside of their historical homeland.

Hakka sub-ethnic identity is not the only aspect of identity that must be negotiated overseas. These migrants must also contend with the politics of being Southeast Asians, specifically Indonesians, living in East Asian or Western societies. This carries the stigma of coming from an
underdeveloped country, or of being poor, or a peasant, or lacking the discipline and work ethic exemplified by the developed world. I do not want to suggest any truth in these claims. The purpose of focusing on the stereotypes of the migrants as well as their negative characterizations of “others” is simply to understand the context in which they are imagined, reproduced in talk and become the common shorthand understandings of people and places. Young people go overseas with hopes, dreams, and fantasies of being able to fit in, make friends and connections, start businesses, and seek a better life. At one end of this spectrum of dreams is the image of more elite cosmopolitan transnational citizenship. At the other end is the hope of living in a glamorous foreign location, making lots of money and finding life experiences. But no matter where in the spectrum of dreams people fall, they all face significant limitations in their ability to create a reality that resembles those dreams. These limitations have to do with lacking the necessary financial, educational, social, logistical as well as cultural credentials.

Hakka from Singkawang, much like other Indonesians, tend not to spend lot of time alone. In Singkawang, they live with extended families, often sleep many people to a room, and do not expect or imagine much in the way of personal or private space. When going out, people travel with a friend or a group of friends. Social engagements that are busy or crowded (Ind. *ramai*; Hak. *an nao*) are continuously sought and generally considered happy affairs. While overseas, people from Singkawang also reproduce this sociality. They sleep in rooms with other people from Singkawang, they go out in groups of people from Indonesia, they chat and SMS and take funny photos in funny places as often as possible, as they would do at home in Indonesia. The majority of Singkawang people overseas, however, do not have any friends from the local population, nor have they ever been to the houses of locals, or accessed social or medical services that would allow them to develop a more nuanced, insider view of the mechanics and nature of that society. This is due to a feeling of not being able to mix with people (Ind. *bergaul*; Hak. *an khoang gak phan*), because of the fear that they are being negatively judged and therefore will not be received graciously as potential friends, acquaintances, business partners, etc.

However, migrants also make positive evaluations of the host societies and they do that by and large in the same manner that they form the negative ones. These evaluations are inherently
comparative, reflecting people’s experience of coming from the Indonesian context. When asked to describe what they like about living in Taiwan, Hong Kong, America, Korea, England, Australia, and Japan, people described these societies variously as safe, secure, liberal, organized, clean, and orderly. Furthermore, people who stayed the longest, learned to speak the local language, and joined church groups tended to have more favorable experiences living abroad, made more positive evaluations of that society, came closer to building transnational lives, and developed a form of burgeoning cosmopolitanism, expressed by one person as “falling in love with kimchi”.

Hendry is the eldest of four children. His family was driven out of the interior of the province on West Kalimantan during the anti-communist purges in 1967 and resettled in Singkawang. At that time, some of his aunts and uncles migrated permanently to Hong Kong via the Chinese Mainland. Those who stayed in Singkawang found it difficult to find work. When he was 20 years old, Hendry joined his uncle who was working in Korea with the hope of finding a job. He went there during the 2001 World Cup and he watched every match and was instantly impressed by the patriotism and enthusiasm of the Koreans.

Hendry spent eight years in Korea. He can speak, read and write Korean fluently. He says he loves Korea. He loves the people, the society, and the availability and diversity of job opportunities. He says he particularly loves Korean food and Korean liquor and claims that anyone, after only one week of thinking Korean food tastes strange, would already have fallen in love with it. We talked for nearly an hour about varieties of Korean food. Ice noodles, kimchi stew, seafood varieties, stone bowl dishes. He was nostalgic and his mouth appeared to be watering.

Hendry’s evaluation of Korea and living and working overseas is entirely positive. He is unique and exceptional in his ability to adapt to life overseas. However, like most other migrants, Hendry returned to his hometown of Singkawang to start a business, and start a family. Upon returning to Singkawang he quickly married a local Chinese girl, opened a business and started to have children. Unlike many others, however, Hendry had seriously considered staying on in
Korea, but said that it is increasingly difficult to become a citizen. Also, his mother missed him deeply and longed for the day he would return to Singkawang.

10.5 Recuperative Discourse of “Our” Cultural Traditions

Migrants’ social marginalization also leads to a particular kind of self-portrayal that emphasizes the uniqueness, goodness, and integrity of their culture in comparison to the culture of others overseas. They portray themselves as maintaining traditional Chinese culture, strong kinship and family structures, unique and efficacious religious practices, and as being loyal and fraternal, engaging in group solidarity practices and mutual aid among friends. While such descriptions reflect, to some degree, the realities of Singkawang’s relatively “traditional” and small-scale Chinese society (defined by concrete social, cultural, and economic arrangements as discussed in Chapter 2), these self-portrayals also reflect certain ideals that have emerged from experiences of their reception as migrants abroad, as well as a perception that some of these things are lost in other Chinese societies.

In Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and America, Singkawang migrants come into contact with states of development and modernity that are radically different from what they are used to at home in Singkawang and Indonesia. They see firsthand advanced industrial and postindustrial economies, the famous international export brands, and international centers of business populated by middle and upper-middle-class professionals who appear well-dressed, disciplined, hardworking, and sophisticated. These migrants, who have entertained fantasies of being able to enter into and be included in this kind of world before they went overseas, often get menial jobs, for example, selling noodles and bubble tea to these busy, well-dressed office workers as they rush from one important meeting to the next. It is within these daily interactions that people from Singkawang feel the limits of their practical ability to convert their lives as lower and lower-middle-class Hakka Chinese Indonesians from a small and out-of-the-way town in Borneo into something resembling their cosmopolitan transnational fantasies or even more modest fantasies of becoming regular, yet successful new immigrants.
In response to this disappointment, they reflect on the uniqueness of their own cultural traditions. Their descriptions of “us” verses “them” tend to emphasize the fact that certain forms of society and culture that they still have in Singkawang have been lost in the host societies. Where Japan is seen as technologically and economically advanced, for example, Chinese society in Singkawang is seen as preserving filial piety, respect, honor, and care for elderly. Where Singapore is seen as alienating because of social and economic competition, Singkawang is seen as relaxed (santai), friendly, and fraternal (Ind. bersaudara; Hak. hiung thi), characteristics that people associate with traditional village life. Where Mainland China is heralded as having achieved rapid economic growth and having a very authoritarian political and legal system (which many people praise as being better than Indonesia’s weak political system), Singkawang is recognized as the center of Chinese folk religious practices (which have been lost in Mainland China). Taoist spirit-mediums are frequently cited as evidence of the ability to preserve cultural traditions. According to people in Singkawang, China does not have spirit-mediums anymore, whereas Singkawang has hundreds of spirit-medium healers. These examples become proof of the value and goodness of Singkawang in spite of its poverty and lack of development and modernization.

A recuperative discourse highlights the preserved cultural traditions of Singkawang in relation to places that are more modern, industrial, and developed. While people recognize that Singkawang lacks these characteristics, they recognize its unique and valuable cultural resources, which have not been changed, diluted or lost. These cultural traditions are something that people can identify with, be proud of, and use to create distinctiveness and value for themselves, especially in situations where their own provincial, small-town status comes sharply into view. Ironically, the very same qualities that make it difficult for people to adapt to living in new societies and limit their ability to become cosmopolitans are also a source of pride and identification.

11 Conclusion
Going abroad often initiates a process by which Hakka Chinese come to learn about their own idiosyncratic patterns of behavior, sociality, and cultural adaptations as migrants from an out-of-the-way small town in Indonesia. This process happens through the dynamics of the encounter, where people experience, firsthand, a new society and new people. In this exposure to new people and places, their membership in a group termed “others” also comes into focus. For many, that process of coming to understand and define the self overseas occurs in direct relation to negative stereotypes made by the host population about “who they are”, in addition to the stigma of being illegal migrant workers with low socioeconomic status and few rights in the host society.

It is in this context that people confront the practical limits of their ability (and, subsequently, their desire) to become cosmopolitan transnational subjects of the sort they had imagined. These limits stem from lower socioeconomic status both at home and in the host society that translates into an inability to cultivate the flexibility and openness to other cultures and societies that would make forms of cosmopolitan transnational life possible. So what happens to the fantasy of being a cosmopolitan transnational subject when one’s own ability to be open, flexible, adventurous, and accepting is called into question through the very transnational encounters one wants to attain? Rather than recognizing these limitations as stemming from class difference, lack of education, experience, and money, people often frame them in terms of cultural differences, employing the essentializing stereotypes of “us” and “them”. Where “they” are overly disciplined, “we” are family oriented. Where “they” are modern, “we” are traditional. These “us” versus “them” characterizations usually define the self in a more positive light. Negative appraisals of others and positive appraisals of self should be seen as a way to recuperate a sense of the wholeness and goodness of one’s origins under conditions that challenge them. A difficult reception abroad and coming to terms with one’s own practical limitations usually results in a series of unique readjustments to accommodate one’s parochialism. For example, no longer imagining they can become rich and successful in Taipei, Hong Kong, or Seoul, people instead bring influences from these places back to Singkawang in small ways, like opening bridal salons, photography studios, bubble tea cafés, or introduce Korean fashion trends, and English language schools into Singkawang. Or people reorient themselves to working and investing in local industries such as birds’ nests, rubber, and oil palm and decide to put more energy into
cultivating wealth and social status at home where their forms of culture are readily recognized and respected. In the same way that the powerful imaginary of the cosmopolitan transnational subject motivates some people’s decisions, so to, in turn, does the negative reception and experience of living abroad as migrants powerfully influence people’s plans, return trips home, and other readjustments that accommodate the realities, rather than the fantasies of living abroad.
Chapter 5: Cross-border Marriage

Figures 13, 14, and 15: “The Taiwan House”

Alang and her husband, Afo, live on a small narrow street in a *kampung* (Ind. urban neighborhood) in east Singkawang. It is one of the main settlement areas of Chinese Indonesian who were chased out of the interior of the province during the 1967 anticommunist purges. This area was once on the outskirts of town, but is now quite centrally located as the city has grown up around it. Because this neighborhood is comprised mostly of families who lost their property when they were expelled from their homes in the interior of the province, it remains economically depressed, compared to some of the other nearby urban neighborhoods.

I visited Afo and Alang at their house on a hot Sunday afternoon. It's a new, two-story, double-width cement house, large, bright, freshly painted, and tiled inside and out with shiny white tiles. The *ruang tamu* (Ind. room for receiving guests) where I sat on a cool and comfortable rocking chair is spacious with high ceilings and solid wood furniture. A long TV cabinet runs the entire length of the main wall and displays hundreds of small dolls, figurines, stuffed toys, and other souvenirs mostly sent from overseas. Alang explains how Afo and Alang live in one side of the house as she pours me a glass of sweet melon flavored juice. The other side of the house has been converted into a *warung* (Ind. café) where Alang and her husband work selling rice porridge in the early morning.

I notice immediately how different Afo and Alang’s house is compared to the other houses on this street. Their neighbors on each side live in small, narrow, single-story wooden shacks, many of which were constructed in the early 1970s and do not have indoor plumbing or gas stoves. Afo and Alang’s house on the other hand, boasts all the necessary modern conveniences. The houses
of their neighbors were once sturdy and well ventilated, but they are now slowly collapsing and very crowded, by large, multigenerational families.

“There’s no need to even say it, everyone already knows,” Afo said. “Everybody knows this house is built with money from Taiwan.”

“Oh really, I see, so if you see another house in this neighborhood as luxurious as your own, would you also assume that it is built with money from Taiwan?” I inquired.

“Of course,” he said. “There would be no reason to ask. I would just know that they have sent a daughter to Taiwan.”

There are an estimated 30,000 Chinese Indonesian women from West Kalimantan living in Taiwan, and another 10,000 living in Hong Kong. Singkawang, its rural outskirts and the villages running along the coastal road from Pontianak to Sambas are the major sending communities of these ethnic Chinese Indonesian “brides”. Cross-border marriage between Hakka women from West Kalimantan and Taiwanese men is one of the main types of migration among Hakka Singkawang. The cross-border marriage trend began in the 1980s with a specific group of unmarried Taiwanese men—older newly retired army officers—coming to Kalimantan to look for brides. They had heard about Kalimantan from Chinese Indonesian immigrants who had moved from Kalimantan to Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the women they married, who I will refer to as “first-wave” Kalimantan brides, were themselves widows who had lost their husbands in the 1966–67 conflict. Following this first wave, the cross-border marriage trend expanded to include a much wider subset of the Taiwanese population, including middle- and lower-class men from other professions as well as a more diverse pool of Chinese Indonesian women in West Kalimantan. The expansion coincided with the development of the international mail-order bride (MOB) industry. Cross-border marriage between Singkawang and Taiwan peaked in the late 1990s, with one source suggesting that in one year, between 1993 and 1994,

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68 These numbers are estimates and were told to me by government officials during my fieldwork. They were also repeated by the former mayor of Singkawang, Hasan Karmen, during a special event in which he hosted the mayor of Yang Mei, Singkawang’s “Sister City” in Taiwan. Yang Mei and Singkawang became “Sister Cities” in order to facilitate communication and mutual development between these two places precisely because there are many women from Singkawang who have immigrated there. I have never been able to verify these number with immigration or locate an official source, despite extensive searching.
over 2,000 women married Taiwanese men (Rosenburg 2003). According to families, NGO workers, and matchmakers in Singkawang, by the 2000s the rate of the cross-border marriage to Taiwanese men was starting a decline that has continued until today, although the practice has not completely disappeared.

The West Kalimantan marriage–migration pattern constitutes a complex and dynamic phenomenon which must be understood in the context of the other mobilities of Hakka Singkawang. In this chapter, I argue that cross-border marriage as a specific form of mobility and social mobility unique to this population. In order to understand cross-border marriage we must look at the history of this marriage practice, traditional Chinese marriage arrangements, labor migration trends, and the advent of international anti-human trafficking laws. I begin by describing the practical arrangements that take place and then the imaginative resources that shape the form that these cross-border marriages take in this specific conjuncture. I explain the motivations of these women and their families in order to show how their pursuit of a better life is similar to the young people going to Jakarta and overseas to work. While the pursuit of a better life is a common motivation across each types of mobility I have discussed so far, there are ways that cross-border marriage is distinct and leads to different kinds of transnational trajectories.

International anti human trafficking laws and discourse combined with reports of negative experiences from first- and second-wave brides, have resulted in a new moral discourse about this form of marriage–migration. As a result, cross-border marriage to Taiwan has become significantly less prevalent. Local economic development, education, shifts in marriage demographics in Taiwan, and changing cross-border marriage regulations between the two countries also played a role in the decline. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of cross-border families exist and young people, especially young women, continue to go to Taiwan in large numbers. Increasingly, these women are traveling as students and temporary labor migrants, and no longer primarily as cross-border marriage migrants.

12 Practical Arrangements
Cross-border marriages are arranged using networks of matchmakers (Hak. *mui nyin pho/kong*; Man. *mèirén* (媒人); Ind. *mak comblang*) who work between Singkawang and Taiwan. The process starts with either a man approaching a matchmaker in Taiwan and expressing an interest to find a wife from Kalimantan, or, alternatively, a matchmaker recruiting an unmarried man who might be interested in finding a wife in Kalimantan. Once a potential husband has agreed to try to find a wife in Kalimantan, a contract is made by the Taiwanese matchmaker stipulating how much money will be paid to him/her, as the agent, how much money will be paid to the family of the bride as a bride-price, how much gold must be bought for the bride, and how much it will cost for air travel and processing the marriage and immigration paperwork. Contracts can be written or verbal, depending on the protocol of each agent, but often the Taiwanese man is required to pay a deposit to the Taiwanese agent to ensure that he is serious and truly plans to go through with the marriage.

Once the Taiwanese agent—who local Singkawang residents sometimes refer to as the *thai mui nyin* (Hak. big matchmaker)—has recruited a group of prospective husbands (usually a minimum of two and a maximum of ten), he or she will contact the local Singkawang matchmakers in his or her network. These people are called *se mui nyin* (Hak. little matchmakers) and are best thought of as the local field agents, which are a type of *calo* (Ind. informal agent; Hakka *kai sau nyin/can kao*) (Lindquist 2012). The Taiwanese matchmaker asks them to start going around to the villages and suburbs asking people to identify eligible daughters who want to marry in Taiwan. In actual fact, this is an activity that they do on a regular basis so that they are already prepared and well positioned when the Taiwanese matchmaker announces that they have obtained a prospective husband. Once the Taiwanese matchmaker has recruited enough prospective husbands, he or she makes a group trip to Kalimantan with these men. The group of men from Taiwan arrives in Singkawang and stays at one of the main hotels in town. The local matchmakers invite the women they have recruited to the hotel to meet the potential husbands. Sometimes these women go to the hotel to meet the men, in which case a process of selection, something akin to speed dating may take place. However, it is more common in Singkawang for the women to decline going to the hotel, saying they are too *malu* (Ind. shy/embarrassed), and to wait for a man to be brought to their house in the village.
If that is the case, then the next day the local matchmaker brings the Taiwanese man to the woman’s house; sometimes the Taiwanese matchmaker is also present. The potential bride and groom meet and talk together in the presence of the parents (and sometimes other family members) for about an hour. The matchmakers help to translate between Hakka and Mandarin if there is a language gap. The topics of conversation are fairly standardized and have to do with work, family, and living arrangements. The daughter and her family want to know what the husband does for a living, whether his parents and grandparents are still alive, whether the parents live with him, and what kind of living situation he has in Taiwan. In addition to these questions, this meeting is an opportunity to assess the man’s character. Is he polite, honest, funny, confident, arrogant, shy, handsome, etc.? And the husband also wants to see if the woman is attractive, funny, serious, confident, etc. During this first meeting, the man and woman (and her parents) must decide whether or not they like each other and whether or not there is any possibility of marriage.

After this first home visit the Taiwanese man is taken to the house of another prospective bride, and perhaps another, depending on the number of eligible women the matchmaker has been able to recruit. After these visits, the Taiwanese man is asked to choose which woman he is interested in whereupon the matchmaker immediately contacts the family to find out if that woman and her parents are also interested. If she is not interested, the Taiwanese man may try for his second or third choice, but if she is interested, plans are made right away for another meeting. At the second meeting they negotiate the final agreement, with the matchmaker playing an important role as broker or negotiator. They must agree to the bride-price that will be given to the family, the amount of gold that will be bought (or decide if the amount already brought from Taiwan is sufficient) for the bride, and whether or not there will be a local wedding reception or banquet. It is frequently the case that the Taiwanese man only stays in Indonesia for three or four days, so this entire process must be completed very quickly. Once these decisions are made, the bride-price is paid, the gold is bought and given, and the reception is held (if there is a reception). After the ceremony, wedding photos are taken of the bride and groom at the civil registry in order to establish the legitimacy of the marriage among family and neighbors, and for immigration purposes. Sometimes a video is made of the marriage ceremony and the reception, which is common for other Chinese marriages in Singkawang. The parents of the bride usually keep one
large printed photo of their daughter and Taiwanese groom to display on the wall of their home thereafter.

The following day, the Taiwanese man returns to Taiwan, and the responsibility for processing the marriage certificate, visa, and immigration paperwork is left to the Taiwanese matchmaker. During the time it takes to process the paperwork, which ranges from two to six months, the new couple might contact each other by cell phone and the woman might begin studying Mandarin in preparation for joining her husband in Taiwan, where Mandarin is spoken widely\textsuperscript{69}. Since 2003, the Taiwanese government has also introduced an interview stage in this process in order to screen marriages and to test their authenticity; the bride is required to travel to Jakarta to visit the Taipei Economic and Trade Office in Jakarta (the equivalent of a Taiwanese embassy) and answer questions about her relationship with her husband. My participants explained to me that they were asked questions, such as “how they met their husband”, “the color of his toothbrush”, “his main habits”. Once the paperwork is completed, the woman flies to Taiwan to join her husband. The husband picks her up at the airport and brings her back to his house to meet his parents. As in Singkawang, the new couple may or may not have a wedding reception in Taiwan with friends, family and neighbors.

There are several points in this process in which money and goods change hands. The family receives approximately five million rupiah from the Taiwanese husband as a bride-price. The bride is usually given gold jewelry, including a necklace, a bracelet, earrings, and a ring. Wealthier Taiwanese men will buy the gold in Taiwan and bring it to Singkawang, whereas poorer men will buy local gold in Singkawang. The Taiwanese man may pay around one million rupiah for a small banquet dinner or more if there is a larger wedding reception in Singkawang. As stipulated in their agreement, the Taiwanese matchmaker receives a large sum of money from the Taiwanese husband. This is a fee that includes all the costs associated with the trip, the paperwork, as well as the agent’s commission. Brides, the brides’ parents and the local Singkawang matchmakers are not told how much the Taiwanese matchmaker receives, but by all

\textsuperscript{69} Despite the presence of a large Hakka minority in Taiwan, women from Singkawang find it useful to learn Mandarin for many reasons. Their husbands may or may not be from the Hakka dialect group, or the Hakka spoken in Taiwan may not be easily comprehensible. Learning Mandarin makes building a life and finding employment easier. The same is the case with Cantonese in Hong Kong. In Taiwan, there are several NGOs set up specifically to train overseas brides in Mandarin and to provide social services to help them integrate into society.
of their accounts (and suspicions) it is much more than that received by the family and the se mui nyin. According to one matchmaking website, which gives a detailed breakdown of all the costs associated with finding a bride in Kalimantan, the total cost is roughly 19 million rupiah. A report on human trafficking suggests that the agents receive 90 million rupiah of which 40–60 million is likely profit (Rosenburg 2003) and an article in Tempo magazine speculates this number could be as high as about 84,000,000 rupiah (Hayati 2007). Chia-Wen Lu estimates that the total cost to a Taiwanese man in the early 1990s was between NT 350,000 and 450,000 (or 30,000,000 and 38,000,000 rupiah) and was reduced to NT 200,000 (17,000,000 rupiah) by 2000s because of competition70. She estimates that of this total at least half goes to matchmakers (Chia-Wen Lu 2005). My research participants in Taiwan speculate that the Taiwanese matchmakers can only profit approximately NT 50,000 (4,000,000 rupiah) per marriage. The Singkawang matchmaker—the se mui nyin—also receives a commission from the Taiwanese matchmaker, which is negotiated after a successful marriage has been arranged. According to those who have contributed to my research, this amount ranges from one to three million rupiah, and is dependent upon the negotiation between the Taiwanese matchmaker and the se mui nyin. Such negotiation is part of the standard practice of both the phenomenon of the calo (Ind. informal agent) as well as the Hakka practice of profiting as a go-between (Hak. da kheng theu).

13 Cari Kehidupan Lebih Bagus (Ind. Looking for a better life)

Why do Hakka Singkawang women marry men from Taiwan? A village girl, her parents, a local politician, an NGO worker, a hotel owner, and a journalist, all participants in my research, gave me the same answer to this question: “the economic factor” (Ind. faktor ekonomi). It is primarily poor women from large families, with low levels of education who live on the outskirts of Singkawang or other towns in West Kalimantan, who leave to marry in Taiwan. These women

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70 In 1995 NT 350,000 was equivalent to roughly 30,000,000 rupiah.
are the daughters of farmers and often have the most difficult economic circumstances of the local population. It is from circumstances of poverty that the idea of migrating to Taiwan as brides becomes an attractive option. I asked these women why they had decided to marry men from Taiwan, as opposed to marrying a local man. They told me that their decision was based on a desire to *cari kehidupan lebih bagus* (Ind. look for a better life), also the motivation behind other migrants working overseas or sojourning in Jakarta. Cross-border marriage to Taiwan (and Hong Kong) is both a short-term and a long-term economic and social mobility strategy for the daughter’s birth family, her future family and her life in general.

There are several ways cross-border marriage improves the economics of a family. The initial payment from the Taiwanese groom to the bride’s parents, in the form of the bride-price, often helps to ameliorate their immediate economic hardship and debt. Having one less person in the household helps to relieve shortages of money, food, and space. There are also formal or informal agreements between the Taiwanese husband and the bride’s family about the kind of future support they can expect to receive in the form of gifts, remittances, and payments for house repairs, which can lead to economic improvement of the family over the long run. Most important, however, are the daughter’s own remittances back home. Cross-border marriage is not simply about the women enjoying the Taiwanese standard of living, but also about her ability to tap into another labor market. It is widely recognized that through marriage and emigration women gain legal, lifelong access to the Taiwanese labor market. This last point is critical, because it is largely through the daughter’s remittances—not those of the husband—that the family in Singkawang can survive and prosper economically. Based on this motivation, it is important to view this kind of cross-border marriage as a form of labor migration that involves multiple kinds of labour, including wage labour and what Boris and Parrenas have identified as “intimate labour” such as “bodily and household upkeep, personal and family maintenance, and sexual intercourse and liaison” (2010:2).

Cross-border marriage, like *merantau* to Jakarta and overseas, is based on the broad logic of needing to *cari kehidupan lebih bagus*, which is something that the vast majority of Indonesians actively seek, in part because there is little social support provided by the government. Like the overseas workers discussed previously, women who marry in Taiwan are motivated by a desire to improve their material circumstances, and the material circumstances of their families, and
fulfill the dream of obtaining a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. These hopes and dreams take on additional force, and become readily imaginable, when combined with the ideas, images, and rumors about life in Taiwan that circulate in the villages around Singkawang. People imagine Taiwan (as well as Hong Kong and Singapore) to be a highly modern, developed, and economically prosperous place, essentially the opposite of the neighbours and villages they come from. These are fantasies about what it would be like to live in a clean, rich, industrial, and metropolitan place, escaping the relentless poverty and lack of mobility in the village. These fantasies easily take root among young rural women and their families who have low levels of education, and little or no experience overseas, or even experience traveling within Indonesia. The prospect of marrying a Taiwanese man who has arrived in the village, in the woman’s home, with a marriage proposal and bride-price already prepared, is very tempting and attractive for these women and their families. They are easily swept up in the fantasy and imagine that they are merely a single decision away from moving to an “imagined prosperous paradise” (Hsiao-Chuan Hsia 2008).

13.1 Being Brave

When explaining their motivations for cross-border marriage, women I talked to never mentioned wanting to find love, or find a good match (Ind. jodoh), or even the desire to have children. The talk is purely economic and related to the generalized concept of what it means to *cari kehidupan lebih bagus*. Among the women who migrate using this route, like those who *merantau* in Jakarta and overseas, there is talk about being *berani* (Ind. brave). But unlike the discourse of struggling to become a boss (Ind. *berjuang menjadi bos*), the talk about cross-border marriage centers around whether or not one is *berani ambil resiko* (Ind. brave enough to take the risks). The risks are well-known, especially now, after so many marriages have resulted in divorce, return, or being lost to Taiwan (Ind. *hilang ke Taiwan*). Marriage in Taiwan is seen as a way to immediately effect change in one’s life and take control of one’s future, as well as the life and future of one’s family. Further, it is to do so in a way that aligns with the cultural aspiration
for success via wealth, the gender norms of women in the traditional Chinese family, and the expectation of children to care for aging parents. In the same way as young people’s plans and decisions are heavily constrained by the desires of parents, so too is the decision to marry in Taiwan primarily a family decision and a family enterprise (Chia-Wen Lu 2008: 216). While a daughter may have strong feelings about the possibility one way or the other, what is certain is that if the parents do not agree, she will not go (except for a few very rare cases of disobedience in which daughters organized their own secret marriages).

When people talk about being berani or not being berani they are subtly but powerfully communicating about the things that one ought to fear and the risks that they and others know exist. Talk about people who are berani is widespread in Singkawang. It is used to talk about people who are willing to gamble large sums of money, invest in long-term enterprises, speculate on property, open new kinds of businesses, travel far distances without guaranteed employment, and do business in dangerous frontier areas (such as Papua). Agreeing to marry a Taiwanese stranger and leaving the maternal home, the village, and Indonesia in order to emigrate to a new society often for life, are acts that require one to be berani. Without such a heroic characterization of these brave and pioneering individuals, it would likely be difficult for women to overcome fear of the unknown and find the courage necessary to enter into these marriages and take this migration route. The need to be berani is further amplified when we take into consideration the extremely powerful affective bonds that people have to Singkawang, as their kampung halaman. To leave in such a permanent way is traumatic for people, and the inability to let go of those powerful bonds, and the difficulties in establishing new attachments with Taiwan, play a role in the high rates of divorce and return among these cross-border marriage migrants. In a society where gambling is the most popular and quintessential risk-taking pastime, the risk inherent in leaving home to marry a stranger and the courage that it requires are valorized.

13.2 Luck Versus Fate
I am told by my participants in Singkawang that gambling is all about luck. To win or lose in gambling is considered direct evidence or proof of one’s luck. And the act of gambling is, in large part, a way to test one’s luck while also making money (hopefully). What I found interesting throughout my fieldwork, was the way that cross-border marriage was conceptualized using this same logic. To cross-border marry in Taiwan is considered a gamble, a way of embodying one’s luckiness or unluckiness. To get a good husband (Ind. *dapat suami yang baik*) with good economic circumstances is a manifestation of luckiness; to get a bad husband with bad economic circumstances, or a bad domestic relationship is a manifestation of unluckiness. This may seem like quite high-stakes gambling, and it is, which is why it is included in the talk about being *berani*. Gambling and *merantau*, as common risk-taking activities are patterned learned behaviors of young people in Singkawang. Men and women grow up surrounded by gambling, and the constant flux of winning and losing, luck (Ind. *keberuntungan*; Hak. *fuk, choi hi, hin*) and unluckiness (Ind. *sial*; Hak. *ng hin*). They watch people gain or lose fortunes, watch people go into debt or become wealthy, watch people go in and out of prison for being arrested for gambling, and while witnessing this, they learn how to participate, and learn how to properly respond socially and emotionally to winning and losing. This is the primary socialization of personal (emotional) and social management of risk-taking and its outcomes. Learning how to properly cope with and express the thrills and the disappointments of winning and losing is something that children learn from their parents and siblings at a young age, and involves learning about luck and unluckiness.

People who *merantau* to Jakarta and overseas talk about whether or not they will become successful in terms of *khao miang shui* (Hak. testing their fate), but the women in this study who married in Taiwan rarely talked in those terms to me about their marriages. Instead they refer to themselves and others being lucky and unlucky. This significantly contradicts the thesis by Melody Chia-Wen Lu (2008) in which a large portion of her analysis is dedicated to the concept of fate and the role of fate in people’s understandings of cross-border marriages between mainland China, Southeast Asia and Taiwan. Why did the women I interview not talk about fate to the same extent as the women in her study? It is possible that I did not recruit enough participants; her study is significantly larger than my own. It is also possible that the women in her study, the majority of whom were from mainland China, have a very different outlook than the women I interviewed in Singkawang. However, a close reading of the excerpts from her
interviews reveal people using the language of luck throughout, suggesting that there is a considerable overlap and interrelatedness between the two concepts. I offer a suggestion below of why the language of luck and fate would appear slightly different in cases from Singkawang.

Why would sojourns overseas be a way to test the limits of one’s fate, while marriage overseas is a question of luck? The concept of fate, particularly as it is expressed in the term *miang shui*, indicates one’s whole life, the sum of multiple parts, events, and aspects. To be lucky, on the other hand, is used to refer to one’s fortune in individual situations and time periods. Luck is a matter of days, of hours of the day (Hak. *hiung si*), or of certain bets in certain games. As such, people pass the days in a constant flux of luck, with ups and downs, lucky stretches and unlucky stretches. The daily unfolding of these flows of luck and unluckiness is merely one aspect of people’s lives. Only in their totality can be seen as a complete picture of one’s fate.

Concepts of luck and fate, of course, are highly individualized and variable. They depend upon the extent to which an individual believes in them and the ways that people attribute causality to each incident in their life. According to some of my participants—people who openly espouse the existence of both luck and fate—these concepts must also be understood in relation to other factors. Some people, I am told, can believe too much in fate and luck. Such people may use luck and unluckiness as an explanation which blames outside factors for their own misfortunes so they don’t have to take personal responsibility. This type of person may observe taboos related to luck and unluckiness, and via this observance are seen, in part, to be manifesting those states.

One person described this to me with an example: “If someone believes that being visited by a person who has just come back from a funeral will make them unlucky, they are more likely to be unlucky, or at least they are more likely to explain their unluckiness on the visit from that unlucky [contaminated] person.”

How people understand their luck and unluckiness, the taboos they observe, and the practices they follow to generate luck are individually variable. However, luck, like fate, is one possible and common explanation for outcomes; although, like fate, luck also needs to be balanced with other factors. The same groups of people who speak of those who believe too much in luck, also talk about the problem of relying too much on fate. There are several well-known stories that
illustrate why it is important to work as well as rely on one’s fate. During a long conversation about the concept of fate one of my participants told me the following story:

There once was a man who went to see a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller told him that on a certain month, in a certain year, the god of good fortune (Hak. Choi Sin) would come to him and give him lots of money and he would be a rich man. The man was very happy and he went back to his house and started waiting. He waited and waited and fell asleep in his bedroom and then eventually he died waiting. After he died he went to hell and in hell he talked to the god of hell and tried to figure out what had happened. The god of hell called Choi Sin to come and explain what had happened. Choi Sin came and explained to the man as follows: “I came to your house on that day but the door was closed. I knocked but no one answered. So I left, and then I came back the next day. But again you didn’t answer the door, so I left the money outside. Then I came back the following day. And the money was still there, so I opened the door to your house, and I put the money in front of your bedroom door. But again you did not open the bedroom door.”

“You see the money was there all along but the man never went out to get it,” my friend concluded. “That’s why you must work. You still have to wake up and work; otherwise you will not receive the fate that is awaiting you.” There are hundreds of didactic stories like this in circulation, which are meant to illustrate certain rules to live by. In this story the point is that fate is only one aspect. Everyone must go out and meet their fate; everyone must work and not simply wait around for good things to happen to them. If someone believes too much in fate, and does not give enough attention to working they are at risk of failure. It is also not advisable to believe too wholeheartedly in the predictions of fortune-tellers, because, like the person who believes in unlucky taboos, this can lead one to manifest that prediction or “fate”. My friend had another story to illustrate this idea.

There was once a man who went to a fortune-teller when he was very young. He was told that his life would be good. He would graduate from high school, and university, then get a master’s degree and then find a job and his life would be peaceful. Just as the fortune-teller had predicted, all of these things happened and his life was peaceful and moderately prosperous. But this man actually had much more potential than that described by the fortune-teller, but because he believed so strongly in the fate that was predicted, he did not try to achieve more or attain more in his life. One day his friend asked him “If the fortune-teller had told you that you were going to die of starvation, would you have waited around to starve to death, or tried to go out and find food and find your destiny?”
“We cannot always rely on what fortune tellers tell us,” was my friend's conclusion. “It can make us complicit, lazy even. There are always many factors.”

The point of this didactic story is to remind people that if they believe too much in fate and predictions of fate they are at risk of manifesting those predictions, whereas their life possibilities could hold much greater potential. So, while fate and luck are concepts that are commonly ascribed to, these must always be balanced with hard work. People are urged to take an active role in manifesting their own destiny through their actions.

Women I spoke with who married in Taiwan, as well as others who I interviewed about the subject of cross-border marriage, rarely talk about these marriages in terms that link them to a person’s fate, although being able to *dapat suami yang baik* (Ind. get a good husband) is often ascribed to luck. Marriage is merely one aspect of a person’s life, not the sum total of their fate. One's total fate cannot be assessed because life is not over yet. Cross-border marriage to Taiwan may be only one chapter, perhaps a very short chapter in one's life. These cross-border marriages have many possible outcomes and are often temporary or short-lived. After describing the range of possible outcomes. I return to the question of why these marriages are often less than permanent, and how this contributes to why they are not talked about as an expression of one's fate.

13.3 Outcomes of Cross-Border Marriage

There is a range of possible outcomes for cross-border marriages, but they can be best grouped into three main patterns: 1) marriages that are “successful”; 2) marriages that end in divorce with the women staying in Taiwan; 3) and marriages that end in divorce with the women returning to Indonesia. The majority of the women I interviewed fit into one of these three broad patterns. In addition to these groups there are a small number of extreme cases, as well as a group of women who have lost contact with their families and are referred to as being *hilang* (Ind. lost). What people identify as success stories are marriages in which a woman marries a man with a good job
and a good personality, the couple is well suited, have children, the woman adjusts to living in Taiwan and finds employment so she can send money home to her family. On the flipside, unsuccessful marriages are those that end in divorce. People inform me that divorces have several common causes: husbands are keras (Ind. harsh, violent), they don’t love their wives, drink too much, gamble, go to prostitutes, stay out all night, are stingy, are violent, or have bad relationships with their parents. But in addition to problems with husbands, marriages also end because women miss Singkawang, feel depressed and isolated, and find it difficult to adjust to life in Taiwan. Below I describe the stories of Linda, Joy, Irene, Aching, and Ratna. Three of these accounts (Linda’s, Joy’s, and Aching’s stories) represent one of the common outcomes of cross-border marriage. Irene’s and Ratna’s stories recount the experiences of two women who are not cross-border brides. I include their stories in order to situate cross-border marriage in a broader context that encompasses other forms of migration, changing moral discourses, and serious cases of human trafficking.

13.4 Linda’s Story

I met Linda at her house in one of the rural outskirts of Singkawang. She was on a one-month trip home from Taiwan to visit her family along with her first child, a three-year-old boy. Linda’s parents’ house is in the forest and can only be accessed by a narrow dirt road, not much larger than a path. The house, built in the 1970s, is a long, compact wooden construction that shows years of exposure to extreme heat and monsoon rains. Cocoa, coconut, and banana trees surround it and when I arrived there were chickens and ducks running around beside the house.

Linda’s 2-year-old son Patrick was the first to greet me on the veranda of the small wooden house. He ran the entire length of the long hallway from the kitchen at the back of the house to the front with a huge grin across his round face. A beautiful, healthy, chubby child, Patrick was wearing the usual cotton singlet and short pants worn by young children in Indonesia. Unsure at first upon seeing me, a stranger, he took a few shy steps back and was lifted into the air by his grandmother, whose smiling face was beaming with affection for her grandson.
Linda came out the front door right behind her mother and introduced herself and then we sat down in the front room and began talking. Linda is one of seven children. She married a man from Taiwan four and half years ago. Like several other young women from her village, Linda was introduced to her husband by Asen, a local mui nyin pho. Asen is a friend of Linda’s mother, lives in the village, and has two daughters of her own who are married in Taiwan.

“T’m very lucky,” Linda said. “I have a good husband. He is an architect and we live in a nice house in Taoyuan [a suburb of Taipei].”

“How did you decide that you wanted to get married in Taiwan?” I asked.

“At that time, many of my friends and one of my cousins had already gone to Taiwan. They told me that it is easy to make a lot of money there. My friend from school sends money home every month. So when I felt ready I just told my mother that I wanted to go to Taiwan. I was 20 years old. I was thinking about my future. I just hoped I could find a better life.”

"Was it difficult to adjust to life in Taiwan?" I asked.

“No, not really,” she replied. “My husband is very kind and I have lots of friends there who are also from Singkawang. Taiwan is clean and organized, and there are lots of nice places to go. There is nothing that I don’t like about Taiwan. I can’t complain.” She said confidently and assuredly.

Then Linda’s mother came into the front room and invited us to come and eat. We walked down the narrow hallway past two bedrooms into a section of the house that is open to the sky to allow rainwater to be collected and smoke from the wood-burning stove to escape. We sat down at a small wooden table in the kitchen area behind the courtyard and began eating rice with red-cooked pork and stir-fried water spinach with garlic. As we ate, we talked about Hakka food in Singkawang versus food in Taiwan. “They have red-cooked pork in Taiwan too, but it tastes different. In Singkawang it is more delicious. My mother can cook it Taiwanese style too, but she knows that I like the Singkawang flavor better. Singkawang food is really delicious, but I can eat the food in Taiwan too. It’s not hard to find food there, because so many people eat out in restaurants,” Linda told me.
13.5 Joy’s Story

I woke up early on the day I went to meet Joy. I had to take a commuter train from Taipei central station to a suburban area in Taoyuan County, almost two hours away. Zhuhai is a small town located in an ambiguous zone on the border between the industrial suburbs of the city and the more truly rural hinterlands. The town, like so many other small Taiwanese towns, consists of a spatially limited, yet relatively dense plot of row buildings three to five stories each. Shops, restaurants, and other businesses occupy the ground floor, with apartments and offices above. There are only a few main streets, and the areas behind these rows of buildings are crisscrossed with small alleys, some single-story dwellings, temporary vegetable markets and street food vendors.

It was a cold day in November. It was raining slightly and the sky was dark and low, as it often is in Taiwan. I arrived at the small train station and stopped for a moment on the platform to peer at a construction site nearby. The landscape was awash in the color of gray cement; it was everywhere. Not just in the construction site, but also in the rain, the sky, and the buildings. On the high street were brightly colored, brightly lit shops selling cake, bubble tea, and lingerie which provided a colourful break to the otherwise grey environment.

I had to take a taxi to get the rest of the way to Joy’s rooming house. She was still asleep when I arrived (perhaps she didn’t think I was actually going to come). She got out of bed when I knocked on the door. She put on the kettle and pulled up a chair for me to sit on. There was only one chair, so she sat on the bed and wrapped herself in a blanket. Her roommate was still sleeping in their single bed. The roommate snored and rolled around while Joy and I talked quietly next to her by the bed.

Joy is 33 years old and has been living in Taiwan for 10 years. She married a Taiwanese man and moved there in 2000 when she was 23 years old. Her story starts like many others. She is from a poor kampung of Singkawang, and has eight brothers and sisters. Her older sister was already married in Taiwan when she decided to try her luck there as well. And so through a connection from her sister she was introduced and matched to her Taiwanese husband. Her marriage didn’t
last long, after a few years she said she couldn’t take it anymore. Her husband liked to drink a lot and would go with prostitutes so she divorced him. “He had an ugly personality,” she said. “I just couldn’t take it.”

Joy stayed with her husband long enough to get her Taiwanese permanent residency, but after that she left him. She now works in a factory assembling small parts for cell phones, but she said that she has moved around to many different factory jobs over the last ten years. She lives with another Hakka Chinese Indonesian woman from a suburb of Pontianak who she met working one of her previous factory jobs. Her roommate is also a divorcée. “Lots of women are divorced now, but they don’t go back to Singkawang. They just stay here and work and make money. We can send money home, or just save it for later in our lives. I have no children, and I have no husband. I just work and sleep.” Joy talked with a serious and depressed face.

“So you ever think about going back to Indonesia?” I asked.

“Yes. I want to go back eventually. I know I will go back. But I am not ready yet. I still want to find money. I still want to live here. But if I retire I want to retire in Singkawang.”

13.6 Irene’s Story

A few days later I met up with Irene at a busy Starbucks in a mall in central Taipei. Irene is Joy’s younger sister, who also came to Taiwan, but not as a cross-border bride. Irene and I talked for a few hours that day and met several times during my stay in Taiwan. She asked me about my interview with her sister, and then she told me something that Joy had left out of her story. Joy had had a son with her husband, but the child is now in the custody of the father, which usually happens in divorce cases with foreign brides in Taiwan (Chia-Wen Lu 2008). This is too painful for Joy to talk about, Irene explained to me. Irene and Joy’s eldest sister is still married and has two children and lives in Kaoshiong.

Irene’s life is different from her older sisters’. Unlike them, Irene came to Taiwan on a student visa and after graduating from university found a job in an office. She lives in Taipei, not in the suburbs like her sister; she has an official temporary work visa and says that she would never
want to get married the way her sisters had. “How could I marry someone I just met? How could I marry a stranger? I am not brave like that,” Irene told me.

“Would you consider marrying a Taiwanese man if he was already your boyfriend?” I asked.

“Yeah, if I fall in love here, and if he is a good man with a good job, I would consider it. Lots of women are doing that now. They are working here or studying here and hoping to find a boyfriend who likes them,” she said.

“Why do you think fewer women these days are cross-border marrying using matchmakers like your sisters did?” I asked.

“It’s because of all the bad stories that get back to Singkawang…because so many women already got divorced. Now people know the risks better, they know that not all marriages are successful. Also, the economy in the village is already better. The women already sent so much money home. It’s more developed now. My sisters are ok, but some cases are worse. I have heard of husbands who are very harsh with their wives—they like to hit them. Also people now think marrying that way is like selling daughters. The parents just need to get money, so they are willing to trade their daughters. And people are more educated now. My eldest sister only went to elementary school, Joy finished junior high school, but now I already graduated from university. But I respect my sisters too, because they are braver than me, they sent money home so my mother can buy vegetables and my brothers and I can pay our school fees.”

13.7 Aching’s Story

I met Aching in the café where she works on the main road heading south from Singkawang to Pontianak. It is a simple and casual shop house café, like many others in Singkawang, it serves coffee, tea, and cakes. The same people congregate there each day, hanging out, reading the newspaper, drinking coffee and gossiping before and after work. Aching sat at a table in the back of the room folding paper money. All around her were clear plastic sacks full of already folded silver and gold paper money (Hak. *kim nyiun kho*), to be burned for the ancestors in the upcoming grave worshipping ritual.
I sat down and ordered a cup of tea and before we started talking I asked Aching and the other women working there to teach me how to fold the money. It’s an easy three-step folding technique but it takes some practice to make each one perfectly symmetrical and identical. As I interviewed Aching, we continued to fold paper money together, filling a large clear plastic bag full.

Aching is 32 years old. She is the eldest of eight children and she lives with her parents and siblings in a house in a village on the outskirts of Singkawang. There are ten people living in the old wooden house, including her brother’s wife and child. In 2006, at age 28, Aching told her parents she wanted to marry in Taiwan. She said that she was worried that she was getting old to still not be married and that she had to look after the daily needs of her family, and cari kehidupan lebih bagus. Her parents knew a mui nyin pho who was connected to a thai mui nyin in Taiwan. These matchmakers brought the man to her house in the village to meet her and her parents.

“When he came to visit our house his personality was certainly great. He was polite and smiled and liked to joke with me. We talked for about an hour with my parents. We asked him about his work and his family. He is a cabinet-maker. After that we agreed to get married,” she said.

“The following day he came for the wedding ceremony (Hak. chiap sin nyiong). He gave me gold jewelry and he gave my parents five million rupiah as deposit money (Ind. uang tanggunan) and then there was also one million rupiah for buying dinner. We took wedding photos and then he immediately went back to Taiwan.”

“After a month, my passport and visa were ready, so I flew to Taiwan to meet him. He picked me up at the airport with his mother and father, but his mother didn’t come back to the house with us; she went to stay with her other son in Kaoshiong to look after her grandson. I went home with my husband and his father.”

“When I got to Taiwan everything changed. My husband’s personality changed. He was mean. He fought with his father. He was stingy. He wouldn’t give me money for my basic needs. It was the same every day. I would wake up in the morning, clean the house, buy the vegetables and cook food for him and his father. Then, after a few months, my husband asked me if I wanted to
work or stay at home. He said if I worked in a factory I could pay someone else a small amount of money each month to buy vegetables and cook food for him and his father. I agreed. I started working in a factory and made NT 22,000 per month. I gave 3,000 per month to a helper to buy vegetables for my parents-in-law.”

“Were you able to save money or send money home to your family?” I asked.

“I didn’t send money home. I saved my money in the bank for my return. Only one time I sent money home because my father was sick. After a year and a half, I came back to Singkawang. I couldn’t take it anymore. My husband was mean and fought with his father every day. We tried to have a child but couldn’t. He’s infertile.”

“Didn’t you want to wait for three years so you could get your green card before getting a divorce?” I asked.

“Well…I couldn’t take it,” she replied.

“Do you think you would have stayed if you’d had a child?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she said. “I think I would have had to look at the situation. His behavior didn’t change. If his behavior didn’t change, I think I still would have come home.”

Aching has been back in Singkawang for five years. She says that in Indonesia, and particularly in Singkawang, there is a big stigma associated with being divorced, but if people ask her, she is honest and tells them that she once was married in Taiwan. She is now planning to go to Malaysia. She has a boyfriend who has been working there legally for the past eight years. He is Hakka from Pontianak. They haven’t met face-to-face yet, but they have been having a cell phone relationship for the past six months. She is very excited to go to Malaysia. She already knows she likes it there because she once took her father there for treatment at a medical center.
13.8 Ratna’s Story

I first met Ratna through a friend of mine who is a volunteer social worker. He was helping me to recruit non-Chinese people who had lived and worked overseas for my study.

Ratna invited me to her house in Singkawang. We sat in the front room drinking tea and eating biscuits as her children played on the floor in the kitchen. Ratna is Malay. She is 19 years old, married and has two children. The first time she went overseas she was only 13 years old. At that time, she went with her younger sister, who was 12. They falsified their ages on their passports and went to Brunei with a labor agent who found jobs for them working as pembantu (Ind. servants/housekeepers/cleaners). The agent took five months of Ratna’s salary before she finally began making money she could keep. During that time her employer held on to her passport. She explained to me, “People in Brunei are scared that the pembantu will try to escape so they keep your passport. But in Malaysia it is the opposite. In Malaysia you can keep your own passport, but the employer holds on to your money.” At that time, she just wanted to work, and the family she worked for was nice enough. But the work was exhausting. She woke up at 4:00 a.m. every day to start cleaning, cooking and washing laundry and didn’t sleep until 10:00 p.m. She did that 7 days a week. After finishing her two-year contract in Brunei she came back to Indonesia. “I hid my money in the inside of my pants when I crossed over the border, I was very scared,” she said. “I thought I might get robbed.”

Shortly after returning to her village, which is located about 45 minutes north of Singkawang, she decided to go overseas again, this time to Malaysia with her older sister.

Working overseas as a foreign domestic worker (TKI- Tenaga Kerja Indonesia) is a well-established pattern in Ratna’s family and in Ratna’s village. Her mother has been working as a pembantu in Malaysia since Ratna was three years old. Her father died when she was a baby and her stepfather is a farmer. She said that the village is full of men and families with women overseas working as TKI.

After a short time in Malaysia, Ratna returned to Indonesia once again. She was 16 years old. She decided that the wages were better in Brunei and wanted to try to go back there again. She contacted an agent and joined a group of women, all of whom were around her age and also
wanted to work as *pembantu* in Brunei. The agent took their passports, and they prepared to cross the border. However, they never reached Brunei. In fact, they never made it out of Singkawang. The women, instead, were brought to a house on the outskirts of the city. They were locked in the house, and routinely visited by men who would rape them. Unlike local brothels, “cafés” and karaoke joints, these women did not get paid and did not have any information about where they were or what was happening to them. They were tricked. Ratna does not like to talk about this experience, but she told me that she managed to escape with another woman. They escaped out of a broken window in the bathroom and walked into the city where they fled to a halfway house and lived there for a couple of years. The halfway house was established as a safe haven for women and children who are the victims of human trafficking, rape, and domestic violence and is run by a local women’s rights activist and lawyer. The women live collectively in this house and learn skills that they can develop into business ventures later.

Ratna now works in a shop in the center of Singkawang. She is a funny and happy young woman with a bubbly personality and an easy, relaxed social manner. She has lots of friends and says that she enjoys working as a junior shopkeeper much more than working as a *pembantu*. She currently has no plans to go overseas again.

In 2012, when I went back to Singkawang to do follow-up research after spending three months in Taiwan, I met another young women who had a similar experience to Ratna. Amoi, is an 18-year-old Chinese women from a small village outside of Tebas. When I met her she was living in Singkawang with a local spirit medium, Asau, and his family. According to her, Asau was a friend of her father’s and she had come to study with him to be a spirit-medium. However, according to a group of informants who hang out at a *pos* nearby Asau’s house, Amoi had gotten into trouble in her home village and needed a place to stay. The spirit-medium training, they suggested, was secondary to that motivation. They described her situation as regrettable, and spoke in hushed tones as they explained how her living situation with Asau had become even worse than in her home village. Amoi was having a sexual relationship with Asau, and was also being prostituted out by him to others. I went to Asau house on the eve of his *sin min sang* (Hak. God’s birthday). I went with the intention of talking to Amoi again and trying to figure out if she needed some support or resources to help her with her living situation. When I arrived there was a group of young boys playing the drums outside and clouds of incense flowing out on the small
house into the street. Amoi was seated at the altar, with a black scarf tied around her head. Her face was bent over on top of a urn filled with resin incense. She was inhaling the smoke deeply. Every few moments she lifted her head and drank from a large open bottle of beer on the altar. Asau stood behind her, whispering in her ear from time to time. When I came in, he stepped back to greet me. I asked him what was going on and he told me that he was teaching her how to enter a trance. After around thirty minutes of trying to enter into a trance Amoi started to spit saliva out of her mouth and then started to vomit. Asau directed his wife to come and take Amoi upstairs, while he sat down on the stool in front of the altar and put on his own black head scarf.

I never had a chance to talk to Amoi that night. One month later I heard from Asau’s neighbour that she was pregnant and that she was looking for a couple to adopt her baby. The next day I walked over to Asau’s house to check up on her. “She’s gone,” he said. “She went to Pontianak.” “Is it true that she is pregnant?” I asked. “Yes,” he said. “She is in the hospital in Pontianak with her family.” “She’s trouble,” he said. We were standing on his front porch. His wife and two children were sitting on a long wooden bench next to us. I decided not to ask about the rumours of sexual abuse and prostitution that I had heard. I include this story here as further evidence of the complexity and ambiguity of power relations inherent in labour and intimate labour, marriage and trafficking.

One of the things that I want to suggest, based on these case studies and the other interviews I conducted, is that for many women, marriage in Taiwan is considered something temporary, whether it is originally imagined as such or not. This is particularly the case for second- and third-wave brides (i.e. those who married more recently and were more aware of the inherent risks) who have seen the marriages of many of their friends, sisters, and cousins end in divorce. People know that divorce is a common outcome. However, they are willing (“berani”) to take the risk because there are enough potential benefits, enough success stories, and enough wealthy, happy friends and neighbors to perpetuate cross-border marriage as a viable and attractive economic alternative to staying in the village. Clearly, some people enter into these marriages primarily with the goal of obtaining permanent residency in Taiwan so that they can access the Taiwanese labor market. Some of these marriages are in fact short-term contract marriages (see below) where the question of love or lifelong compatibility need not enter into the equation. Even marriages that are not short-term contract marriages may undergo a six-month trial period
as the woman decides if she can adapt to life in Taiwan. Despite the impression and assumption that marriage is a final and lifelong decision, there is a series of options that make it potentially only temporary.

The reason that many marriages end and are perhaps conceived of as temporary from the start may have more to do with the strong bonds of attachment people have with Singkawang, as their *kampung halaman*, than it does with the conditions of the marriages themselves. Women readily blame their husbands, their living conditions in Taiwan, and Taiwanese society in general for these divorces, yet this is only part of the picture. These women often desperately miss home for all the same reasons that others miss home, and all the same reasons that people continue to return to Singkawang: food, friends, family, familiarity, landscape, climate, language, gods, temples, and the bones of the ancestors. Being away—particularly for long periods of time, or without the possibility of returning home, or traveling frequently between two homes—is difficult and painful for many people. There are many women, particularly of the first and second wave of brides who went to Taiwan and Hong Kong, who now have children who are older, finishing school, going to university, working, and becoming more independent adults. Many of these women now return to Singkawang for extended trips, or plan to spend the rest of their lives in Singkawang. Like aging parents who live with their working-aged children in Jakarta, these women, too, dream of retiring in Singkawang. They have already made their sacrifices. They have been brave, taken the risks, worked overseas, sent money home, raised foreign-born children who can speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and English, and now what they wish for is to enjoy the comforts of home once again.

13.9 Contract Marriage and Polyandry

Contract marriage is a form of temporary cross-border marriage that has conditions formally outlined in a contract to which both parties agree. I heard about these contract marriages from many different people who told me that in some cases these marriages have actual written, paper contracts, unlike other business dealings in the Hakka Singkawang community that are often
made face to face and by word of mouth. I found this surprising because of the level of formality, and I was skeptical that such arrangements actually existed. Ultimately, I was unable to find anyone who had one of these contracts for me to look at. This leads me to believe that contract marriage constitutes a very small percentage of the total number of cross-border marriages of Singkawang women to Taiwan. Contract marriage is best viewed as a form of labor migration and emigration that uses marriage certificates as the primary way to obtain official legal entry into a foreign country. I met very few women who had married in this manner, but the information that I acquired suggests that there is a wide variety of possible contract marriages with the terms often less than explicit, and opportunity for deception on either side.

It was around 11:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning in Taiwan. I had gotten up early that day to go to one of the suburbs of Taipei where a large number of women from Singkawang live. My destination was an Indonesian minimarket, which is also a warung that serves Indonesian food, including popular Chinese dishes from Singkawang. Sunday mornings are particularly ramai (Ind. busy, popular) because most people have the day off and make plans to meet their friends there. The warung owner sets up a karaoke machine on Sundays and groups take turns monopolizing the microphone singing Mandarin, Hakka and Indonesian songs.

I already knew a couple of the women who gather there, and once I got there they introduced me to a bunch of their friends. We chatted about Singkawang and Taiwan and then sang karaoke songs and ate spicy snacks. Eventually I told them about my research and asked them to explain to me the various kinds of common marriage arrangements. Once we got to the topic of contract marriage, a woman who was in her early fifties, quite eccentric and claimed to have six husbands (four in Taiwan and two in Singkawang) broke it down for me like this: “The Taiwanese man and Singkawang woman make an agreement. They get married and she comes to Taiwan. He helps her find a job and she starts working and starts to pay him a percentage of her salary. Usually she pays him until she gets her permanent residency, but sometimes only about six months. After that they get divorced. Then that woman can go back to Singkawang and find a man who wants to marry her and she can sponsor him to come to Taiwan. The man now has to pay her a portion of his wages, until he gets his own permanent residency. But many men don’t want to do that, because they are scared that they will have to do Taiwanese military service.”
This form of contract marriage, while interesting, left me with a lot of questions, so I decided to open them up to the group. “So in a contract marriage, do the husband and wife live together? Do they have sex? Does the woman have to cook and clean as well as work?” Immediately there were a bunch of different responses, “yes”, “no”, and “sometimes”. Eventually a consensus was reached that it depended on the agreement. However, most of the women I met that day wanted to assure me that this kind of contract marriage is very rare. Most of their marriages, even those that have ended in divorce, were entered into with the hopes of it being a good match (Ind. jodoj) and a long-lasting marriage.

The eccentric woman chimed in again, confidently saying, “Yeah, but who here doesn’t still keep a boyfriend in Singkawang?” The group of us that were huddled around the karaoke machine laughed and smiled in response to that statement. It is an open secret that women who marry in Taiwan often continue to carry on relationships with men in Singkawang, maybe previous boyfriends, or people they meet on return trips home during Chinese New Year. I have also been told about this in Singkawang by married men who say that their former girlfriends often seek them out to have sexual affairs on their visits home from Taiwan. Matchmakers, wedding photographers, and journalists know about this too and say that the reason is because so many of them are unfulfilled in their marriages in Taiwan and feel like their husbands don’t love and appreciate them. Keeping a casual boyfriend in Singkawang, or reuniting with one’s high school sweetheart after a divorce in Taiwan is also a theme that comes up in the books and films about cross-border marriage that are now part of a burgeoning Hakka film industry in Singkawang71.

Back in Singkawang, while hanging out at a café in the north section of town, a woman who I had just met and instantly got along with starts to tell me about another variation on contract marriage. This is something she has done herself, and she assures me she is not the only one. “There are plenty of people around here who are brave enough to try it,” she says. She is married with two children, but her husband has no job and it was difficult to get enough money to eat. So around six years ago she decided she would try to go to Taiwan. So she got married to a Taiwanese man with the help of a local mui nyin. There was no contract and her Taiwanese

husband was not told about her existing husband or children. Once she got to Taiwan she started working and sending money home. After two years they got a divorce and she came back to Singkawang. But after only a year in Singkawang she decided that she wanted to go back to Taiwan, because, as she explained, “the economy is so much better there”. She got married again to another Taiwanese man; although this time she had to make a new different passport to have the marriage certificate processed by the Taiwanese thai mui nyin. That marriage lasted three years and she said that she found a job working in a cell phone factory with a friend of hers and they both worked overtime to save more money. “So do you plan to go back again?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “I’m tired. Anyways, Singkawang is more relaxing.”

The stories from these women, both in the warung in Taiwan and the café in Singkawang, represent the voices of older and more experienced women, and women who were willing to be open and honest with me. However, the vast majority of the women who married to Taiwan (including many who I interviewed one-on-one) start out as young girls, uneducated, inexperienced, and full of hopes and dreams about their futures. Many of these women are barely old enough to get legally married. They are often very scared to leave home and have little concrete information about what life in Taiwan will be like. But they see their neighbors’ newly renovated houses, houses like Afo and Alang’s house, and they see the fancy clothing and handbags and gifts brought back by sisters, cousins and friends who have gone before them, and they daydream about the possibility of a more affluent life. These are powerful daydreams for people who live in conditions of extreme poverty in villages but are constantly inundated by performances of wealth and the middle-class dream, by media and neighbors alike and live with the pressure to take care of aging parents.

For these young prospective brides, the ones who have not yet left Singkawang, the role of the matchmaker becomes essential in navigating and negotiating the marriage process. Not only do these matchmakers do the technical business of introductions and arrangements, but also, like educational agents, they do the fantasy work, they help people who have doubts or lack experience to imagine the possibilities of what could be.
Matchmakers and Traditional Chinese Marriage Practices

Matchmakers are a kind of agent. They are one type among many who work in Singkawang in the business of facilitating people’s mobility through brokering information, providing services and providing access to places and possibilities beyond people’s knowledge. Matchmakers, like other agents, fulfill the role of *perantara* (Ind. escort/go-between), a common job in Indonesia in a variety of sectors. The role of the *perantara* is to help transfer someone between two points or states (Ind. *jemput-antar*). For many Indonesians, and in particular situations, having a *perantara* is considered essential. According to Shiraishi, being picked up and dropped off is more than just part of proper etiquette and polite behavior in Indonesia (1990). Having a *perantara* also helps people feel as if they are with someone known to them, not just one in a sea of strangers; it makes people safer; it makes people feel as if they are protected because they have others who know them close by (Shiraishi 1990). Matchmakers are a kind of *perantara* or agent who facilitates people’s movement from Singkawang to Taiwan and from unmarried to married. They rely heavily upon networks to create work and opportunities. This strategy involves using *guanxi* (Man. 关系 connections) and is similar to that used by young people looking for work in Jakarta and overseas, or people in the *konfeksi* and *sablon* industries. It is also a strategy used by other agents, such as labor recruiters who work as informal *calo* or *kai sau nyin.*

Matchmaking was a common and well-established job in traditional Chinese societies. Traditionally a matchmaker’s role is to introduce families with children of marrying age, make proposals on behalf of the families (usually the groom’s family), check that the couple has compatible astrology and generally act as a go-between in the marriage negotiations, including choosing an auspicious date for the wedding ceremony and negotiating the bride-price (Chia-Wen Lu 2005, 2008). Matchmaking has continued to this day in several different forms. In urbanizing and industrializing societies such as Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong, the job of matchmaker has become more formal, professional, and commercial, whereas in others societies it remains a task done by local village women who take it upon themselves to know which local families have sons and daughters of marrying age. Up until the 1960s, Chinese men and women
in Singkawang were matched by a matchmaker and the rules that governed how, when, and whether men and women could meet in person were very strict. From the 1960s onward, young people began to court each other and established relationships based on love and romance without as much supervision and intervention by parents and matchmakers. However, matchmakers still played a role, and they still play a role today in officiating wedding procedures. In places like Jakarta, the role of the matchmaker in the wedding ceremony has largely been taken over by professional master of ceremonies and wedding planners who know the order of operations for a Chinese wedding.

In Singkawang (as well as Pontianak and small towns in West Kalimantan), the vast majority of local matchmakers who facilitate cross-border marriages, are older Chinese women from the local village called *mui nyin pho* (Hak. matchmaking granny). Many of these women have married men from Taiwan themselves and now travel between Singkawang and Taiwan. Others may have married Taiwanese men in the past, then got divorced but stayed on living in Taiwan as citizens. They now return to Singkawang from time to time to match people when they have an opportunity. A few are not brides themselves but women who have a family connection to Taiwan because a daughter, sister, aunt or cousin has previously married there. In this case, the local relative will often work with their relative in Taiwan to match couples. *Se mui nyin* is a heavily feminized job, as evidenced by the common name *mui nyin pho*, and has traditionally been a job done by women. The *thai mui nyin*, who are usually from the Taiwanese side, tend to be men and work as more formal agents who have offices, websites, business cards, etc. The *se mui nyin* and the *thai mui nyin* must work together. The *se mui nyin* rely on the expertise of the *thai mui nyin* to navigate the marriage and immigration bureaucracy (for an investigation of this dynamic see Chia-Wen Lu 2005, 2008), and the *thai mui nyin* relies on the *se mui nyin/mui nyin pho* not only to do the local scouting work in the village, but more importantly to be able to “talk up” Taiwan, to promote and vouch for the prospective Taiwanese husband, and generally do the necessary work of persuasion.

As someone with experience in Taiwan, who is or was married in Taiwan, or has a female relative married in Taiwan (perhaps they are a recipient of remittances), *mui nyin pho* are well positioned to convince women and their families that they are making a smart decision by agreeing to a match. These women can establish trust with families because they are local and
their transnational experience also ideally positions them to perform the necessary fantasy work.
The local women and families would have little reason to trust the Taiwanese *thai mui nyin*,
much less the prospective Taiwanese husband, both of whom are usually strangers to them.

The transnational dimension is also important, because the *se mui nyin* might have to do damage
control on the Taiwanese side if the reality of the situation does not meet expectations, if the
husband turns out to be less than what was advertised, or if the new bride is having trouble
adjusting. In such cases, *mui nyin pho* who go between Singkawang and Taiwan might provide
key social support to these women, such as introducing her to other women from Singkawang
and Indonesia, helping her to find Mandarin courses, helping her to find a job, and showing her
places to go, foods to eat, etc.

Because matchmaking is based on trust, the family and daughter must believe that the *mui nyin
pho* and the man himself are representing the prospective husband accurately and honestly. If
things turn out badly the *mui nyin pho* is often blamed and this can lead to the rupturing of
relationships. In order to avoid this problem, she must manage disappointments early on and
work hard to convince the bride that things aren’t as bad as she thinks they are. If this fails and
the bride divorces and returns to Singkawang because of circumstances she cannot abide, this
will have consequences for the *mui nyin pho* back in Singkawang. This is what Alang and her
husband explained to me. The family may break off the friendship, they may tell other people
that she is not a trustworthy person, and she might lose existing connections and destroy the
chance of developing new ones. In much the same way as a bad business transaction or a
 gambler who cannot pay off debts, a matchmaker who has been intentionally deceptive in order
to seek personal gain is considered morally disgraceful.

Locals are aware of the risks of deception. There are those that consider matchmaking to be a
good deed (Ind. *pahala*), particularly if the match turns out to be a real *jodoh* (Ind. match).
There are also those that consider matchmaking to be a sin (Ind. *dosa*), or morally suspect. While
the *mui nyin pho* work to establish trust based on their position as locals with transnational
marriage experience, there is a growing skepticism about the extent to which they can be trusted
based on the numerous bad matches and marriages that have already taken place. People are
increasingly aware of the self-interested aspects of the transaction.
In the past, *mui nyin pho* would receive *ang pao* (Hak. red envelopes containing voluntary monetary gifts) from the groom’s family (and sometimes also from the family of the bride) but now that *se mui nyin* mostly work in conjunction with a *thai mui nyin* who give them a commission. This opens a new space for *mui nyin pho* to seek their own interests over the interests of the family. Families used to have more control and quality control when the financial aspect of the matchmaking service was more in their hands. The expectation is the *mui nyin pho* will remain impartial, and resist acting in self-interest. Traditionally the matchmaker made introductions, acted as a go-between and negotiated the dowry and bride-price, as well as officiated at wedding ceremonies. The structural change that has happened recently, with *se mui nyin* working mostly in the service of a *thai mui nyin*, who are themselves increasingly working in a competitive cross-border marriage market, complicates what formerly was a more independent brokering position.

15 Status of Women in the Chinese Family

The decision to marry in Taiwan is not a decision made by the women alone. This decision, like other decisions pertaining to a Chinese family, is made in the context of the patriarchal Chinese family (Chia-Wen Lu 2008). The status of women in the family (as mothers, wives, daughters, grandmothers, or granddaughters) is less than that of men. Women marry out of their natal homes and join the family and surname group of their husband, whereas men remain in the natal home and carry on the family lineage (Ind. *marga*; Hak. *siang*). This is a patriarchal, patrilineal system which traditionally saw all property inherited only by male descendants. Sons, particularly eldest sons, were essential in order to perpetuate the lineage, inherit property and take over family businesses. Daughters, on the other hand, were considered of little importance, sometimes even a burden, because they were expected to grow up and leave the natal home and it would be the responsibility of the parents to find her someone to marry. Much of this traditional patriarchal family structure remains today in Chinese families in Indonesia, in part because Indonesian society and family law enshrines gender inequality into the structure of the
family, as outlined in the Indonesian Marriage Law\textsuperscript{72}, and in part because Chinese culture in Singkawang has remained traditional or \textit{kuno} (discussed in Chapter 2). In so doing, it has preserved patriarchal social structures.

Men and women are both aware of the gender inequalities that exist. Young people I talked with were vocal and forthcoming about the fact that sons and daughters are treated differently, have a different set of expectations, and have to abide by different rules. Sons are more highly valued. They are given more pocket money, more freedom, and prioritized for education and investments. While all children are expected to obey and be subservient to their parents, girls often find that they must also be subservient to their higher status brothers. Girls are easily socialized into this system, as it is a process that starts before birth with the hope of having a son and the already inferior position of the mother in relation to the father. They are intrinsically implicated in perpetuating their own inferior position in this ideology of the family, precisely because of the way they internalize this lower status position as the natural order of life as a woman. This is often not recognized as a form of gender inequality, but simply thought of an essential gender characteristic, reflected in statements such as “women are not brave enough to…” or “women are like that” or “men are not like women because…” Even those who see the discrimination most clearly, resist it and label it as a form gender inequality (and there are many women like this too), rarely find the courage to transform their lives in ways that would overcome the structural inequalities that exist between men and women in the family and in society at large.

Santri Mudiyani is one of the few outspoken feminists in Singkawang. She is a social worker and community organizer who leads projects that empower women through education and information about sex, health, equality, and human rights. She is a vocal opponent of cross-border marriage, and considers it to a form of human trafficking. Santri is explicit about her goal to actively empower local women to seek not only sexual rights, but also sexual satisfaction from their husbands. While she opposed cross-border marriage within the Chinese community on the ground of exploitation, Santri is less critical of the polygamy within her own community. She

\textsuperscript{72} Undang Undang Republic Indonesia Nomor 1, Tahun 1974, Tentang Perkawinan.
does not oppose it, but rather supports the practice of men taking multiple wives. In accordance with her belief that men will always try to seek multiple sexual partners, polygamy is the safest and most harmonious situation because the women involved know who the other partners are. According to her, this reduces the risk of secrets, lies and the spread of diseases. Despite our disagreements about gender equality and polygamy, I learned a lot from Santri and her networks of social workers about gender ideology and the social position of women in Singkawang.

In Indonesian society there are also large-scale structural factors that produce and reinforce gender inequality (Brenner 2011; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003). All citizens of the nation are supposed to be recorded according to family units. Individuals start life listed on the Kartu Keluarga (Ind. family registration card) of the nuclear family, until they get married and have their own family and then start their own Kartu Keluarga. Every family card (and every family) must have a Kepala Keluarga (Ind. head of the household) and only a man may be the Kepala Keluarga. A woman may only become the head of the household in the event that she is widowed. If she is divorced she returns, along with her children to the family card of her father. Children born out of wedlock are also a problematic category for Indonesian laws and face social stigmatization along with single unmarried mothers. While this structural inequality exists across Indonesia, in Singkawang gender inequality is particularly prominent and powerfully felt at the level of local social norms in daily life.

I learned about gender ideology and gendered social norms in Singkawang from a series of informal meetings that I had with members of a network of volunteer social workers (Pekerjaan Sosial Masyarakat). This included men and women, activists, educators, organizers, social workers, villagers and urban residents. From these conversations, and my observations during extended fieldwork, I became aware of the extent to which patterns of daily life are gendered. Women, generally, do not go out after a certain time at night. They rarely go out alone with men other than their husbands, boyfriends, sons, brothers, or uncles. The expectation for women is that they will shop, cook, clean, care for children, and be proper sexual partners of their husbands, even if they are also working to support the family. Women are discouraged from talking about sex, or asking for sex from their husbands; to do this comes with a major risk of being considered promiscuous which can lead to suspicions and accusations of infidelity.
Women do not hold as much decision-making power in the household; husbands and fathers often have the final word, and in some cases decisions are made without consulting wives.

15.1 Mail-Order Brides, Not-So-Traditional Marriage, and Human Trafficking

I have chosen to use the term cross-border marriage to describe the marriages between Singkawang and Taiwan because it is a descriptive term that is relatively free of negative connotations and moral judgments. But there are other terms found in the literature, including “commercially-arranged marriage” and “Mail Order Brides” (MOB) (Chia-Wen Lu 2006). Commercially-arranged marriages, or what is sometimes called the “Mail Order Bride” industry, is distinguished from other forms of marriage by the explicit use of agents, agencies, websites, and catalogs to advertise prospective brides and broker the marriage of men and women internationally.

Chia-Wen Lu observes that commercially-arranged marriages or MOB are often conflated with human trafficking or sex trafficking and this is for three main reasons: 1) the transnational aspect of the MOB phenomenon; 2) the existence of a monetary transaction and 3) the gendered migration flow (women from poorer countries marrying men from wealthier countries and not the other way around). In addition to the association with trafficking, the term MOB conjures up images of sex tourism, as well as domestic and intimate labor exploitation (Chia-Wen Lu 2006). For these reasons it has quickly become seen as a morally and legally questionable practice, unlike other kinds of commercially mediated relationships such as online dating and international child adoption. Melody Chia-Wen Lu, however, counters these dominant associations by showing, quite rightly, that cross-border marriage (what she calls transnational marriage migration) build on traditional forms of matchmaking and rely on localized social networks in which women are not victims but play active decision-making roles. She forcefully argues that money transactions and the use of brokers don’t necessarily turn women into commodities, and that the decision to marry is not motivated by poverty alone (Chia-Wen Lu 2006; Piper 1999). Portrayals of the MOB industry as trafficking also fail to account for the potentially positive changes in women’s status that take place through these marriages.
I have reached similar conclusions in my research. There are strong cultural resonances between the current cross-border marriage practices from Singkawang to Taiwan and traditional Chinese matchmaking customs. It is, in part, these similarities that make these marriages both practically and imaginatively possible for both communities. Cross-border marriage to Taiwan is a cross pollination of local forms of marriage matchmaking with a transnational dimension. Marriages uniting women from West Kalimantan with men in Taiwan are distinct from other cross-border marriage flows (for example MOBs from the Philippines to Australia) because they occur within the Chinese diaspora. These are largely marriages between Hakka communities. The role of ethnicity makes them distinct from other cross-cultural cross-border marriages (Chia-Wen Lu 2006). Chia-Wen Lu demonstrates statistically that while the number of non-Chinese Indonesian and Filipino domestic workers in Taiwan is far greater than the number of Chinese Indonesians, and these domestic workers are easily accessible and potentially available for marriage, Taiwanese men rarely marry from these groups of women. Instead, they seek an ethnically Chinese bride from Indonesia, China, Vietnam, or Myanmar. My study participants explain to me that this has to do with the desire to have similar language, customs, food, and family living arrangements and to create Chinese families as opposed to families of mixed race and ethnicity.

Regardless of the ways it makes sense culturally, sociologically, or economically, the marriage of Chinese Indonesian women to Taiwanese men has nonetheless become associated with human trafficking, primarily by people outside of the sending communities. These marriages have been “exposed” (Ind. *terekspos*) through journalism, and they’ve become the subject of films which seek to “create a sense of moral urgency,” and “produce a wave of public concern,” (Blanchette and da Silva 2012) around human trafficking. Portrayals usually report about the worst, most extreme cases, often using anecdotal evidence. The language is judgmental. These kinds of portrayals, and other sensationalism in the news media, are particularly common in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era, where new media freedom is mixing with a public fascination for witnessing gruesome and bizarre events. This is also part of the ongoing attempt by some social groups to eliminate crime, injustice, and morally deviant behavior in Indonesian society.

Rebecca L. Wharton, in an article entitled “A New Paradigm for Human Trafficking”, argues that one of the reasons that sex trafficking is more reported and sensationalized in the media than trafficking of men for labor (which is more common), is precisely because the idea of women in sex work or women being sexually abused is more appealing for media distributors who are
trying to compete for an audience. This is the case in Indonesia where news media broadcasts often include special segments dedicated to exposing crimes and morally deviant behaviors.

Sensationalism surrounding sex trafficking in Indonesian news has coincided, over the last ten years with a serious effort to combat human trafficking internationally. This initiative aims to create definitions, conventions, and laws that can be used to stop what is recognized as a transnational problem of significant magnitude. Spearheading this initiative was the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (hereafter referred to as the Protocol), drafted in 2000 as a supplement to the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (2000). In the same year the United States congress passed the Trafficking Victims Prevention Act. By 2003, the protocol became legal and by 2012, a total of 117 states, including Indonesia had signed. The protocol provides an exhaustive definition of trafficking in persons, broad enough to include forced labor, debt bondage, sexual exploitation, and trafficking in children and slavery. The definition is as follows:

(a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

As the protocol came into force, it generated an enormous amount of activity at the national and local levels, including data collection, drafting laws that comply with the protocol, producing educational programs to raise awareness among social workers, NGOs, civil society groups, government officials and the public about what human trafficking means, training law-enforcement officers and prosecutors to use the new anti-trafficking laws and creating prevention programs for “vulnerable populations”. This burst of activity has put a spotlight on human trafficking. It is now a regular topic on the news and for investigative journalists. The global
antihuman trafficking campaign builds on previous efforts to eradicate forms of exploitation, such as slavery, indentured labor, prostitution, and child labor.

In April 2007, Indonesia passed comprehensive anti-trafficking laws which meet the minimum standards of the protocol. The laws give local law enforcement officers the right to investigate, arrest, and prosecute people who are suspected of human trafficking. According to a 2007 report from the United States State Department about trafficking in Indonesia, the country is considered one of the worst in the region with rampant internal and transnational trafficking for sex and labor exploitation. According to the report, however, the new laws, which include definitions of labor exploitation, debt bondage, and sexual exploitation, will only be effective if they are properly implemented and if officials actively join the anti-trafficking efforts. The report declares, without explanation, that state agencies in Indonesia can resemble trafficking syndicates and do not provide protection to prevent migrants falling into debt bondage. In the third sentence of this report, cross-border marriage between Chinese Indonesian women from West Kalimantan and Taiwanese men is clearly identified as a form of human trafficking: “Women from West Kalimantan who migrate to Taiwan and Hong Kong as contract brides are often forced into prostitution or debt bondage . . . Trafficking of ‘brides’ to Taiwan for sexual exploitation persists.”

The worst cases of cross-border marriage can clearly be identified as human trafficking. These include incidents where women and their families are deceived into believing that they are engaging in legitimate cross-border marriage when the reality is quite different. There are, without a doubt, cases of women being sold or forced into prostitution or other kinds of work, passports being withheld and “husbands” demanding payments from them. It is not my intention to question the legitimacy of these cases as incidents of human trafficking, or to suggest that the abuse of power does not exist within the practice of cross-border marriage. However, I

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75 I have been told about such cases, but I never spoke directly to a victim or a friend or relative of a victim.
do want to identify a series of problems with the evaluation of the cross-border marriage flow between Indonesia and Taiwan as human trafficking.

The first problem arises when reports—by national and international bodies—use words like *often* to estimate the number of cross-border marriages that result in women being sold into prostitution. My own research, my investigation of the data sources for these reports, and my personal relationships with people who are frequently quoted and cited in these sources, lead me to a very different conclusion: that cases of "human trafficking" are a very small proportion of the overall incidence of cross-border marriage to Taiwan and are exaggerated for the purposes of reporting. In the sentence quoted above, the words *rarely, occasionally, or sometimes*, should replace the word *often*. To say that women are *often* forced into prostitution is a misrepresentation, particularly when compared to the total number of cross-border marriages and their outcomes.

These reports create generalizations based on cases that are not representative of the overall phenomenon. These are extreme cases, which have been sensationalized as part of the current Indonesia-wide trend to “expose” things in the media. The accounts may be based on anecdotal evidence or come from third-party informants. They are written by journalists motivated in part by a desire to create a profitable news story. They also sometimes have major factual errors that undermine the authors’ credibility. Finally, the stories are usually collected by self-interested NGO workers or consultants who are paid by international development agencies to find relevant data.

As NGO workers or consultants learn how to think about certain human arrangements as examples of human trafficking, they start to label them as such, and find ways to creatively narrate cases such that they contain enough elements to be included in reports. These workers are congratulated (and paid) for their ability to generate this data, which the Jakarta and UN based personnel cannot access. As Ratna’s experience of being a victim of trafficking attests, horrific incidents do happen. And yet, there is a broad and ambiguous space for interpretation, misrepresentation, and sensationalization. Ratna’s experience involved deception, and exploitation. She understands what happened to her as a form of trafficking, and she considers herself a victim. But Joy, Linda, and Aching do no perceive themselves as victims of human
trafficking. They entered into cross-border marriages as free agents, who were berani ambil risiko, ready to make a move that would potentially lead to a better life for them and their families. While their choices were made in the context of the family and as women in relatively impoverished Chinese families in rural Singkawang, they nonetheless took time to weigh the possibilities and considered the accounts of friends and relatives before they made a final decision. Most people within the communities that have large percentages of women married in Taiwan and Hong Kong actively reject the labels contract marriage (Ind. kawin kontrak), MOB (Ind. pesanan pengantin) and human trafficking (Ind. perdagangan manusia) for their form of cross-border marriage. To them this is not a business based on coercion, but rather a practical strategy for social mobility.

My informants in Singkawang explained to me that many of the risks that exist in cross-border marriage are ones inherent in all marriages and include incompatibility, excessive drinking, gambling, fighting, and unemployment. The risks are amplified, however, by the lack of familiarity between the bride and groom and the potential, based on this stranger status, for deception, which can go both ways. The groom may exaggerate his level of employment, wage, and social status in Taiwan; the bride may neglect to inform the groom that she is already married, or has children.

Laws and conceptualizations of human trafficking divide the phenomenon into traffickers and victims of trafficking. They are represented as two clearly and unproblematically defined groups. The assumption is that there are individuals and agencies that do the exploiting and there are individuals who are exploited. Those who exploit others (via human trafficking) are criminals, while those who are exploited are the victims of trafficking. There is no space for the possibility that individuals may not consider their own arrangement as one of exploitation, or that they are consciously, actively, and intentionally involved in their own trafficking. There is no recognition of the relationships, often close, familial or intimate, within which choices are made (i.e. when an older sister is the matchmaker, for example). There is also little space in this schema to account for the role of structural factors operating at the level of the family and the state which create the context in which choices are made and social and economic arrangements are shaped.
Amei is a 17-year-old and from a family of ten siblings. She lives in a small wooden house in a village on the outskirts of Singkawang. Her father was originally from Bengkayang, but left shortly before the violence that broke out in 1967 after the Communist purge. Fleeing to the settlement outside of Singkawang in a hurry, the family left their business and their property in Bengkayang. They were resettled in a modest refugee housing settlement. The population in the area has continued to expand and there are few employment opportunities for young people. There is no existing family capital, and barely enough rice to feed all the members of the family. Two of Amei’s older brothers stopped junior high school in order to start working in Jakarta with a friend from their village who has a silk-screening business. They are trying to save money to start their own businesses. Amei also has two older sisters who have already married overseas, one in Taiwan and one in Hong Kong. But even with the money being sent, periodically, from her sisters, life in the village is still difficult.

“What are the major expenses?” I asked her.

“First, there is school fees. For me and for my younger siblings. And then there is my mother. She has diabetes. She needs medicine and treatment. Then there is my father. He sells vegetables, but he is difficult. He needs money for . . . bad things,” she trails off.

“What do you mean by bad things?” I follow up.

“Gambling debts and rice liquor,” she says.

Amei tells me that every day is the same. She sits on the porch at night, or lies on the mattress on the floor next to her other female siblings, and thinks about joining her sisters overseas. She imagines finding a job in a factory in Taiwan. She dreams about finding a good husband. She fantasizes about having new clothing and handbags from Hong Kong. She tells me that she wants to come home with a suitcase full of clothes for her mother and father. “I want to get out of the village” she declares. “I want to live in a bigger more modern city, like my sister in Hong Kong.” Each year, during Chinese New Year, Amei sees many women pulang kampung from overseas, wearing fancy clothing and taking their families out for dinner in restaurants in Singkawang. They speak Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien with their foreign born children and have stories to tell about their lives overseas. There is something alluring about this figure to her. For Amei,
marrying a man from Taiwan constitutes a distinct opportunity for travel and social advancement. There are *mui nyin* in the village that can help Amei and her family arrange such a marriage, anytime she wants. “I’m not certain. I’m still thinking” she replies when I ask her whether she is considering taking the same route as her older sisters.

If Amei decides to marry a man from Taiwan using matchmaker and receives a bride-price should we call this human trafficking? If her husband turned out to be a farmer, rather than a shopkeeper as he and the *mui nyin* claimed, do we call this human trafficking? If her husband was 53 years old and she was 19, but he is wealthy and she considered herself lucky at the increases in her material standard of living, do we call this human trafficking? If her parents wanted her to stay with them in the village and marry a local man but she insists on marrying overseas, do we call this human trafficking? If she was less than confident in the idea of this marriage, but was convinced by her parents, sisters, and *mui nyin*, do we call this human trafficking?

Black-and-white terms, traffickers and “the trafficked”, do not address this gray zone. Social and economic conditions shape people’s decision-making processes, options and a lack thereof also play a role, as do flows of information and personal connections. Together these elements configure what is imaginable and practically possible for people. While obvious coercion and deception are absent, it is very difficult to say whether someone has entered into a situation based on their own “free will”; the concept of free will itself runs out of meaning when multiple influences and circumstances are taken into consideration. The concept of free will itself is a historically and culturally contingent. It does not accurately describe the sorts of decision-making processes that take place in the context of Chinese family structures.

If we look at the examples of contract marriages that were explained to me in that *warung* in Taiwan we can further understand some of these complexities. Contract marriages are clearly considered cases of human trafficking. They are identified as having imbalances in power and profit-making, including labor and sexual exploitation. The traffickers are identified as men and agents, whereas the women are portrayed as naive or ignorant victims of coercive schemes. But the women that I interviewed were informed about these arrangements and agreed to them on the basis of a contract, often a written contract. They did not consider themselves victims. To many
of them these arrangements were creative solutions to economic problems and a means to cross international borders legally. However, whether one has consented or not is of little relevance in the face of the international human trafficking protocol, which clearly views these migrants as victims. According to the second clause of the protocol: “(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;”

So the law prohibits individuals from entering into arrangements even voluntarily that run the risk of being exploitative. Effectively, the second clause makes it possible for contracts individuals enter into freely to be retroactively labeled illegal. For cases such as Ratna’s, this protocol and legislation is useful for prosecuting more clear-cut cases of human trafficking, which are premised on misrepresentation, coercion, and exploitation. But for the gray-zone that constitutes the world of cross-border marriages between Hakka communities in Singkawang and Taiwan, it is difficult to understand how such a protocol could be used. Who will be arrested and prosecuted? The elderly female matchmakers who live in the villages? The bride’s parents? Her sisters? The Taiwanese husband? The thai mui nyin? The entire network of actors?

Tony is in his early forties. He works as a photographer and a filmmaker in Singkawang, he’s also has a prominent role in local politics. He has photographed and filmed hundreds of marriages between local women and men from Hong Kong and Taiwan. He himself is one of 13 children and has 6 sisters married in Hong Kong. He also worked briefly along with his father as an informal mui nyin kong, both matching potential cross-border couples and officiating their marriage ceremonies in Singkawang.

When I interviewed him about cross-border marriage he rejected the association of these cross-border matches with human trafficking and explained how the legislation could be misused. On two separate occasions, his father was called into the police station for questioning. “I guess the police were trying to link him to human trafficking, but all they were really doing was trying to get money from him,” Tony said with a big grin on his face. We had known each other long enough to speak openly and freely together, and he knew that I was aware of the ways that police look to supplement their incomes. While Tony rejects the label human trafficking, he is also aware of the risks involved in cross-border marriage. He has portrayed the complicated decision-
making, the heart-ache, and the longing for home that can result from these marriages in a feature length film he made in 2011. For Tony, it is not him or his father, or his father’s network of *mui nyin*, who ought to be criminalized for match-making dozens of couples over the years. “They [the police] are pressured to demonstrate their law enforcement. But they know that prosecution is impossible. So finding money becomes the main goal,” he explains. The real underlying driver of these marriages, according to Tony (and many others), is poverty.

16 Conclusion

Cross-border marriage is one of the main forms of migration from Singkawang. It is a dynamic and complex phenomenon that has changed considerably since it began in the 1980s. Although it resembles traditional Chinese match-made marriage in some ways, it has become labeled as a form of human trafficking exposed and criminalized in Indonesia and internationally. Although members of the Chinese community involved in this practice do not consider it to be human trafficking, the discourse about trafficking has had an impact. Fewer people want to talk about cross-border marriage, and fewer people want to admit to being a cross-border marriage migrant. Some women of younger generations speak disparagingly of cross-border marriages. While they do not desire to fault their older female friends or relatives, who are marriage migrants themselves, they declare that they have no interest in taking that route, preferring to work or study overseas instead.

Cross-border marriage from Singkawang, like other forms of *merantau*, is thought of as a strategy to *cari kehidupan lebih bagus*, not merely by raising one’s own standard of living but by being able to support one’s family through remittances. Whether or not one is able to get a good husband, which is a cornerstone to making this arrangement successful, it is often described as something determined by luck. Certainly, these marriages are based on a gamble of sorts; there is seldom enough time or information to make a fully informed decision about the compatibility of the bride and groom. Taking this risk is surrounded by a discourse of being *berani*, which is itself a characteristic that has value.
There are now thousands of cross-border families connecting Singkawang, and West Kalimantan with Taiwan and Hong Kong. One of the biggest impacts of this has been the distribution of money from overseas into the local economy. Although data on remittances and other kinds of support entering Singkawang has not been aggregated, most people, including the former mayor Hasan Karman, believe that it must account for a large percentage of the money in circulation. These marriages have served to raise the economy of individual families and communities. Nevertheless, many of them end in divorce.

I have suggested that divorce may have been a plan from the outset either because labor migration was the primary goal, or because of a strong desire to return. While divorce is usually explained by incompatibility and bad personality traits of husbands (violent, drunk, womanizing, poor, harsh, etc.), the return of women to Singkawang has as much to do with the affective forms of attachment that they have with their hometown and home community. The allure and pull of the _kampung halaman_ follows these women overseas and despite their hopes and dreams, as well as their increases in wealth and quality of life, they are unable to forget their connection to home. Their prolonged longing manifests in a strong desire to return, sporadically, regularly, or permanently.

The rates of cross-border marriage are on the decline and this has to do with three main factors. First, the economic situation in the villages has already improved, largely because of remittances from women who have married overseas in previous decades. Second, there are fewer men from Taiwan coming to Singkawang to look for wives because the regulations have become more difficult, and because new marriage markets, including Vietnam, Burma and mainland China have opened up. Third, as this form of marriage has become associated with human trafficking, it has gone from being considered heroic and glamorous to being a more ambivalent choice, at once understandable and regrettable. As a result of these changes, it has become a less attractive option for young women.
Chapter 6: *Pulang Kampung* (Ind. Returning Home)

On the sixteenth day of the first lunar month of the Chinese calendar, I joined a group of people from Jakarta on a road trip to the small village of Jawai, located on a peninsula in the northwest corner of West Kalimantan. When we arrived in the town a special raised platform that resembled a stage had been built in the middle of the road. It was furnished with formal banquet chairs, carved wooden sofas, and a red carpet. There was a microphone with a sound system. The platform was sheltered from the rain and the sun with a plastic tarp. In front of this stage there was a bright red tent filled with special objects that had been donated by members of the local *Cap Go Meh* committee for use in their New Year celebration.

When we arrived in the small fishing village, there was already a group of people waiting for us. They must have been waiting a considerable time since our departure from Singkawang had been delayed by a long wait for a ferry to make the river crossing from Tebas. We were a large group of people, hard to coordinate, and traveling on *jam karet* (Ind. rubber time).

Earlier in the day it had rained hard and when we arrived it was still drizzling. The sky was severely overcast. The villagers were huddled under the overhang of the shop houses on either side of the main street. We got out of our cars and carefully negotiated our way around the big muddy puddles that lay between the stage and the tent. The master of ceremonies (MC) greeted us cheerfully, shook each of our hands and ushered us up onto the raised platform to take our VIP positions as the out-of-town guests invited to participate in the auctioning off (*Ind. lelang*) of the auspicious altar objects for this year’s *Cap Go Meh* ritual.

Into this isolated village of poor farmers and fisherman we had arrived as a wealthy entourage. A six-car caravan of rich businessmen, journalists, photographers, and investors, some originally from Singkawang, others from Jakarta, as well as me, the resident anthropologist, introduced proudly, although incorrectly, as Professor Miss Emily. Each of us had been invited by Bong Min Thiam (called simply Athiam), a successful businessman from Singkawang, who lives and works in Jakarta but remains deeply involved in local politics, social development projects, and

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76 This was the day after the annual *Cap Go Meh* festival in Singkawang, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
the promotion of *Cap Go Meh* in Singkawang and the surrounding areas.

After we were seated on the stage, and given water and snacks, the MC began to deliver a lively welcoming speech, projected via the sound system into the open street. But the weather was bad, the crowd was meager, and disappointment over our late arrival was evident in the bored expressions of the few people who remained loitering around. Despite these conditions, the MC carried on energetically. Several long introductions ensued and he preached sycophantic thanks to our group. This was the first of three events (Ind. *acara*) planned for our group for the day. Members of our group began to shift around in their seats and talk to each other, ignoring the MC. But everybody knew that these formalities, whether rushed or not, had to continue, at least for a while. *Acara*, have a clearly organized etiquette which people endeavor to follow.

Finally, the introductions were over and the *lelang* began as all *lelang* of this sort begin, by auctioning off the largest and most beautiful pair of pomelo fruit (Hak. *jiu*). Fruit which had been blessed the previous night and placed earlier in the morning on the top level of the three-tiered temporary altar (Hak. *sam thoi*) built for the *Cap Go Meh* ritual. *Jiu* are the most auspicious and praised objects. They are thought by some to bring luck, success, and prosperity in business as well as personal protection for the coming year. They are the most expensive objects in the *lelang*, with pairs on occasion fetching US $5,000. The MC opened with the starting price, but before any bidding ensued, Athiam interrupted him and asked him to wait a moment. Athiam then turned to his closest cronies and they whispered back and forth, reaching some kind of agreement. Then Athiam walked down to talk to the MC face-to-face. Negotiations took place; the MC looked serious and nodded his head. Then using an overly dramatic oratory style popular throughout Indonesia, the MC announced to the remaining spectators that Athiam and his entourage had offered to buy all the objects in the *lelang*, and he announced the price they had offered (which was in the thousands in dollars). He asked out loud into the open street whether or not the spectators would collectively accept this generous offer. The question was of course rhetorical. Certainly they would accept the offer, as there was no one in this poor isolated village able to participate in the *lelang*. If nobody bought the altar objects the *Cap Go Meh* committee would be left carrying the cost they had invested in the objects to begin with.
At this point Athiam took the microphone and began to give a speech. Like the MC, he spoke in the local Hakka dialect rather than Indonesian, but he made a few translations for some of us out-of-towners, including a journalist from Singapore and myself. He spoke confidently and graciously, lavishing thanks upon the MC and the local Cap Go Meh ritual committee, performing all the proper deferential niceties. Regardless of his artful decorum, it was clear that an unsettling breach of conduct had taken place. The lelang, after all, had not been held. There was no performance, no spectacle, no publicly visible displays of wealth or charity, and no entertaining, funny or competitive bidding wars. The MC was not really even needed. The acara had become abridged, truncated by a group of wealthier Jakartans who needed to rush off to another acara.

As a way of softening this breach of conduct, our leader began to introduce us one by one, asking us each to stand up in turn and receive applause. I was asked to make a greeting in Hakka, which was met with the usual laughter and smiles from the locals standing below the platform. A few other members of our group also gave short speeches and explained the importance of Singkawang and West Kalimantan as their kampung halaman, emphasizing how significant these places are for the preservation of Chinese Indonesian culture. They proclaimed how happy they were to be able to visit this special place on this auspicious occasion.

After the speeches were over and the rain had stopped, we descended from the stage and crossed over into the tent to inspect the objects. People mused over the collection of ornaments; there were golden colored rabbit statues, long-life cakes (Hak. shio ko), cases of beer, cans of lychees tied into packages, golden lion figures in glass display boxes, bottles of Chinese rice wine, gift baskets and pairs of pomelo. Then, suddenly, a second announcement was made. Not only were we going to buy all of the objects in the lelang, but we were not going to take them with us. Instead, these objects were to be donated back to the community, to the temple and to the Cap Go Meh committee. While it is common for certain items bought during a lelang, such as beer and bananas, to be immediately shared with the local people by eating a communal meal, it is uncommon for all of the objects to be left or shared. Animal statues in glass display cases, gift baskets and long-life cakes are usually taken home. Athiam’s decision to leave the objects that had been purchased was clearly another aberration of protocol. Regardless of the breach we got back in the cars and headed to the next acara, taking only that first pair of most auspicious jiu
along with us.

I include this story about joining Athiam and his entourage on their annual return to the *kampung halaman* because it was one of the ways that I was able to observe how those who have become “bosses” are able to embody their new social status in their hometown. On that day, I witnessed the ways these individuals receive recognition for their social status through deferential treatment. Through attending this day trip, as well as dozens of other acara within the Chinese community in Singkawang, I came to realize the importance of these hometown returns. These trips home are key sites in which the ideal of becoming a boss is perpetuated. Homecoming fuels social reproduction because within peer-based and class-based interactions individuals who are considered *sudah sukses* (Ind. already successful) and those who are *belum sukses* (Ind. not yet successful) observe one another and confront their respective material realities and forms of power. The wealthier *con Pasang* (Hak. returned home from Jakarta) who visit their birth villages are reminded of their humble origins and of the culture of the village, which they often describe as *kuno* (Ind. old fashioned/traditional) and *kental* (Ind. thick). Alternatively, the villagers see the new styles of the hometown returnees, some of whom are their friends or relatives, and are reminded of the possibilities of becoming wealthy through business pursuits, of the sophistication and cosmopolitanism of living in a metropolis, and of the power to command others and make decisions that go along with the status of being a big boss. Ultimately, these return trips fuel this social reproduction, they are part of the expression of sentiments toward the *kampung halaman*, and the cultivation of a territorially-based sense of belonging.

17 Introduction

In chapter 3, I introduced the Indonesian concept of *kampung halaman* as a territorial metaphor used to identify one’s actual (or imagined) place of origin in a way that contains the social, emotional and nostalgic attachments that one associates with home. The practice of *pulang kampung* (Ind. returning home) is not unique to Chinese Indonesians, but is a social pattern throughout Indonesia. It is linked with a politics of belonging in which all citizens are expected
to have a specific place they are said to come from (Ind. asal dari) in order to be able to claim legitimacy within the imagined multiculturalism of the nation. In this chapter I describe the ways that Hakka Singkawang pulang kampung in order to demonstrate that the concepts of “home” and “away” are intimately connected and mutually constituting. The ways that people pulang kampung illuminate how the concept of home is configured in the imaginations of migrants who often need to experience degrees of social and physical distance from Singkawang before becoming aware of what kampung halaman means for them. Returning is a significant component of migration and mobility (refs). Returns may be physical, virtual, permanent, or sporadic and the ways in which people maintain ties with their kampung halaman range from obligatory to voluntary, emotional to practical, logistical and formal to casual, personal and familial. Hakka Singkawang mobility processes involve many different kinds of returns and focusing on them shed light on some of the ambiguities of merantau.

For migrants from Singkawang, maintaining connections with the kampung halaman takes many forms; people make both planned and unplanned returns home from overseas, which are either permanent, temporary or cyclical. Returns can be either desired, as in the case of returning home to start a business, or undesired, as in the case of being deported from another country. There are annual trips home for Chinese New Year (Hak. Ko Nyian) and Cap Go Meh (Hak. Cang Nyit Ban), short trips home for two annual periods of ancestor worship (Ind. sembahyang kubur; Hakka Kaci), and more sporadic visits for birthday parties for temples and gods, weddings, birthdays, and other large events. In addition to calendar events some people make monthly business trips home to attend to their birds’ nest houses or to take care of other businesses or investments. Another way that people return is by being “called” home (Hak. ham con) from overseas or Jakarta to care for sick or aging parents, or parents who deeply miss their children, or for marriage or to take over a family business. By focusing on these various reasons for returning, we can understand the context in which people construct their mobilities and how changes can take place often spontaneously as they negotiate personal ambitions, different economies, imaginaries of success through business ownership, family relationships, the fantasies and realities of cosmopolitanism, and affective connections with home.

Homecoming is vital to the construction and perpetuation of ideas and imaginaries that make
mobility possible precisely because by returning (whether permanently or from time to time), these individuals become the physical manifestations of what it means to have sojourned. They can display their successes publically and participate in local activities with elevated status. This both allows people to exhibit their affluence, and provides a model for the aspirations of young people. Returning migrants contribute substantially to society locally via their lifestyles, investments, remittances, philanthropic pursuits, their involvement in religious rituals, and participation in local politics and social organizations.

For Hakka Singkawang, merantau is both a fantasy and a reality; it is something many people dream of doing and it is something that many local people have done and continue to do. As presented in chapter 5, the realities of living overseas are often very different from the fantasies of living overseas because migrants end up working low wage labor jobs, living below the poverty line, sending remittances home, and being financially and culturally limited in their ability to develop the cosmopolitan sensibilities needed to live lives resembling those of their initial fantasies. Within the schism between fantasy and reality, economic necessity and voluntary experience-seeking, the prospect of returning to Singkawang takes on greater significance. Decisions about whether or not to return are strongly influenced by alienating experiences overseas. While migrants create their own “cosmopolitanisms from below” to borrow Appadurai’s term (2011), they also construct a form of parochialism for self-preservation, in which home and things from home figure strongly. Just as cosmopolitan fantasies contribute to people’s motivations for going abroad, so too do the limits of people’s ability to realize those fantasies contribute to people’s reasons for returning.

Singkawang exerts a tremendous gravity, which draws people back. This pull is not restricted to those overseas; people who merantau to nearby Jakarta and other places in Indonesia also have a strong desire to return to Singkawang. They entertain elaborate daydreams of a pastoral retirement in the kampung halaman, (which are increasingly actualized by older retired people returning to build villas on the outskirts of town, or live in their family houses in the city center.) If returning permanently is not feasible (or undesired), Hakka Singkawang make frequent trips home instead for a wide variety of purposes, some of which are more formalized than others.
The rate of return and the manner in which people return reveal two powerful imaginaries at play: the first is the idea of leaving Singkawang in pursuit of a better life and the second is the idea of returning to Singkawang in pursuit of a better life. These exist in a productive tension, which fuels mobility, both emigration and homecoming. I first became aware of this tension when I began to hear two seemingly contradictory perspectives repeated to me over and over. First, I was told that “anyone with money will leave Singkawang and go overseas to find a better life”. Then I was also told that “anyone who has money doesn’t need to leave Singkawang to find a better life”. These two ideas represent the space from which people develop concepts of home and away, exist between fantasies and realities, and live in states of “becoming”, becoming a boss, becoming successful. Individuals move back and forth between these two positions, at points looking outward away from Singkawang and at other points looking back toward Singkawang. Clearly these two ideas—that if your wealthy you want to leave and that if your wealth you don’t need to leave—also reflect a person’s position within a gradient of socioeconomic necessity, a person’s stage of life and where a person is located in their journey of merantau. Interestingly, all of my participants, regardless of their socioeconomic position, repeated these statements to me, often using them alternately, at certain times and in certain contexts emphasizing the desire to go overseas, and at other times emphasizing the desire to return home. During conversations about problems in Indonesia, for example, conversations about systemic and entrenched corruption or the fraught position of the Chinese in Indonesian, people more often declared that anyone who has money will want to leave Indonesia to find a better life. In these conversations, my participants often told me about the great exoduses that took place in the 1960s as well as after the riots in May 1998, listing friends or family members who had emigrated to Australia or America or China during those moments of crisis. But for the majority of my participants overseas and in Jakarta, the desire to return to Singkawang because of the pleasures of home was emphasized instead as people explained to me that for anyone who had enough money there was no need to leave Singkawang. Singkawang, I was told by my participants, is a wonderful place to live. Perhaps the best place to live in their estimation. It is a lovely, relaxed place, but terrible for finding money (Hak. an nan chon cim liu; Ind. susah cari uang). While Singkawang is romanticized as the kampung halaman par excellence, one’s ability to be comfortable in Singkawang and enjoy the lifestyle there is determined by one’s economic situation. Thus, people find themselves faced in a situation wherein their aspirations to seek


wealth and success through personal business pursuits are limited by the local conditions; they are thus compelled to merantau in order to pursue this goal. However, because it is primarily within the social space and physical place of Singkawang, as the kampung halaman, that the recognition of having successfully obtained this aspiration is relationally experienced within the Chinese community, many people, once away, try to find ways to return home.

The character of Singkawang, particularly its economic possibilities and limitations, are a mediating force in people’s decision-making about where to work, how to save money, and how to start businesses. Its marginality, both geographically and within the global economy, as well as the very real limits of the local consumer market are a constant frustration for those trying to usaha sendiri (Ind. self-employed). People often have to confront the fact that the ideal of business ownership as superior to other forms of employment—the conclusion that profit is potentially limitless because it is dependent on one’s own labor and one can always work harder to seek more profit—does not apply to the context of Singkawang. No matter how well a shop is stocked, how strategic the location, how competitive the prices, how friendly they are to their customers, the fact remains that there may not be enough customers to make the business viable or profitable. Because of this, people merantau to places that are either more ramai or more marginal. In the case of the latter, the logic is that by opening a business in a remote area, such as a small interior town, or on an outer island, one may corner the market and be able to charge inflated prices. Opening up a frontier area, even if one has limited success, is considered an admirable endeavor, since this is an act of being berani (Ind. brave), taking a risk and khao miang sui (Hak. testing one’s fate).

In addition to the economic characteristics of Singkawang, the practice of leaving and returning, the arc of merantau, is also strongly mediated by particular emotions and states of being, including malu (Ind. shy/embarrassed), sombong (Ind. arrogance) and rindu (Ind. longing), all three of which Johan Lindquist has identified as aspects of the “emotional economy of

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77 Not all social groups view the economic possibilities available in Singkawang in the same way. Many individuals from non-Chinese ethnic groups commented to me that the local market is sudah ramai (Ind. already busy) and sudah maju (Ind. already developed). In recent years, there has been a large scale entry of local Malay and Javanese people into sales and services businesses, as well as many new migrants from Java and Sumatra who have come to Singkawang to sell things as street peddlers (Ind. Padagang Kaki Lima (PKL) five footed trader).
merantau” (2008). These emotions are constantly at play and tightly tangled up in people’s plans and rationalizations for migrating and returning. Feeling embarrassed about one’s lack of success, having to return tangan kosong (Ind. empty-handed), or being alienated because one is perceived as having become sombong (Ind. arrogant) contribute to the ambiguities of merantau. I met Susanto again in Singkawang after he graduated and returned from college in Malaysia. We met at an outdoor snack shop a block away from his house. We sat on a thin wooden bench opposite each other, drinking young coconut milk and eating papaya slices dipped in a mixture of chili powder, salt, and fermented shrimp paste. Susanto told me about his university experience, listing each of his professors by name, explaining the subjects he had taken and telling me what he had learned. I asked him about his plans for the future and he replied as clearly and as confidently as the first time I had met him.

“I have decided that I want to work in China,” he said. “After I have gained experience working in China I want to move to Britain. I want to become a British citizen,” he continued. “Ultimately, I need to make a multinational corporation, with offices in many countries.”

I sat across from him, listening and nodding, trying to visualize how he was going to take the next steps in his life to pursue these ambitions. Susanto’s plans seemed like a stretch to me, a stretch away from his humble origins and a stretch away from the kind of model provided by his friends and peers. Susanto grew up in Singkawang sheltered by parents who would rarely allow him out of the house alone, sleeping all one family in a small room, moving into a shared apartment in Kuala Lumpur, sleeping in a single bed with another Indonesian student, always significantly limited in his daily means, and yet unwavering in his dream of a prosperous cosmopolitan and transnational future.

“You know I just graduated, so I must start to apply for jobs,” he reassured me. “So far I have only applied for jobs in Indonesia. But truly I should look for a job in Malaysia or Singapore.”

“What about looking for a job in China?” I asked.

“It is not easy. I haven’t found any connections yet. Singapore is a bridge. Besides, my mother wants me to go to Singapore because it is closer. Next week I must go to Jakarta for an interview for a job in Jakarta, but you know, Emily, I really don’t want to go. I don’t want to find a job in
Indonesia. I want to move to Singapore.”

“So what are you doing right now?” I asked.

“I am back at home helping my parents in the bakery of course,” he sighed.

A few months later I got a chat message via Facebook from Susanto saying: “Emily, I got a job in Singapore.” I felt so happy for him and we started to chat online more frequently. Using an international recruiting agency to find employment, Susanto had undergone three sets of interviews for a job in Singapore as the social media marketing and networking officer for a small company. After a few weeks I heard more news from him. Once he arrived in Singapore it turned out that he was one of only three employees and that the work was actually strange and challenging for him because, unlike many of his peers, he has a limited social network and is not a frequent user of social media (including Facebook, Twitter, BBM, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.).

Two months later, I stopped at the bakery and asked his father about him. Susanto’s father told me that Susanto had only lasted one month in Singapore before returning to Singkawang again, where he applied for more jobs and finally got an offer in Surabaya, where he is now living.

Susanto’s situation resembles the situation of many of the youths I met, each of whom is trying to figure out how they can contrive to make their specific combination of wealthy or poverty, education, work experience, job opportunities, and family obligations exist in a comfortable harmony that also makes geographic sense. While thinking about the challenges to balancing each of these competing demands I began to list in my mind of all the people I knew in a similar situation.

Vani is from a wealthy family, originally from Singkawang. She was raised in Jakarta for the most part, but she attended high school in Canada. She graduated and went on to university and then worked internationally as a flight attendant for ten years. She is in her mid-thirties now and she is back in Jakarta, living with her family and dating a Chinese man from Singkawang. “It doesn’t matter where I go in the world, it just doesn’t feel like Indonesia. It doesn’t feel like home. It is so much nicer to be at home, even in Jakarta, maybe one of the worst cities in the
world, but that’s my home. Actually I like Canada very much, but I don’t want to stay there. I don’t know why. It’s hard to explain. It just doesn’t feel the same. *Enak tinggal disini* (Ind. it is nice to live here).”

After four years of postsecondary education in England, Afui’s dream of working in Hong Kong or in London has not yet materialized since he’s been unable to find a job or someone to sponsor his working visa. With a degree in international finance, he had hoped to find a good multinational employer but has only been able to find a job working as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant. Finally, after three months of searching, he got a summer internship at a large British bank. At the end of the summer, the bank offered him a job with a five-year contract, which he was very excited about. Without regard for his feelings, his mother forbade him from accepting the offer, saying that the contract was too long and it was too far away. Instead, she called him home (Hak. *ham gie chon*) so that he could help run the family business (which is a common sociocultural pattern for eldest male children in Chinese families) and find a suitable Hakka Singkawang woman to marry. Afui is now back in Singkawang, armed with a foreign education, full English proficiency, skills and experience in international finance, but working in a motor garage.

While in Taiwan, Eli talked constantly about missing Singkawang and her desire to return. She studied for a short period of time and then dropped out in order to work full-time without proper documentation. Finally, she saved enough money to return home, which included the cost of the flight, but also a fee for overstaying her educational visa which had long expired. Once she was back in Singkawang, she only stayed there for ten days! It was too boring, she said. None of her friends were there. There was nothing for her to do. It wasn’t what she had hoped it would be. Now Eli is in Jakarta, working as a Mandarin translator, despite the fact that she never completed her degree and her Mandarin is far from fluent. For her, Jakarta is a halfway point between Singkawang and Taipei. Many of her friends from Singkawang who also worked overseas have returned and decided to continue working in Jakarta. The lifestyle in Jakarta is more like Taipei, she tells me, because there are many places to go out with your friends. “*Singkawang tidak ada apa apa!*” (Ind. *There is nothing in Singkawang.*)
There are many stories like these and the one thing that they reveal are the ways that places and people’s perceptions of places change depending on their own positioning, their own changes in self and changes in status. As people attempt to manifest their dreams into realities, their perspective on the places that they go to, and the place from which they came, are altered as they are transformed by the experiences they have. Youth are frequently in a hurry to be free of family constraints, to leave the village, to become more independent, to have their own income, to pursue an education, to have experience living alone, or living overseas, and these desires compel them to confront their fears and merantau. Later, from the position of living overseas, the parts of home that they like and that they miss come into focus and form the basis of their nostalgia and rindu. They may long for unexpected things; they may long for things which they formerly thought they disliked and wanted to get away from. In other instances, they may find that the freedom they gained by living at a distance from family and the kampung halaman is too short-lived, that sooner than they would like they are being pressured to return to Singkawang and take up their family obligations once more. Many varieties of these kinds of returns exist and in the following sections I lay out the most common ones. These may be divided into those that are planned and those that are unplanned.

18 Planned Returns

18.1 *Sudah Sukses belum?* (Ind. Already Successful, or not yet?)

A large part of my research involved following people to the places where they merantau. On one such occasion, I went to meet with a family from Singkawang who had relocated to Yogyakarta. During my visit with the family, who had been living in Yogyakarta for over 25 years, they met up with an old friend and classmate from Singkawang who was passing through Yogyakarta on a holiday. I happened to be there at the time and I got to listen in on a conversation between Frank, my host in Yogyakarta, and Thomas, his old school friend.

Thomas: “Where is your older brother?”
Frank: “He’s in Jakarta.”

Thomas: “Is he already successful or not yet? (Ind. *sudah sukses belum?*)”

Frank: “Already successful. He too opened a photocopy business.”

The manner in which people return is an expression of their ability to manifest their plans and transform their goals into realities. Successful return is often enumerated in terms of material wealth and one’s ability to build success through independent business activities. “*Sudah sukses, belum?*” is one of the axiomatic ways in which people inquire about the wealth and social status of others.

Hendra stayed in Korea for nine years, and his mother even came and visited him while he was living there, but he always planned to return to Singkawang. His goal was always clear: to save enough money to start a business in Singkawang. Upon his return, he quickly opened a small café in the front of his family’s house and married a local Chinese woman. He made me a fresh avocado milk shake when I arrived at his café and his wife and mother both came over and sat with me at one of the low tables covered in a bright plastic tablecloth with photos of tropical fruit. Hendra had nothing negative to say. According to him and his mother, his sojourn had been successful. He had done exactly what he set out to do. Now he is married and his wife is expecting their first child.

On the other side of town, in a much larger shop house Akim sat at a desk behind a glass display cases. This storefront is also his office and his house. Wedding photos, glamour shots, and professional baby portraits line the walls and other trinkets and decorations have been carefully placed throughout the space to personalize and embellish the otherwise plain white walls. Like Hendra, Akim has returned to Singkawang triumphant, with enough capital to open this shop. However, it was not always easy. He spent the better part of ten years struggling and working for other people in Jembatan Lima, Jakarta. There were many times he had to go without food and borrow money just to pass the days. Only after he joined with a more successful boss did he start
to better his circumstances and was able to start saving money. Once he had saved enough, he returned to Singkawang, bought the shop house, and opened the electronic store. Not long afterward, he got married and began to have children.

Returning “successful”, that is returning with something to show for one’s *merantau*, whether education, experience, or capital, is widely considered the ideal way to return. Many of the participants in this study specifically planned to return from Jakarta and overseas only once they had saved enough money to *dan sa co* (Hak. work for themselves) in Singkawang. Not everyone is capable of returning in this manner and some must return who are still in the state of *belum sukses* (Ind. not yet successful).

### 18.1.1 *Pulang malu* (Ind. Return home shy/embarrassed)

I saw a small bus on the road leading south out of Singkawang with the name *pulang malu* painted in large, bright, stylized letters over the windshield. I told a friend of mine who runs a coffee shop about the name of the bus. She said, “You know what that means, right?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

She said, “It means that you return without success, without anything to show for your *merantau*.”

As Lindquist has shown, in relation to his discussion of the role of *malu* (embarrassment, shyness) in the emotional economy of *merantau*, the dream of a triumphant homecoming, in which one returns successful and wealthy is foremost in people’s imaginations when they migrate (2008). To *pulang malu* is the opposite of *sudah sukses*, it means to *pulang tangan kosong* (Ind. go home empty-handed) with nothing to show for one’s *merantau* and it is a state that people struggle to avoid. The ways that people plan their returns, therefore, take place in relation to the degrees of pride and embarrassment that they experience, or that they perceive they will encounter from friends and family back home.
Despite trying to avoid having to *pulang malu*, in actuality many people are forced to return well before they have anything to show for their *merantau*. Frequently, this is due to difficulty finding work overseas, or the work is poorly paid, or they gamble too much, or they spend too much money. In such cases, the newly returned might feel sheepish about coming back to Singkawang and having to face their friends and family. They might not want to have a party, might be slow to go out and see their friends, or might not tell anyone that they have come home at all. Those in this position might try to make immediate plans to go away again, but to a new destination, perhaps across the border to Malaysia or Brunei, or rather than come all the way back to Singkawang, they find a friend to stay with in Jakarta and look for a job there. Those who *pulang malu* do not necessarily want to admit their failure is a result of any personal lifestyle choices and so they have a series of complaints about the conditions overseas to explain their lack of success.

The kind of embarrassment experienced by those who come home because they have been arrested, fined, and deported for working illegally overseas is a bit different. Even if they return empty-handed, these individuals are considered brave risk takers and their failure to make money is explained away by the fact of their deportation. Being arrested and deported is considered part of their fate and as such is beyond their control. Every migrant working illegally overseas has a story about avoiding the police, or being caught and arrested. While some of the participants I interviewed were *malu* about these incidents, others were happy to share them, explaining the circumstance in great detail, outlining the sequence of events step-by-step, recalling their emotional states with vivid detail. For these individuals, those stories are part of their *cari pengalaman* (Ind. search for experience).

19 Unplanned Returns

19.1 *Ham Con* (Hak. Called Home)
The first time I met Hendro I was hiking at Luban San (Hak. Mount Roban). It was 4:30 p.m. and crowded with people getting their daily exercise. Early in the morning and in the afternoon right before sunset are the busiest times at Mount Roban, a forested hill by the side of the road on the eastern route out of Singkawang heading to Monterado and Bengkayang. There are old people, young people, groups of friends, solo enthusiasts, and couples all hiking. I made a habit when I first arrived in Singkawang of bearing the tropical heat and going to the mountain as frequently as possible. The 45-minute hike up and down the steep slope through the jungle leaves one breathless and dripping with sweat but the traffic of hikers on the path is encouraging. As a foreigner, and the only foreigner to take the hike up the mountain, I was constantly stopped and asked “Dari mana?”—Where are you from? —a simple question that inevitably led to introductions, taking photographs, and making new friends. But on this particular day a voice called from behind me not in Indonesian but in English, “Excuse me, where are you from?” It was refreshing to hear. I quickly turned around, introduced myself and began the first of what would become many long conversations with Hendro.

Hendro’s experience is useful for understanding some of the most compelling reasons for returning to Singkawang after living overseas—obligation, family, and rootedness.

Hendro lived in America for five years. He paid an agency in Jakarta to help him with his visa and to help him find work. First, he worked in a Chinese restaurant in LA. He then moved to work in a factory in the Philadelphia area where he later began working as a home care-aid for seniors. He liked living in the United States and he was able to slowly learn English from the elders that he cared for. When he arrived in the USA he was using a one-month tourist visa, but he overstayed and after five years he still did not want to return to Indonesia, so he tried to emigrate. With the help of an expensive immigration lawyer he applied for permanent residency, but his application was rejected. After that he tried to seek asylum arguing that it was not safe as a Chinese person living in Indonesia. Nevertheless, his attempts failed and he was eventually deported, an unfortunate outcome that he and others who have worked in the USA say is a result of the stricter visa and immigration regime of the post-911 context.
After returning to Singkawang for a few years, Hendro moved to Hong Kong. At that time, he already had one sister and one brother living there. His sister had married a Hong Kong man through an arranged marriage several years previously, and his brother, who lives between Hong Kong and Indonesia, was working as a “travel agent” specializing in helping people enter Hong Kong, find illegal employment (Ind. *kerja gelap*) and/or a local husband. Hendro began working with his brother by recruiting people in Singkawang who were interested in going overseas, and then introducing them to his brother, but this didn’t appeal to him. He preferred to leave Indonesia again, so he decided to move to Hong Kong himself. After his arrival, he easily found work again caring for elderly people, a service that is in high demand in Hong Kong and is mostly done by temporary overseas workers from the Philippines and Indonesia. Hendro is singular and atypical in his readiness to do this kind of work. Unlike the majority of my participants, who were not willing to work in a domestic capacity as housekeeper, babysitter, or home care aid, Hendro does not dream of being successful through his own business pursuits and does not want to be independently employed. He likes working as a home care aid and it suits him. He is a kind, patient, polite, and conscientious person, who values health, cleanliness, and order; qualities that are useful and respected in the home care industry.

Hendro and I became regular hiking partners. When the weather was good, he would pick me up on his motorbike and we would make the short trip out to the mountain and then have a vigorous hike, huffing for breath as we talked nonstop up the mountain and down again. Each time he would tell me more about his life and his perspective on Singkawang, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and America. He would introduce me to others on the mountain and we would gossip about local current events.

According to Hendra, Indonesia has many problems. It is neither clean nor safe. His experience overseas makes him even more aware of the regrettable conditions in Indonesia, like the traffic, the pollution, the lack of infrastructure, the corruption, the incompetence of the government and the heat, which he complains about incessantly. He speaks English well, prides himself on being able to adapt to colder climates, and makes a point of wearing good quality, high-end sports utility clothing bought in the US and Hong Kong. He seems to treasure these items, keeping them in impeccable condition by regularly scrubbing and conditioning his sneakers, washing and
ironing his canvas pants, airing out his polypropylene vest and Gore-Tex jacket. His clothing and his critical and comparative perspective about Indonesia, distinguish him as someone who has lived overseas. Hiking with me, the foreigner, on the mountain, speaking English, and wearing good quality Western clothing, was a point of pride for him, and an opportunity to manifest some of the changes he had experienced and status attained from years of living overseas.

The following year I reconnected with Hendro in a suburb in Hong Kong, where he was living. He met me at the subway station and we walked around the neighborhood, through the wet market, passed a bunch of shops on the high street, crossed a few main roads, and then ended up in an open-air courtyard with a stall where we could eat a bowl of wonton noodles and talk more easily. That’s when Hendro first told me about his plan to get married. Although he was already in his forties, Hendro was not yet married and he was getting worried about the fact that he does not have children. “Marriage and children,” he explained, “is natural and everybody wants to do it but I have not found the right person yet.” So, after much deliberation, he decided that he would try to marry a woman he knows from Hong Kong. He had met her at his workplace in Hong Kong. She is a divorcée, which he considers less than ideal, but is a fact he is willing to accept given his circumstances. They talked for a quite a while about the potential marriage. It would not be a love match, but not exactly a marriage of convenience either. It was simply a problem-solving arrangement. He wants to get married and wants to get Hong Kong residency; she would like to rid herself of the stigma of being a divorcée and would like a male companion and someone to partially support her. They had not yet discussed the matter of children, but the assumption was that they would try to have children right away, as they were both aging.

Right before the marriage was going to take place, Hendro’s mother called him home (Hak. ham gie con), a common thing that parents do to their children living away. She was sick at that time. Her husband, Hendro’s father, had passed away many years ago and her other children live in Jakarta and Hong Kong. These children have tried to convince their mother to join them there, but she refuses. She does not want to go to Hong Kong and she is not betah (at home/adapted) in Jakarta. “My sister is successful in Jakarta, she has a big house, she has everything, but still my mother does not want to live there,” Hendro explains. “No, she is certain. She will not be leaving Singkawang. She cannot speak Indonesian, or Mandarin, and she cannot drive a motor cycle or a
car.” His mother spends her days at home, occasionally walking around the neighborhood to see her cronies, or making a trip to the market or the local Chinese temple.

Hendro went directly back to Singkawang, postponing his marriage plans. “I must return,” he said. “There is no one else to look after my mother. I have no choice. She asked me to come home. It is out of my control.” Hendro has another brother in Singkawang who lives in the house with their mother, but according to Hendro, he neglects her. He does not care for her properly. If he did, his mother would not need to call him home. His brother is poor and unemployed, with a wife and three children, and he has a temper. “He has abused our own mother!” Hendro tells me in horror, his voice shaking with a combination of anger and sadness. “Can you imagine? He struck our own mother! I hate him. He is a really bad person.”

Now that Hendro is back he looks after his mother diligently. He takes her to the doctor, oversees her medications, takes her to the market, and most importantly he talks with her. “My brother and his wife never talked to her,” he said. Hendro’s company and care are a great comfort to his mother.

What does it mean to be “called home”? How does the prospect and the act of being called home effect the lives of people who merantau overseas? How does being called home influence people’s relationship with Singkawang, the kampung halaman, as well as the away places that they make their temporary homes? How does the specter of the parent’s power and ability to call their children home influence the way that people make plans, form attachments, and build lives overseas?

There is a tension between acting independently, going out to meet one’s destiny, becoming successful by one’s own undertakings on the one hand, and going along with the decisions, plans and wishes of one’s parents on the other. These tensions are felt throughout life, but arise most clearly when big life decisions are being made, such as choosing the location and major for university, choosing a marriage partner, and choosing where (in the world and in Indonesia) to live. People are ambivalent about the extent to which parents insert themselves in their lives and
exercise power and influence over their decisions. This ambivalence, like the discussion in previous chapters, is reflected in the way that people explain their lives, sometimes supporting the system of strict filial piety that they are a part of, other times criticizing it and rebelling against it, but they are always, nonetheless, implicated.

After returning to Singkawang to look after his mother, I met up with Hendro and we talked again. He said that his marriage plans were now not just postponed but canceled indefinitely. “My mother has blocked my future,” he said dejectedly. “I like my hometown, but I would rather live overseas, find a better life and just come home every year or two years.”

“I thought you and your siblings were going to find someone to take care of your mother?” I asked.

“She doesn’t want that,” he said. “She has blocked my future,” he repeated again.

“Can’t you convince her to let you go back to Hong Kong again?” I asked.

“Mother controls her son, son always has to listen to mother…you know my culture, you know how it is,” he said.

On a separate occasion, Hendro described what his life in the United States was like. He didn’t like working in the restaurant or the factory, so he became a home care aid and a housekeeper. He really liked that kind of work because the people were so nice to him. “The people liked me because I treated them like they were my own parents. They trusted me. They gave me keys to their house and even their ATM cards to take out money for them,” he told me. These examples provided proof that he had treated them very well, respectfully and as family. In his own words, he treated them “like his own parents”.

A year after returning from Hong Kong to look after his mother in Singkawang, after being forced to cancel his marriage plans, Hendro was planning an overseas vacation. His mother was supposed to go to Jakarta to stay with his wealthy sister while he was away for two weeks. At the last minute, she decided that she did not want to go to Jakarta and Hendro felt he had no choice
but to cancel his vacation. I asked him if he was upset. He said, “I am disappointed, but my mother is more than everything to me.”

People alternate between being critical of the parental control over their major life decisions, and accepting of it. They recognize and accept their position in the hierarchy of the family while complaining about it at the same time. Regardless of one’s personal reactions, among Hakka Singkawang more generally, the family remains a strong institution influencing people’s mobility and decision-making. The friction between independence and filial duty is an element of being a part of a family that all members must negotiate. Parents often encourage their children to work or study overseas, and often try to move to those places to live with their children. By doing so, they attempt to do their part in accommodating their aspirations, aspirations that they have themselves helped to nurture. For all that, the fact remains that older adults prefer to be in Singkawang. This is widely recognized and constantly talked about. Parents who join their adult children in Jakarta and overseas often cannot tahan (Ind. endure) and eventually return to Singkawang.

Hendro’s story exemplifies the demands and needs of elderly ailing parents but people are called home for several other reasons as well. Overseas trips or periods of time working in Jakarta are often undertaken with the explicit knowledge that these sojourns may be interrupted. Children are often given the opportunity and the permission of their parents to go overseas for university with the understanding that it will be a temporary period of freedom. This is a critical time of youthful exploration when children who are becoming adults are encouraged to become independent, find experience, and gather worldly knowledge before being called home. After these youthful sojourns children are expected to take on larger adult responsibilities such as taking over a family business, starting a business of their own, getting married and starting a family. These "returns" depend on the desires and expectations of parents as well as the ambitions and capabilities of the children. Older siblings, particularly and traditionally the eldest son, may be given priority to merantau, after which younger siblings can take their turns, provided resources are available and they have the ambition. These sojourns are often staggered so that there are always some children at home to be with the parents and work in the family businesses. In larger families, the pressure to return is spread out more among many siblings, but
the resources are also stretched, resulting in many children traveling to work in Jakarta and overseas with family connections, but otherwise little financial support.

19.1.1 Giving Other Siblings a Turn

Maria was called home from the United States after living there for five years. She had gone there on a tourist visa, applied to a university and then changed to a student visa. After graduation she was allowed to work for a year before needing to reapply for a visa. This was before 9/11, when the visa regime was less strict than it is now. Maria liked living in the US and would have continued to live there, but she was instructed to return home in order to give her younger brother the opportunity to go overseas to study. Despite being young and healthy, her parents didn’t want all of their children so far away from Singkawang at the same time. They wanted at least one of their children at home at any given time. Maria came back to Singkawang and started to teach English, based on the experience and credentials she gained while studying in the United States.

Meanwhile her brother, Thomas, graduated from senior high school as well as from a private Mandarin high school and received a scholarship from a local social development organization called PERMASIS (Ind. Perkumpulan Masyarakat Singkawang dan Sekitarnya) to study Mandarin in Guangzhou. The terms of his scholarship stipulated that after graduating from a four-year Mandarin teacher-training program he must return to Singkawang and work as a Mandarin teacher in a local school for a minimum of five years. Thomas has been back in Singkawang for two years and is teaching in a small Mandarin school in a rural suburb of Singkawang. He lives at home with his parents, while Maria, who is already married and has a young child, lives in a separate household with her nuclear family.

19.1.2 Taking Over a Family Business
Encouraging children to get a university education, particularly in a foreign country, has become a specific cultural priority for middle class Hakka Singkawang. This is based on a long established cultural priority for Chinese in Southeast Asia to fund their children’s postsecondary education. It also resembles similar patterns of intergenerational educational achievement and family immigration patterns the world over. Older generations of Hakka Singkawang, those who had their primary educational experiences during the colonial period, World War II, or the Sukarno and Suharto eras had different educational experiences than their children and grandchildren, both in terms of the level of education as well as educational priorities. People of older generations in Singkawang tell me that in the past, education and employment were more closely aligned, such that one who trained to be a lawyer, usually became a lawyer, and one who trained to be a doctor, usually became a doctor. But in recent years one’s education and one’s employment often to do not align and are sometimes at odds with one another.

In today’s context foreign education is primarily valued for its prestige, for the potential to expand one’s social network, as a youthful rite of passage and time of freedom, and experience-seeking. Receiving a university education in a foreign country becomes a form of social status for those youths. Their parents have the prestige of being financially and socially capable of sending them overseas. The actual knowledge and skills acquired through one’s education, I have been told by my participants, are in fact secondary priorities.

While many youths are encouraged and pressured to study overseas and study career-oriented subjects such as business, economics, commerce, international trade, and accounting, for example, they are also frequently asked to come home and take over the family business. The disadvantage of this is that many homegrown businesses have little relationship with the knowledge or skills acquired at university. This constitutes one common type of dilemma, the problem of being overeducated and overqualified to take over a shop house trading business, and yet being deeply embedding in familial relationships based on duty and expectations. In her study of overseas students, Robertson argues that this group of “middling transnationals” increasingly experience complex contradictions between class status, labour market engagement and family obligation (2013), and must make creative arrangements to balance each of these aspects of their lives.
Despite the prevalence of calling young people home to take over small businesses, the opposite sort of situation also exists. Parents and children often imagine that their foreign degrees, most of which are granted from third tier universities in small cities in America, Canada, UK, Malaysia, and Australia, will easily translate into lucrative and high-level jobs in international finance in cosmopolitan urban centers in Asia or the West. The idea is that business school, or a degree in accounting will open doors, based on the credentials and the social network one has been able to establish, if not based on knowledge and skills one has obtained through study. We are reminded of Susanto’s situation, but also Afui’s situation. Susanto expected it to be easy to find a job in international business in China directly after graduating from university in Malaysia. Unfortunately, he discovered that he did not have the necessary connections, and that the reputation of the university he had studied at did not have the kind of prestigious association attached to it abroad that it has in the context of Singkawang and Indonesia. Afui, on the other hand, who eventually had a good opportunity to pursue a career in the banking sector in London, was not allowed to do so because he was obliged to return home to take over the family business, find a wife, and start a family. All of which took familial precedence over his own career aspirations.

Calvin is in his late twenties, but when I first met him he had just returned from business school in the United States. His father has run a profitable building materials shop in Bengkayang for all of his adult life. Although Calvin’s father never finished primary school, he has managed to amass a large fortune. He owns several properties, many birdhouses, the material store, and has sent two of his four children to university overseas. The second time I met Calvin I went to talk with him in the shop. He was sitting on a stool behind a high counter, instructing one of his anak buah to move boxes of nails from one side of the store to a new shelving system that he had recently designed on the other side of the shop. On this occasion I asked him specifically about the disconnect I perceived between his level of education, his educational specialization, and his daily employment in this shop.

“I’m confused because you went to an expensive business school in the US, but now you are back here working in your father’s shop. Why?”
“Hahaha. I know. It doesn’t make sense, right? But the thing is that for Indonesians we want to come home because you can live well here if you have money. If you have money here, you can do whatever you want. I can do things here I can’t do other places. Like here, I just go get a jeep and go out into the jungle or go fishing or get some crabs or go and find some sea turtle eggs. Everything is free and easy here if you have money.”

“But what about your business degree?”

“The thing about Indonesia is that it is such a large market. All you have to do is introduce one new thing into Indonesia and if you can get people to buy it, you will be a millionaire. That is what I plan to do. I need to bring one new thing here and sell it.”

“Oh, I see. So, what do you want to introduce?” I asked.

“I don’t know yet.” Calvin shrugged.

Sometimes parents and children like to fantasize about how their foreign degrees will lead to high-status jobs internationally. It often is the case that during the time that children are away at university, parents miss them and begin to hope for their return, and the children miss home and begin to re-imagine their futures back in Indonesia. The discourse that I encountered with returned migrants, as well as the groups of migrants I met in Taiwan, was full of the language of longing for home. A language also often represented in Hakka songs and films about Singkawang. If this happens, then those earlier hopes in which parents encouraged their children to find work in Hong Kong or London or Sidney, give way to the realization that they would rather their children pulang kampung indefinitely. The benefit of this kind of merantau is being able to enjoy the time away without getting too attached to the freedom of the away place and then being able to pulang kampung and reintegrate into the household without too much struggle. This sentiment is inherent in another participant’s explanation of the process of returning:

“I’ve been back from Malaysia for six months now. At first, it was really strange to come back. Everything was different. Nevertheless, I felt that I could still accept Singkawang. I hadn’t changed so much that I couldn’t live here anymore, like some of my school friends. At first I was very bored and felt that there was nowhere to go
and nothing to do, but now I am used to it again. Besides, I have a goal. I must help
my father. I must learn all about the gold-mining business and take care of all of our
assets.”

(Lukas, 26, Singkawang)

19.1.3 Getting married

Another common reason to *pulang kampung* is to try to find a suitable marriage partner. Among
Hakka Singkawang, there is a strong preference to marry within the dialect group, and if not
within the dialect group, to marry other Chinese Indonesians. While marriage across ethnic and
religious lines does occur with some frequency, the majority of marriages in Singkawang take
place within one’s ethnic and dialect group. Malay, Dayak, Madurese, and other communities
have the same pattern. This is a cultural pattern that is also perpetuated via Indonesian marriage
laws, which stipulate that only members of the same religion may marry. In the context of the
Chinese family in Singkawang, the issue of ethnicity and religion are seldom talked about, but
always implicit. While there are some parents who strongly discourage or forbid their children
from dating people of other ethnicities, choices about dating and marriage are a result of a much
subtler forms of socialization by family and peers.

The traditional Chinese family is patrilineal and patrilocal; wives adopt the surnames of their
husbands, join their husband’s family and lineage, and conduct the ancestor rites for their
husband’s relatives. Because of this, it is often the case that more care is taken to ensure that a
son choose a suitable wife, than a daughter choose a suitable husband. Ultimately, it is the
daughter-in-law, not the daughter, who may live with the husband’s parents and may end up
caring for them when they are old. Be that as it may, because Singkawang is a small city and a
close-knit society, daughters find it easy to maintain close relationships with their maternal
families, even continuing to live with them after marriage if the conditions are suitable.

As with other large decisions, choosing a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife is strongly
influenced by the authority of parents and permission is usually required. While the extent to
which parents are involved in and monitor their adult children’s romantic relationships is
individually variable, there is near universal recognition that parental consent ought to be sought
before marriage plans take place. This is an explicit part of the Chinese marriage *adat* and is represented in the Chinese wedding rites, including picking up the bride (Ind. *jemput pengantin wanita*; Hak. *hi ng ka theu*) and the tea ceremony (Ind. *minum teh*; Hak. *kong cha*).

19.2 Maintaining connections with the *Kampung Halaman*

In addition to the people who return and those who *pulang kampung* after periods of sojourning in Jakarta and overseas, there are also thousands of Hakka Singkawang who remain living away and continue to maintain strong connections with the *kampung halaman*. Whether for social or business reasons, to participate in local politics, to initiate local development project, to invest in temple building and renovating, or to seek spiritual guidance, the constant influx of these hometown returnees constitutes a major mobility dynamic in Singkawang. It is one of the main channels through which new ideas, industries, technologies, investments, and imaginaries emerge, spread, and influence the local community. Frequent hometown visiting, perhaps more than permanently returning to Singkawang, has become the most prevalent circuit of mobility, particularly among upwardly mobile Hakka Singkawang who conduct business in Jakarta.

19.2.1 Imlek (Ind. Chinese New Year) and Cap Go Meh (Hok. End of Chinese New Year)

The story that started this chapter is about displays of social status by hometown returnees on the occasion of the annual Cap Go Meh festival—the fifteenth day of the first lunar month—which marks the end of Chinese New Year. Many people return home to Singkawang for Chinese New Year and stay until Cap Go Meh, which over the last decade has developed into a national and international event. In the following chapter, I explain how Singkawang natives who return home for Cap Go Meh are also becoming involved in local politics. In this chapter I focus on the productive aspects of these hometown returns for the construction of the concept of Singkawang as the *kampung halaman*, the maintenance of family and friend relationships and the system of
social reproduction that drive youth to seek upward mobility through mobility and enterprise. The kinds of return trips home that I discuss below represent occasions for the experience and performance of affective connections to the territorial conceptualization of the *kampung halaman*, and as such are part of the social construction of the place. The rituals that take place during these returns are related to the idea of traditional Chinese culture which is linked to Hakka Singkawang claims to autochthonous origins, that create forms of legitimacy of being in place and social space within the current politics of indigeneity in Indonesia.

**San Kheu Jong Ngai Thi Fong**

Ko nyian thai ka chi to an jiu thau,  
Chin chit phen jiu ceu ko thi fong lun cung sim siong con loi liau  
Ngai thi fong het san kheu jong, ngai chut se choi san kheu jong  
Sui jan ceu ko thi kong sim han siong con san kheu jong  
San kheu jong li an jiu thau, thi fong phai to cui ho liao  
Kong nyl hi ngai thi fong: cui ciang cui ho che san keu jong

**Singkawang My Place**

At Chinese New Year everyone feels happy,  
Family, friends and everyone gone abroad thinks about wanting to come home for the holiday  
My place is in Singkawang, my birthplace is in Singkawang  
Even if I go to another region, my heart still thinks about returning home to Singkawang  
Here in Singkawang it’s really nice, an area which can be counted as the nicest for relaxation  
Say you are going to my place: the most beautiful, the best is Singkawang

The excerpt above is from Chinese New Year song about Singkawang which expresses a sense of connection and affection for the hometown. *Ko Nyian* (Hak. Chinese New Year) is the most important annual event for Hakka Singkawang. An observation of the activities and the interpretations that take place reveals the primacy of the family within Chinese society in Singkawang and in Indonesia in general. *Ko Nyian*, first and foremost, is an occasion to reunite with family members, and New Year’s Eve (Hak. *sam sip bu am*) is inevitably spent eating a special feast with one’s nuclear or extended family. During this time, the streets of Singkawang are noticeably changed as women who have married in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as those who are working and studying overseas and in Jakarta return home in great numbers to be with

[78] The video for this song can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zkt8XEvu9LQ, accessed May 2015. The full text is transcript in Appendix 1: Singkawang song.
their families. The priority to spend time with family is not merely about experiencing the comforts and joy of being at home, although that is one aspect. Rather, gathering with family is about observing Ko Nyian in a correct and auspicious way. The moment in time that is marked as Ko Nyian is a sensitive moment in which certain spiritual energies are seen to be in flux. This is based on Chinese astrology and on the potentialities for future luckiness and unluckiness. Many people in Singkawang, long beforehand, are already avidly awaiting the arrival of Ko Nyian, particularly if they have not had many good experiences over the previous year, or, worse still, have had bouts of unluckiness. Reuniting with family for Chinese New Year is perhaps best seen as a method of observing the proper adat required to usher in the New Year in the most propitious way. It is not necessarily indicative of closeness among kin. It is the sanctity of the family as the primary unit of social organization, rather than love of family members, which is upheld by the traditional Chinese New Year celebration.

During the New Order, public celebrations of Chinese New Year were officially banned, lion dances and dragon parades were strictly forbidden, and Chinese Indonesian families were forced to limit their celebrations to their homes or temple grounds. All that changed in 2000 when Gus Dur removed the discriminatory legislation. The following year Megawati went further and declared Chinese New Year a national holiday. After this rapid about-face, Tahun Baru Imlek exploded into a major national event with festivities taking place in exhibition centers, malls, and banquet halls in all the major cities in Indonesia. During this period the scale and public celebrations of Ko Nyian also grew in Singkawang. After 2007 and the election of Hasan Karman, the first ethnic Chinese mayor, not only the day, but the entire season leading up to and around Chinese New Year took on spectacular proportions with an enormous array of fancy and colorful decorations, cakes, and new clothing being imported and sold.

Ko Nyian is a celebratory time of year, full of entertainment and indulgence in eating, drinking, and gambling. Friends and family gather together, people return home and seek out all of their favorite foods, friends, family members, and places. It is commonly believed that to celebrate Chinese New Year in the proper way, one ought to receive guests respectfully and generously, pay visits to those within one’s social network, hand out money-filled red envelopes to children, have a sense of charity with others in need, don at least one new piece of clothing and also
carefully mind one’s speech and behavior. The intentionality of conducting the holiday in this way is not merely about having a joyful holiday, but is also specifically meant to promote luck and prosperity for the year to come. As with other Chinese celebrations and rituals, there are certain *adat* that must be followed. Whereas Chinese New Year has a great deal more room for flexibility and individual variation, the rites that take place during the period of grave cleaning and worshipping are governed by a standardized set of procedures.

19.2.2 Grave Worshipping (Ind. *Sembahyang Kubur*; Hak. *Kaci*)

“He’s here. They’re all here,” Apheng said as he quickly opened a few more cans of beer and placed them on the grave next to the rice, meat, and cake.

“Who’s here?” I asked.

“Akong, Amak, all of them. It’s *ramai*. They are having a party,” he replied. We all stood around the gravestones sipping bottled water in the early-morning heat, having a family reunion with the deceased relatives. Apheng can talk to the spirits of his ancestors. He knows when they are around, and not only on this occasion—the grave cleaning and ancestor worshipping ceremony (Ind. *sembahyang kubur*; Hak. *kaci*)—but at other times as well. *Kaci* is a time when the spirits of the ancestors are present and commune with the living. They eat together, and talk together. So having the ability to communicate with the spirits (which by no means all people possess) is a particularly good skill to have on this occasion.

Several times a year the streets of Singkawang are filled with the color red. This occurs most lavishly and most dramatically during the lead up to Chinese New Year, but during the mid-autumn festival (Hak. *pat nyiat pan*), and the two annual periods of *kaci* there are also colorful holiday signs. For the mid-autumn festival, it is the display of moon cakes and other seasonal treats in fancy red-and-gold packaging that line the tables of storefronts, giving the city a festive atmosphere. During *kaci*, which takes place during the first two weeks of the third and the seventh months of the lunar calendar, respectively, it is also the incense shops, of which Singkawang has many, that stock large quantities of special grave-worshipping supplies. The
most basic supplies are candles, incense, altar adornments, and hand-folded paper money, which are available all year-round. During kaci, you can also find packages of paper clothing, paper glasses, paper slippers, paper bicycles, paper houses, and, more recently, paper cell phones, computers, tablets, and iPhones. There are fancy shoes and Western-style suits for the more modern and more recently deceased relatives; but there are also tiny slippers suitable for women with bound feet and sets of traditional pajamas available for the older, more traditionally clad ancestors. Some of these outfits are locally made in a kind of small (paper) garment industry, while others are imported from Jakarta, Medan, and China.

I woke up before the sunrise, around 4:00 a.m., and went to my neighbors’ house, where they were already packing up two vehicles with the objects they had prepared for kaci: food, candles, incense, dishes, drinks, and clear plastic bags full of folded paper money, both gold and silver. Once everything was packed, we squeezed into the cars around the objects, tying the remaining bags of paper money to the roof, and drove off to the graveyard on the outskirts of the city. It was early in the morning but there was already a lot of activity. The graveyard is in a large open field surrounded by small mountains and a forest, and large semicircular Chinese graves dotted every few meters. Cars were coming and going; families were arriving and unpacking their supplies. Here and there candles were being lit in the darkness, which was fading quickly as the sun was rising. I helped my neighbors unpack the car, placing things neatly in a pile on the paving stones in front of the grave of their grandfather (Hak. Akong). “What can I do? Can I help?” I asked.

“Just watch, take photos, and ask me anything you like,” my neighbor said, characteristically conscientious of my ethnographic goals and my role as an observer.

I sat on the edge of the stone grave in candlelight and started taking notes and photographs. Everyone was immediately busy. The men were using machetes to cut away the remaining grass from around the gravestones. The thicker, taller grass had been cut away the previous day by a couple of local Madurese boys who hang around at the Chinese cemeteries during Kaci in order to make some money. While the men cut the grass the women began unpacking a box filled with foods that had been cooked specially for this ceremony. They arranged the altar meal thoughtfully and precisely according to a specific design. Candles were placed on either side,
then a bowl of three kinds of fruit to one side. On the other side they placed a cake. This is a large white fluffy cake with bright pink stripes (Hak. *hi kao ban*) that looks like it has exploded because of a strong leavening agent. It is meant to symbolize increased prosperity for the future, I was told. Then tiny thimble-sized glasses are placed in the center, as many as there are ancestors to be included in the ritual. And there are drinks for them as well; tea, coffee, and rice wine, which will be used in the ceremony. But these drinks are really according to their tastes; some ancestors only drink coffee, others only tea, and some prefer beer, in which case a few cans will be opened up and placed on the grave along with the meal. In front of the glasses are bowls of rice with chopsticks. Again the number of bowls depends on how many ancestors will be eating. In front of the rice, in the most central and prominent position, are the meats, which must include the following varieties: a whole boiled chicken, along with its organs, some fatty pork meat, some tofu, and a few hard-boiled eggs. In addition to this, there are a variety of snack foods, such as crackers and deep-fried spring rolls.

While the women meticulously set the food in place, my neighbor tended to the back of the grave. He stuck incense sticks into the ground around the semicircular perimeter, as though building a fence out of incense around the earth mound. Inside this half circle, on top of the freshly cut grass behind the gravestone, he scattered hundreds of sheets of small yellow paper money, energetically throwing bundles up into the air and watching them fall randomly over the earth mound. Once the perimeter was marked, the money strewn, and the foods arranged, they moved to a smaller grave-shaped altar next to the grandfather’s grave. This is an altar for the local earth god (Ind. *Dewa Bumi*; Hak. *Tho Thi Pak Kung*) and it must also be prepared for the ritual with altar adornments, two red candles, a bowl of fruit, a *hi kao ban*, tea, and rice wine.

The ritual began by burning incense to *Tho Thi Pak Kung* and asking him to invite the ancestors to this occasion. After he has gone and fetched their spirits, he is asked again if the ceremony may be performed (i.e. whether the ancestors have arrived or not). To do this, my neighbor’s mother-in-law, who is the eldest and most experienced in these ritual matters, tossed two objects up into the air and watched them fall. These are divination blocks (Hak. *sin kao*), usually red and half-moon shaped, but in this case, in the absence of actual *sin kao*, she used two sticks that she found on the ground near the grave. I knew from previous experiences at temples that these are
used to ask for permission from the gods to do things. They are thrown up in the air and if they land both face up or down then the answer is yes, and one may proceed with the request. If a negative result is given, some choose to immediately ask again and throw again until they are given permission to carry on, while others prefer to wait a few minutes and then try again. Sometimes achieving permission is difficult. If, after many requests and many tosses of the *sin kao* the sign to go ahead is still not given, it may be decided to cancel the ritual for that day, although this is rare. What is more likely is that the ancestors have not arrived yet, so the ritual cannot proceed, or some aspect of the preparations has not yet been satisfied fully. The position of altar objects may be checked again, more incense added to the perimeter, more grass cut away from the gravestones, or a final sweeping of the stone platform in front of the altar.

The *sin kao* gave permission to proceed with the ritual on the first try. The eldest started first. She lit incense and prayed at the altar to *Tho Thi Pak Kong*, then prayed at the grave of the grandfather. After she had placed her incense in the small urn in front of the grave, she opened the bottles of tea and rice wine and began filling the glasses, a small amount at a time, as though serving a guest. Meanwhile, the next eldest person had already started to pray to *Tho Thi Pak Kong*, and she was now moving over to Akong’s grave. As she stooped to pray with her incense, she mumbled some words and knelt there for a long time, speaking under her breath, as though confiding in someone quietly and secretly. When she was finished, she placed her incense in the urn and then began to fill the glasses with beverages, also serving the ancestors. Then it was my neighbor’s turn. He followed the same method as his aunt and mother. Finally, it was my turn. I lit the incense and bowed in front of the altar to *Tho Thi Pak Kung*, then I knelt and found a spot to place the stick of incense in the sandy ashes. I tried to take my time, doing everything carefully and precisely, as they had each done. I went over to Akong’s grave and did the same thing, lit the incense, prayed, knelt before the grave, bowed, and then placed the incense in the central urn among the other. “Should I pour drinks?” I asked.

“It is ok, you don’t need to,” my neighbor replied, so I refrained.

The women sat waiting next to the grave while the ancestors were eating and drinking and my neighbor started pouring the bags of paper money into two huge piles, one pile of gold paper
money for Tho Thi Pak Kung and another pile of silver paper money for his Akong. Akong’s pile was strewn with small yellow circular papers with red writing, as well as large folded sheets of yellow and silver paper. Once lit, these piles of paper money burst into a bright hot smoky fire and burned quickly down to ashes. The women began packing up the food and I was told we were going to the grave of another ancestor.

As they were preparing the second grave, I decided to take a walk around the cemetery. While walking between the graves I met a young man from Jakarta and stopped to talk with him briefly. He has an electronic store in Mangga Dua Mall. He told me that he had gone to Jakarta six years ago to cim liu and cari kehidupan lebih bagus, but he returns home to Singkawang three times a year, twice for kaci and once for Chinese New Year. “Why did you move to Jakarta?” I asked.

“Singkawang is nice for living, but Jakarta is nice for finding money,” he said.

“Do you ever miss Singkawang?” I followed up.

“Of course, I will definitely come back here one day,” he replied.

I walked further and met some police officers that I already knew quite well. They were on duty, keeping peace and order in the Chinese cemetery on this busy morning. As I chatted with them another man approached me. He introduced himself in English and said that he has been living in Los Angeles for five years. He rarely has the opportunity to return home, but when he does, he always comes home for Kaci. This time he said that he is staying for six months. He wants to be home for Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh, as well.

I was called back over to the grave of my neighbor’s ancestor, this time the grave of his grandmother. We were joined by two other women, another aunt and one of his cousins. They are also from Singkawang, but have moved to Kuching, Malaysia. The aunt is a traditional Chinese folk medicine doctor (Hak. sinse) who specializes in healing children considered susceptible to a variety of local childhood illnesses caused by exposure to elements, spirits, and ghosts. She has a clinic in her old home, down the street from where I lived, but because she has joined her daughter to live in Kuching, she only pulang kampung once a month to open her
Her healing powers and techniques have been passed down to her from her father, and as far as she knows she is the fifth generation of *sinse* in her family. She invited me to come to her house and watch her cure children using a special technique in which shallots, ginger, and other items are rubbed over the skin (*Hak. tiao*). She told she uses an old book, written in Mandarin, which was brought to Indonesia by her ancestor (Ind. *nenek moyang*) as a reference for her remedies and techniques and invited me to come and see it.

*Kaci* is an occasion for a communal meal with the family, just like *Ko Nyian*, only this meal also includes deceased ancestors. To care for your ancestors by offering food, drink and material possessions (in the form of burnt paper offerings) is a way of expressing respect for those who are responsible for one’s being. Within the idealized Chinese family, adults are required to care for and look after their children, and in turn, children are obligated to care for their parents, grandparents, and ancestors. To conduct *kaci* properly is an expression of the sanctity and continuity of this hierarchical family structure and clan line. After witnessing the grave cleaning and ancestor worship ceremony several times, I became more interested in discovering how widespread and diligently it was actually conducted. So I began to inquire with my participants during non-*kaci* times of year. “Could you imagine not doing *kaci*?” I would ask.

“No. We must do it,” was the most common retort.

“But what if you can’t afford all of the food and offerings?” I would follow up.

“If you can’t afford, that is ok. Many poor people can’t afford all the offerings. If you can’t buy the expensive meats and fruits, just buy a package of *nasi campur* [Ind. mixed rice] and take it to the grave. The important thing is that you give something and that you eat with your ancestors.”

“What if there was a person who didn’t like their ancestors and didn’t want to do *kaci*?” I pressed on.

“Even if that was the case, they would never admit to anyone that they did not do *kaci*. If people found out that they did not do *kaci*, the character of that person would be seriously questioned.”

Eating and communing with one’s ancestors is most commonly interpreted as a form of remembrance and also a form of respect for one’s deceased relatives. However, like Chinese
New Year, the way it is conducted also has implications for the lives of the living. To conduct *kaci* properly is a way of ensuring that one’s own life, which is connected to the lives the ancestors, will go smoothly and without obstacle (Ind. *semua lebih lancar*). Those who pray to their ancestors often hope for the same kinds of things that they pray for to the gods in the Chinese Folk Religion temple, namely health, happiness, and prosperity. My participants caution me from generalizing too broadly about this fact because they say it depends on what you believe, and on one’s personal psychology. After all, the majority of those same participants acknowledge that one’s prosperity and success, particularly in business, can be strongly influenced by the continued happiness of the ancestors. Conducting this twice annual grave ritual is one of the most concrete and territorialized ways that Hakka Singkawang continue to return to and maintain connections with their *kampung halaman*.

19.2.3 Associations

Another way that individuals maintain connections with their *kampung halaman* is through participation in voluntary associations, particularly new social development organizations that have started charitable missions in Singkawang and other areas of West Kalimantan. There is a wide array of literature describing the role of voluntary associations in overseas Chinese communities (Liu 1998), including some case studies from Indonesia (Heidhues 2006; Giblin 2003). Associations based primarily on locality, lineage, dialect, or occupational affiliation were cornerstones of 19th and early 20th century Chinese communities overseas. They had various functions ranging from welfare, mutual-aid, protection, ancestor worship, education, funerary services, cultural perpetuation, social activities, and business networking (Kuah-Pearce and Du-Dehart 2006; Liu 1998). While clan, home-town, and dialect associations became less prominent social institutions in the second half of the 20th century—in part due to the restrictions placed on Chinese communities by nationalist governments and in part due to declining interest among more cosmopolitan-oriented youths—globalization, along with the opening up of China and a new interest among overseas Chinese to explore ancestral villages, has brought about a resurgence and a transnationalization of such associations (Liu 1998). Adding to older forms of
affiliation like lineage and origin place-based forms of fellowship are alumni associations (Liu 1998; Hui 2007) and social development associations. These associations continue to facilitate social solidarity, cultural identity construction, and social and business networking.

Many different types of associations exist in Singkawang. The most common and active are funerary and volunteer fire-fighters associations. Although there are also a handful of clan associations, they are less active and appear to be decreasing in significance. There are branches of all the various national religious LSM (NGOs) including Majelis Tri Dharma, Majelis Tao, Majelis Kong Hu Chu, Mejalis Adat Budaya Tionghoa, Yayasan Bhakti Suci, as well as local alumni associations for the large Catholic private schools. It is, however, a group of relatively new social development associations that best facilitate participation by out-of-towners in local society. Participation allows them to represent and perform their success and status locally, in turn perpetuating the social reproduction of the ideal of success through business ownership and so the mobility of Hakka Singkawang. It is through the embodiment and the recognition of forms of symbolic, social, and material capital that this imaginary is sustained. Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as “a credit” and as “the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition.” (Bourdieu 1998: 23). Such processes of recognition are clearly at play in the activities of these associations, wherein those who have attained a level of notoriety based on their success take leadership roles in projects that aspire to help develop the city, and the local population. An example will be useful.
Figure 16: Cover of the Bulletin of *Permasis*\textsuperscript{79}

*Permasis* (Ind. *Persatuan Masyarakat Singkawang dan Sekitarnya*; Greater Singkawang People’s Association) is an example of an organization that is busy supporting local cultural events, education, poverty reduction, health promotion, and other kinds of development projects. The organization’s visi dan misi (Ind. vision and mission) makes explicit the role of Singkawang natives who are either overseas or living outside of Singkawang but within Indonesia:

**Vision:** To raise the potential within the overseas community coming from Singkawang and the surrounding areas (i.e., the ex-kebupaten Sambas district before the division) to actively participate and develop Singkawang and its surroundings in various fields of life and development, such as economic, social, educational, health and others.  
Act as a container to collect resources from overseas Singkawang community members and sympathizers, in establishing and improving communication and fruitful cooperation and understanding for the good of society and the progress of Singkawang people wherever they are.

**Mission:** To provide assistance and support in the broadest sense to the community

\textsuperscript{79} Photo shows Pheng Jun Phen, a locally famous Hakka businessman shaking hands with Cornelis, the Dayak provincial governor, who is standing next to Hasan Karman, the Chinese mayor or Singkawang, and Janto Tjahjadin, the head of PERMASIS.
in Singkawang and surrounding areas or to those from Singkawang who are sojourning. To improve human resources, level and dignity of the entire community of Singkawang and surrounding areas so that those who are left behind can attain a decent standard of living so that they can take an active role in the development of society and the Republic of Indonesia.

I had an opportunity to witness some of the events and activities held by this association and similar ones. One specific occasion provided a particularly explicit and visible manifestation of the ways that the returnees express personal social status motivations through philanthropic pursuits. I rounded the corner into the school yard where the event was going to take place. I had been invited by a member of the association who explained that the purpose of the event was to distribute packages of staple foods and other sundries to poor families within and around Singkawang. There were two large open-air tents set up in the school yard facing a stage. One tent was filled with red cushioned banquet chairs and on top of each chair was a box with a cup of water and a selection of snacks inside. Beneath the other tent there were tables and stainless steel serving trays for a buffet-style meal as well as carafes of coffee and juice. When I arrived there was already a crowd of people gathering beneath and around the two tents. I spotted my friend who was sitting in the second row of the covered tent. She ushered me over to where she had saved a seat for me and as soon as I reached her side she began introducing me to other members of the association seated nearby. Some of them I had met before, at similar events given by other associations, some of them were new to me. Most of them were Singkawang people who now live in Jakarta. She introduced each person by name, their position in the association, and the name of their business in Jakarta, Singkawang, or elsewhere. Clutching my arm as she sat next to me, she seemed proud to be able to show me off as her new foreign friend. “This is Emily from Canada,” she said. “She is a researcher living in Singkawang.” I tried to respond with equal enthusiasm by politely repeating how happy I was to meet them, and asked to exchange name cards, my university logo for their association logo. Some people had to shuffle around in their wallets and purses to find the right card as they had multiple cards for their multiple association memberships, PERMASIS, Lion’s Club, Yayasan Bumi Khatilistiwa, Yayasan Bhakti Suci, etc.

After a few moments of meeting and greeting we took our seats in the shade below the tent as the MC had already started introducing the event. It took a long time for the crowd to settle down
and I was surprised when the association members continued to stand around talking to one another, talking on their cell phones, and generally ignoring the MC’s calls for attention. (Only after 16 months of fieldwork, and having attended numerous acara such as this, I realized that there is nothing particularly unusual or rude about ignoring the MC or talking during the introductions at large events such as these in Indonesia.)

Even though I did not know what to expect, I still ended up feeling quite surprised at what happened next. The MC announced the number of poor families each member of the association had found to receive a food package. Association members, the wealthier Jakartans sitting next to me in the tent, were then called to the stage one by one to receive a certificate and applause for their charity work. “From the Kopisan area we have Chin Nyian Bong, who found 14 families!” the MC announced, with Chin Nyian Bong rising to his feet and taking to the stage to receive his award while the other members clapped their hands. “From Atap Kong, Maralina Liu, eight families!” he announced, going in order from those who had “found” the greatest number of poor families to help to the least. Maralina, who I had just been introduced to, was called up onto the stage. Each member was individually recognized (Ind. dapat penghargaan) for their role in identifying these poor families and they were also asked to stay up on the stage until all the names had been announced. That way all awarded members could be photographed together for commemoration of the event and for inclusion in the publication of the association’s bulletin.

I got up and moved to the front of the stage so that I could take photos of these association members being photographed with their new certificates. As I was doing so, I noticed another entirely different group of people gathering in the school grounds. These were the members of the impoverished families who had come to receive their food packages. I recognized two people immediately. One was a woman from my neighborhood and the other was a man I had met at a temple celebration in a village in the south of the city the week previously. I went over to shake hands with them, only partially aware of the fact that they might feel malu to be seen lining up to receive a handout.

Whereas the association members were sitting in comfortable chairs beneath a tent, drinking water, and eating snacks, the poor families who had come to collect their food packages had no
such provisions. They had to stand in the hot sun of the *siang hari*, without chairs, snacks, or shade, waiting for the award ceremony to be over and the food distribution to begin. It seemed ironic that the borders between classes would be constructed in such a way at the event put on by an association with such a clear mandate for social solidarity.

Finally, the photo opportunity was over and the members descended from the stage. The MC announced that lunch had been served and all the association members, including those still seated in the tent, got up and went over to the other tent to start their buffet. They formed two neat lines and were chatting and laughing loudly with one another, seemingly oblivious to the food distribution, which had just begun on the other side of the school yard. Unlike the order and organization of the buffet tent (which the poor food-package recipients were not invited to) the food distribution area was crowded and chaotic.

Rather than a line, there was a scrum of people pushing to get to the front to receive their food, overcome by an uncomfortable and unfortunate feeling of anxiety and fear that there might not be enough to go around. Association members did little to help coordinate this part of the *acara*, leaving the task instead to the local Singkawang committee (*panitia*), which was also comprised of people I recognized from around town.

My friend came over to find me and invited me to come and eat lunch in the buffet tent, but I had to politely decline. I made up an excuse about having to be somewhere else. Something about witnessing the inequalities among people made me lose my appetite. The *acara* put on by these associations act as important sites wherein members can perform their social status as wealthy returnees via philanthropic acts and build their social and business networks, and in a way which is based on a shared value of the idea of the *kampung halaman*. These new hometown associations are engaged in signifying acts of territorialization, in which underprivileged locations are imbued with new meaning and significance by being named the *kampung halaman* of association members and by virtue of receiving aid, investment, and attention. One of the implicit, if not explicit, ideological roots for these associations is the idea that one ought to feel a sense of pride, love, and connection to one’s *kampung halaman*. This sentiment is based on the experiential aspects of collective memory and nostalgia, and the pragmatics of family, friends,
food, and familiarity (which I have identified), but it is also gets materialized by the presence of the bones and graves of the ancestors.

The formation of these associations is taking place in the context of new cultural freedoms (recall that Chinese associations, with the exception of funeral associations, were prohibited during the Suharto era), and the process of forming associations is itself an act of legitimization, formalization, and bureaucratization (see the next chapter about processes of formalizing and bureaucratizing Cap Go Meh). These groups make claims on places and claims to belonging to those places; they are based on origins and as such they help authenticate legitimate belonging within the multiculturalism of the nation, as it is ethnically and territorially imagined.

Despite the class divisions apparent in the food distribution event that I attended, we need not dismiss the sincerity of the philanthropic activities of these associations, or the charitable sensibilities of their members. These associations have a complex combination of personal and social interests at play. Many of the members, who stretch across the country as well as across continents, share an imagined sense of connection, not only to Singkawang, as the kampung halaman, but also to other association members and to current Singkawang residents who have not been able to cari kehidupan lebih bagus through merantau. Some of the members have themselves experienced childhood poverty and many have overcome sizable obstacles or great competition to achieve their social status as philanthropists. It is memories of these times and an empathy for others in that same position today which, in large part, motivates their involvement. The dynamics of these associations, their programs, and events constitute another forum to perpetuate and reinforce the ideal of success through business which in turn fuels the social reproduction of mobility. Becoming active in associations as volunteers is a socially valued method used to redistribute one’s wealth and philanthropic activities help to ameliorate the risk of social alienation that one may face if considered pelit or sombong. By getting involved in these associations, members can also channel some of the emotional dimensions of their experience of rindu for the kampung halaman that they have while living away. Returning to Singkawang for events such as the one described is an opportunity to visit favorite places, spend time with friends and relatives, eat the foods from home that one is craving, and shop for local products unavailable outside of Singkawang. In addition to the charitable mission of these
associations, members can *cari nama* (Ind. build a reputation) and grow their social and business network. Members names, positions, and photographs are inevitably published in annual books and bulletins, membership business cards are printed and awards are given out. Self-promotion and adverting are a major component of all association bulletins as well as events. Introductions, face-to-face meetings, and relationship building are all ways for people to use the associations to make connections with each other thorough the shared project of developing the *kampung halaman*.

## 20 Conclusion

Permanent returns, but also shorter, more frequent, trips home are important opportunities to make visible the experiences and achievements gained (or not gained) overseas and in Jakarta. During these returns, the motivations of *merantau* are reinforced, as migrants visit friends and family members in sites where ideas about travel, going abroad, becoming successful, and finding a better life are produced and circulated. These return migrants embody the migration experience. They become models for others who are imagining or planning to leave Singkawang. Their successes, as well as their failures, represent the potentialities of what could be, if one were to choose to leave Singkawang in search of a better life. Returning, therefore, is an intrinsic part of mobility in Singkawang where return is often planned or imagined as the best outcome of migrants. By returning one is able to continue to participate in the social and cultural activities of the hometown; maintain connections with friends and family; display one’s success; experience the changes in social status that come along with being successful, having a business, having lived overseas, having studied abroad, or having become more worldly or cosmopolitan. When people return to Singkawang, not only do they go to their natal homes and villages, but they also seek out their old friends, classmates, or business partners and *ngongkrong* with them at various *pos* around town, as well as a handful of favorite local snack shops.

The way in which Singkawang migrants maintain connections with their hometowns resembles the way that overseas Chinese elsewhere in the diaspora are encouraged by the Chinese
government to visit ancestral hometowns and even to become emotionally involved in hometown development (Khun 1999). This is part of a deeper and more long-lasting cultural pattern in which place-based attachments are maintained and cultivated. The only difference is that the terrain has shifted from ancestral home villages in China to hometowns in West Kalimantan. These strong attachments have been forged even in difficult circumstances and despite challenges to their claims as legitimate and original inhabitants within a politics of indigeneity in Indonesia. In a recent article, Hui (2013) has shown how place-based belonging and longing in Kalimantan resembles the Mainland Chinese pattern of xiangxia (Man. returning home). Some Chinese Indonesians from Pemangkat, a town north of Singkawang, who returned to China in the middle of the 20th century—who were victims of violence in the 1965–66 communist purge in Indonesia, or ideologically aligned to China at that time—now look back to their hometown in Kalimantan with longing and nostalgia. Hui argues that it is in fact a second hometown (Man. zu xia), imbued with the same kinds of emotional attachments as the original hometowns in China. Based on my research with people in Singkawang. I would argue that small towns in West Kalimantan, particularly Singkawang, have totally eclipsed villages in mainland China as both the physical and imaginary ancestral villages that constitute one of the moorings for people’s sense of belonging in the world. In the past new immigrants maintained strong ties with their villages in China through hometown associations, surname associations, temple networks, ancestor shrines, as well as cyclical migration and return. However, after years (in some cases hundreds of years) of separation from the mainland, and the turbulent and authoritarian regimes in both Indonesia and China, these connections have practically expired. And yet, the sense of place-based belonging and the cultivation of place-based attachments have in no way lessened, they have simply shifted to the places that are now home, the cities, towns and villages of Kalimantan.
Chapter 7: The Politics of *Cap Go Meh* (Hok. End of Chinese New Year)

21 Introduction

The once-suppressed Chinese ritual held on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month (1/15), known in Indonesian as Cap Go Meh, has undergone a prominent resurgence in Singkawang in the post-Suharto era. Whereas in many Chinese communities elsewhere this date is celebrated as the Lantern Festival, in Singkawang, it is the occasion for a procession of hundreds of spirit-mediums (Hak. *tatung*) who dress in the regalia of their patron deities and perform feats of self-mortification\(^8\) while in a state of possession, seated atop specially constructed palanquins (Hak. *to khiao*). Since 2001, when Cap Go Meh was observed for the first time in over thirty years without the specter of government proscription, the procession has expanded from what was

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\(^8\)“Self-mortification” is the English nomenclature employed by Margaret Chan (2009). A common Hakka term for this practice is *con nyium cim*, “pierce silver needle,” which does not carry the connotation of mortification.
once a relatively small affair held within private temple grounds into a city wide celebration that regularly attracts thousands of spectators. Beyond the Chinese residents of Singkawang, these onlookers represent various religious and ethnic affiliations and include both foreign and domestic tourists, as well as dignitaries such as the governor of West Kalimantan, and ambassadors from Jakarta. Along with this growth, the festival has become a defining feature of the town, a source of civic pride, and a period of economic stimulus. In this chapter I describe the ways Cap Go Meh in Singkawang has become an arena in which complex negotiations and conflicts between various groups of stakeholders arise as they pursue their respective symbolic, social and material interests. At stake in these conflicts is the centrality of Cap Go Meh as an expression of Chinese religious and territorially-based rootedness. This public ritual, which materializes these sentiments annually, is linked to the system of mobility that I have described in the previous chapters. It is an annual event that migrants return home for, both as witnesses and participants. It is an embodiment of a collective identification with the gods and spirits that act territorially as cults of the city and surrounding area. The ways that young spirit-mediums undergo possession has a resemblance to the act of merantau. Cap Go Meh is a large-scale collective presencing of self in relation to place and in relation to gods and spirits of place. As such, it is one of the most potent annual rituals for the collective cultural identification of Chinese Folk Religion as it is practiced in Singkawang.

The participants and stakeholders involved in Cap Go Meh include religious specialists, politicians, businesspeople, government agencies and various other ethnic and religious publics in and from Singkawang. Recent changes to the structure of organizing the event have made its internal politics more visible and fraught with tension and linked it to broader city and mayoral politics. Conflicts around CGM are not entirely new; they also exacerbate and take place along fissures that are already present in Chinese society in Singkawang. Fissures connected to struggles over leadership, representation and the negotiation of ethnic “Chineseness” within the Indonesian context. Disagreements stem from questions over who has the authority to make decisions about the event, and the implications of this polytheistic “festival” for the nominally monotheistic and majority Islamic Indonesian public. Debates are also related to the concern among some non-Chinese Indonesians over the proliferation of public circulations of Chinese Folk Religion and displays of ethnic “Chineseness” which are a part of the broader, society-wide resinicization processes that have been under way since the fall of Suharto in 1998.
Alongside the visible resinification processes and cultural re-florescence (Hoon 2008) of the reform era, Chinese Indonesians have begun to reenter politics (Surydinata 2001: 9–12). In West Kalimantan, the reentry of Chinese people into regional and city politics has generated anxiety and competition among members of the province’s other sizable ethnic groups, namely Malay and Dayak (Chan 2009). The resurgence of Cap Go Meh in Singkawang has become a powerful symbol and expression not only of the reemergence of Chinese Folk Religion and cultural expression, but also of the reentry of Chinese Indonesians into politics. Anxieties and debates about the space for Chinese culture and the place of Chinese Indonesians in politics are being playing out in the public sphere, at both the local and national level. The re-florescence of Chinese cultural expression, as embodied in Cap Go Meh, is simultaneously being both encouraged and restricted by members of the government as well as by the politically motivated festival organizing committee in order to maximize strategic interests while minimizing the potential for interethnic, interreligious or political-based conflicts. Embracing the festival and promoting it, not merely as a Chinese festival, but as an important civic event adds another layer to the construction of Singkawang as a particular kind of place, and as the Chinatown (Ind. Pecinan) of Indonesia.

Cap Go Meh is a date marked with elaborate citywide rituals. Hundreds of spirit-mediums parade through the streets of the city on palanquins laden with blades and nails. They perform feats of self-mortification which both express and authenticate the presence of their possessing gods. The procession culminates at a specially built altar in the center of the city, where the spirit-mediums pray to the god Nyiuk Fong Song Ti and then bless altar objects—gifts to the gods, which have been donated by individuals and by the event organizing committee. After the spirit-medium ritual is finished, these blessed offerings are auctioned off publicly as a method of

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81 The first Chinese mayor of Singkawang, Hasan Karman (2007–2012), the Chinese vice governor of West Kalimantan, Christiandy Sanjaya (2008 to present), and a former Bupati and member of parliament in Bangka Belitung (2004–2014) who is the current governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, are all people in the spotlight whose political careers are representative of these processes and negotiations.

82 In Singkawang spirit-mediums are known by various names, including the Hakka name cho ki and the Indonesian term tathung (which is derived from the Hakka verb tathung, meaning the act of being possessed by a god). In Hokkien spirit-mediums are known as dang ki and in Mandarin as tóng jī (童乩).

83 Nyiuk Fong Song Ti (Hakka) is known in Indonesian as Kaisar Langit, or the Jade Emperor of the Sky/Heaven, Mandarin Yùhuángdàdì (玉皇大帝).
offsetting the costs of the event and transferring merit and good fortune to auction participants. According to locals, the purpose of the ritual is to cleanse the city of potentially harmful ghosts, to provide the local community with protection, and promote health and prosperity.

Large public rituals and festivals, in which ethnic and religious identifications are performed en masse, are often seen as moments in which social bonds are renewed through a collective experience of “activated groupness” (akin to Durkheim’s notion of the social effervescence) (see for example, Stadler 2011, Ward 1984, Wilmore 2006, Durkheim 2012 (1912)). Cap Go Meh in Singkawang can, in part, be seen as an instance of such “activated groupness” as members of the Chinese and Dayak population come together to publically perform this ritual (Chan 2009). However, caution must be taken before assuming that the charged atmosphere of this ritual moment is indicative of community cohesion in either a short- or long-term sense. Conflicts and politics are also present during Cap Go Meh, and since the event has been revived and has grown in size, it has quickly become a stage in which multiple struggles for power and representation take place.

Throughout Indonesia, Singkawang has a reputation as a place where Chinese language and culture not only remained intact but thrived, even throughout the repressive Suharto era. Residents of Singkawang and other Chinese Indonesians, acknowledge that certain forms of Chinese culture in Singkawang are not only strong and intact, but also very “traditional”, or what people refer to as “ancient” (Ind. kuno), and what Hui calls "archaic" (2007: 203). These “traditional” or “ancient” cultural practices and concepts are thought to have originated in China and been passed down from generation to generation (Ind. turun-menurun) as a kind of cultural inheritance (Ind. warisan). Although long divorced from the original context these traditions have been carried along by a coolie class of predominantly Hakka practitioners, as opposed to Mandarin elites (Hui 2007: 202). “Ancient” practices include cosmological and practical traditions, including marriage ceremonies, funeral rites, health concepts, healing techniques, feng shui and astrology, as well as a diverse array of ideas from Chinese Folk Religion. Cap Go Meh and the culture of spirit-mediumship in Singkawang more broadly are part of this real and

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84 In the case of Singkawang, the preservation of Chinese language is limited to the Hakka dialect, known in Mandarin as 客家话 Kèjiā huà, and in Indonesian as Bahasa Khek.
imagined “ancient” cultural which is changing along with the shifting social, political, cultural, and economic context of Singkawang, Indonesia, and Southeast Asia.

22 Cap Go Meh

Figure 18: Spirit-Medium Coming Out of a Trance, Singkawang, 2011

Figure 19: Day Before Cap Go Meh, Singkawang, 2014

Figure 20 and 21: Cap Go Meh Parade, Singkawang, 2015

The fifteenth day of the first lunar month marks the final day of Chinese New Year celebrations. Chinese populations around the world, including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and
other overseas Chinese communities, celebrate this day in vastly different ways. In many places, it is a lantern festival (Man. 元宵節 yuánxiāojié) and people eat glutinous rice balls in sweet soup (Man. 湯圓 tāngyuán) symbolizing the first full moon of the year. In other places, the day is not marked at all, or it is a simple affair consisting of a family meal. In parts of Southeast Asia, it is sometimes thought of as a Chinese Valentine’s Day, perhaps because in the past it was an auspicious time for young people to go out and look for mates. Among all this diversity, Cap Go Meh in Singkawang is unique as it is marked by an elaborate ritual in which gods and spirits enter the bodies of the hundreds of spirit-mediums and proceed through the streets together. It has a specific local history and it is a multiethnic event with participation from Chinese, Dayak and (to a lesser extent) Malay locals.

The most common explanation for the origins of the Cap Go Meh ritual in Singkawang is that it originated as a community response to a small pox epidemic that took place in Monterado, a Chinese mining settlement close to Singkawang. At that time, Singkawang was a sparsely populated frontier area without doctors or hospitals, so the settlement sought salvation from ritual specialists who initiated this ceremony as a way of purifying the local environment and exorcising the town of the disease, disease believed to come from the spirits of homeless and malicious ghosts. On the anniversary of this ritual, Cap Go Meh is held over the period of three days and the exorcism and purification are done again.

In 2015, the event attracted hundreds of local residents as well as thousands of out-of-town tourists, political guests, photographers, and home town returnees. The ritual took place in an environment already overflowing with Chinese New Year festivities. The city is awash in red. Lanterns line the main streets. Stores which usually sell incense and paper money are suddenly full of all manner of Chinese New Year bric-a-brac: ornaments, red envelopes, banners, lanterns, lights, posters, and stickers all adorned with cute, traditional or stylized images of the coming year’s animal. At this time of year, Singkawang is swollen with people. The streets are unusually full of cars and people enjoy the rare opportunity to complain about the sudden traffic in their

85 In popular Chinese culture the color red is considered lucky and used to create and symbolize auspicious things. The use of the color red during Chinese New Year in Indonesia is so abundant that it has come to represent Chineseness (Hoon 2009).
otherwise sleepy, provincial town. The small-town atmosphere is transformed into that of an extended holiday party with hundreds of people returning home from Jakarta and overseas to be with family for Chinese New Year. During this time, multiple lion dance troupes (Ind. Barong Sai) troll the streets, performing for donations from impromptu audiences in front of houses and shops\textsuperscript{86}. The sight and sound of fireworks and firecrackers is constant, adding to the celebratory atmosphere.

After nearly two weeks of celebrating and visiting, there is a lantern parade on the night of the thirteenth of the first lunar month. It is merry, carnival-esque, secular and family-friendly (contrasting starkly with the more serious and intense Cap Go Meh ritual) and it attracts crowds of local residents irrespective of religious or ethnic affiliation. The parade consists of a couple dozen decorated vehicles, each uniquely displaying the New Year’s animal using a gaudy mixture of lanterns, streamers, and bamboo branches. Some vehicles play loud music as they slowly move through the streets. Others are draped with banners offering New Year’s greetings from local shops and temples. VIPs such as the mayor, his wife, the head of the local people’s representative assembly or prominent businessmen (Ind. tokoh) dress up in kitschy Mandarin pajamas, conical hats, and cheongsam\textsuperscript{87} and sit on the back of trucks, waving to the spectators as they pass by. Occasionally temple groups bring out gods to join the parade such as a four-foot-tall Guan Yin statue strung with small flashing lights, or a truck converted into a miniature Chinese temple (Ind. klen teng; Hakka pakkung miao).

The Cap Go Meh ritual starts the following morning on the fourteenth day of the first lunar month. Hundreds of possessed spirit-mediums slowly emerge onto the streets and make their way to the city’s oldest and most central Chinese temple to honor and pray to a powerful local god, Thai Pakkung\textsuperscript{88}. These spirit-mediums wear brightly colored costumes emblematic of their patron deities. They ride on bladed palanquin carried by a group of eight paid palanquin

\textsuperscript{86} Much larger and longer Barong Sai performances are also held by paid invitation at private residences.
\textsuperscript{87} Cheongsam is the Cantonese word for the tightly fitted Chinese dress now iconic of 1920s Shanghai.
\textsuperscript{88} Pakkung (Mandarin: 伯公 Bógōng), literally meaning “uncle”, is a popular kind of god of locality ubiquitous in Singkawang. Pakkung in Singkawang is essentially a local form of 土地公 Tǔdìgōng, often translated as earth god, who is imagined to be a lower level official in the religious bureaucracy, responsible for the protection and affairs of the local community (village or neighborhood level) (see Wolf 1978).
bearers. Throughout the day the spirit-mediums arrive and visit this central temple, as well as the Guan Yin temple and the Mazu temple. Although it is still a day before the large parade of spirit-mediums that attracts so many spectators, according to religious experts the fourteenth is equally, if not more, important because spirit-mediums undergo an extended period of possession and interact with multiple gods, thereby initiating the spiritual work of this ritual.

Small groups of people come out to watch on this day. They take photos and make video clips using cellular phones but there is little talking. There is an increased police presence on the streets controlling the flow of traffic and pedestrians, and monitoring the movement of the palanquins and spirit-mediums. The atmosphere on this day is markedly different from the previous night’s lantern parade because it is a ritual day dictated by the logics of spirit-possession, and the states of consciousness that spirit-possession entails (discussed below).

On the following day, the morning of the fifteenth of the first lunar month, hundreds of spirit-mediums gather in the stadium grounds and are organized into a procession. Early in the morning the area is already thick with people: spirit-mediums, bearers, spectators, organizers, photographers and films crews. There are hundreds of banners and flags bearing the names of temples and gods and there are hundreds of brightly painted palanquins laden with blades or nails (Hakka to khiau) and adorned with flags, feathers, bamboo, plants and flowers, each specific to the tastes of the possessing gods. By seven or eight in the morning the procession starts moving through the streets according to a route that allows the spirit-mediums to visit most of the main streets of town and culminates at the temporary altars in the city center. The spirit-mediums ride on top of their palanquins; many of them half dance, half vibrate to the rhythmic sound of drumming that accompanies the parade. Some balance by their feet, torsos or backs on top of blades or nails installed on the seat and arms and back of the palanquin. Some pierce their flesh with metal skewers or run blades over their arms or tongues, walk on platforms of glass, hang large snakes around their necks or sacrifice small animals such as dogs and chickens.

Crowds of people cram into the streets to watch this exceptional event, locals as well as domestic and international tourists, their faces indicating surprise, awe, respect, and astonishment as they

89 These bearers are also distinguished by wearing hats and T-shirts designed each year for Cap Go Meh workers by the Cap Go Meh committee, or by the specific temple group.
witness these spirit-mediums performing acts of self-mortification (Hak. *chon nyiun cim*), acts seen as displays of spiritual strength.

Once a spirit-medium reaches the altar they dismount from their palanquin to divine using half-moon shaped divination blocks⁹⁰, and to pray and bless the altar objects. According to the logic of Chinese spirit-mediumship, it is the possessing spirit, not the spirit-medium him- or herself, who prays at the altar to the god, *Nyiuk Fong Song Ti*, who is considered one of the highest and most powerful gods in the Chinese Folk Religious pantheon. After praying at the altar, the spirit-mediums remount their palanquins and are carried home, marking the end of their part in the ritual. Following this there is a public auction of the auspicious altar objects which takes place adjacent to the temporary altars of the main groups involved in Cap Go Meh⁹¹.

Figure 22 and 23: Spirit-Mediums During the Cap Go Meh Parade, Singkawang, 2011

### 23 Chinese Folk Religion in Singkawang

Most ethnic Chinese in Singkawang practice what can be called Chinese Folk Religion⁹² (also called Chinese Religion or Chinese Popular Religion), though there are also many practitioners

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⁹⁰ In Chinese folk religion, Hakka: *sin kau* (Mandarin: 擲筊zhì xiáo) are two red half moon-shaped divination wooden blocks, which are thrown up in the air in order to ask for permission to pray or begin a ritual.

⁹¹ Most recently this has been conducted at a single stage erected by the *Panitia*. However, in previous years there were also separate altars as well as separate auctions hosted by *Tri Dharma, Majelis Tao Indonesia*.

⁹² I am calling this Chinese Folk Religion in order to follow international scholarship. However, in the context of Indonesia this collection of religious practices would most often be identified as either or both Taoism (Ind. *Tao*) or
of Buddhism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. While some Buddhists might subordinate the practices of Chinese Folk Religion to Buddhist practices such as chanting or meditation, rarely would the ontology or the efficacy of the religious practices of Chinese Folk Religion be disputed, and many people who are affiliated with Singkawang’s Buddhist temples also practice Chinese Folk Religion in a casual or opportunistic way. While Catholics and Protestants may be officially prohibited from participating in Chinese Folk Religion, in practice participation occurs with some frequency, particularly during semiannual holidays devoted to the care of ancestors (Ind. *sembahyang kubur*; Hak. *kaci*) and through certain kinds of healing consultations that involve various Taoist, Buddhist, and local gods. Therefore, the term Chinese Folk Religion is a general rather than a precise descriptor and its aptness as a term is debatable, inasmuch as it might carry derogatory connotations or seem implicitly subordinate to a more philosophical or literary “Chinese elite religion”, which is not the case. In Hakka, as in Mandarin and other Chinese dialects, folk practitioners typically employ the verbal phrase *pai sin* (Man. *Bai Shen*), or “worshipping the gods”, in order to self-identify as someone who prays to a number of gods, often in smaller temples. *Pai sin/bai shen* is a useful category because it “transcends the nominal dissection of Chinese religion into Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, since many of the gods worshipped are not confined in practical terms to these divisions” (Lee 1986: 199). The shape of Chinese Folk Religion in Singkawang is very similar to the *shenism* of Singapore and Malaysia, which has been documented succinctly by both Elliot (1955) and Lee (1986).

Chinese Folk Religion was brought to West Kalimantan by Chinese miners who began arriving in the region in the middle of the 18th century. By the 19th century, West Kalimantan had dozens of Chinese mining collectives, known as *kongsi*94, which were going through a process of consolidation into larger federations (Heidhues 2003; Yuan 2000). Membership in these mining collectives had an aspect of ritual brotherhood, akin to that of secret societies, which involved Confucianism (Ind. *Konghuchu*). There is a movement to unite these practices under the umbrella term "three ways" (Ind. *Tri Dharma*) although that is far from standardized. There is a significant problem of names for Chinese religions in Indonesia, stemming from the muddled history of an early 20th century movement to establish Confucianism as a separate religion, as well as layers of misunderstanding and misnomer during the Suharto Era. A proper explanation of this problem is outside the scope of this chapter. See Coppel 2002.

93 Despite the fact that Indonesia is a Muslim majority country, relatively few ethnic Chinese practice Islam, particularly in Singkawang where rate of conversion is minimal.

94 The word *Kongsi* comes from the Mandarin word *gongsì*, meaning public company, but it is also commonly used in Indonesian to mean partnership or working together (Heidhues 1993:68).
oath-taking and initiation rites (Heidhues 2003:58). While often thought of primarily as economic units, each mining *kongsi* also had a temple with deities brought from China, and religious affairs were not considered separable from business enterprises and the routines of daily life (Heidhues 2003:58; Hui 2007: 198). The ashes from the incense urn of a home temple in China were sometimes brought to West Kalimantan for the establishment of a new altar or temple. This is known in Mandarin as *fenxiang* or “dividing the ashes” (Yuan 2000; Schipper 1990; Lee 1986) and still takes place within temple networks in Indonesia today. Additionally, seafarers and other sojourners brought the god Mazu (Man. 媽祖Māzǔ), the goddess of the sea, to West Kalimantan and other places in Southeast Asia, as an altar to this god was a common protective feature of migrant ships from southern China (Widodo 2009). These ship altars were often dismantled and reestablished into temples in coastal cities in Indonesia (Widodo 2009), particularly by Hokkien settlers and sojourners from the Fujian province.

As newcomers to foreign lands in Southeast Asia, Chinese migrants also made efforts to respect and honor local gods, spirits, and places. Chinese settlers and sojourners built altars and temples in prominent natural locations, including at the sites of large or auspicious rocks, trees, caves, river mouths, mining sites, and mountains (Lee 1986). These natural features sometimes became personified and then deified over time, taking on the status of Datuk and Datuk-Kong spirits/saints. Worshipping these Datuk spirits is common in Chinese communities in the Malay world, including parts of Indonesia, and in certain urban centers in Malaysia Datuk-Kong cults have considerable popular following. When later waves of migrants from southeastern China began arriving, not as miners, but as entrepreneurs, traders, and craftsman, making permanent settlements more populous and dynamic, they also brought a variety of other Taoist and Buddhist deities and sects, adding to the heterogeneity of the Chinese religious landscape.

In Singkawang, as in other Chinese enclaves in Malaysia and Singapore, there are now hundreds of small temples with gods that come from a mixed pantheon, combining influences from Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism as well as local Datuk-Kong traditions (see Hui 2007). Among the plethora of gods, one of the most common gods is *pakkung* (Man. bogong; Hokkien:

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95 Datuk is a Malay word meaning ancestor, uncle or grandfather, or used more generally as an honorific title (Lee 1986; Widodo 2009). In local Hakka dialect in Singkawang *Datuk* is pronounced *latok*. 
Peh Kong), which refers to a class of divine beings that have a locally defined, specific personality. As Arthur Wolf has argued, “god” in Chinese Folk Religion refers to the rank and role of a spirit rather than a being with a wholly distinct ontological status (1978). Although people typically refer to pakkung using only this term, it is understood that every pakkung has a proper name, nickname, origin-place name or status title (e.g., Het Lui Ciong Kiun; Li San Phak Ji; Liong San Pakkung; Su Choi). Pakkung are functionally equivalent to the locative divine beings known by various terms in Chinese communities elsewhere, such as tudigong and dizhugong, and are sometimes called “earth gods” (Wolf 1978; DiBernardi 2006:177; Lee 1986:199). They are often described by practitioners as the spirits of long-deceased people, particularly pioneers (Lee 1986:199; Hui 2007: 213) who were especially powerful and virtuous while still living and who have, on this basis, been assigned to protect the inhabitants of a specific locale, a role analogous in many ways to that of low-level magistrates in imperial China (Wolf 1978). In Singkawang, people explain the position of pakkung using contemporary Indonesian bureaucratic terms, including RT, Camat and Bupati (Neighborhood Head, Sub-Regent and Regent, respectively). The connection between pakkung and an imagined imperial bureaucracy is further strengthened by the fact that spirit-mediums, as the ritual specialists of Chinese Folk Religion (Lee 1986), typically don special costumes based on those of imperial magistrates or generals while under the possession of a pakkung god, a pattern clearly visible during the Cap Go Meh procession. In Singkawang, knowledge about pakkung, as well as knowledge about a myriad of other gods from Buddhist-Taoist and local traditions, is not derived from a set of texts or doctrines, but rather from unwritten local traditions and, more directly, from conversations and other interactions with the gods themselves that occur through spirit-mediums or even through dreams.

Chinese Folk Religion is characterized by openness and flexibility (Lee 1986). It is adaptable, inclusive, and capable of accepting and incorporating a wide range of gods, spirits, and folk practices from other religious traditions into a large and growing pantheon, this occurs without generating internal theological contradictions. At the root of this inclusivity is a pragmatic approach to worship; practitioners seek help in practical matters (Lee 1986:199) and worship

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96 Margaret Chan has written about this and developed an interpretation of these spirit-medium as a ritual brotherhood based on the character of the gods, their costumes and behaviors (2009).
deities who are considered to have specific kinds of spiritual/instrumental power. This may be a deity from the level of gods considered sky or heaven gods, or from the category of gods known as earth gods. Help may also be sought from a prominent and multidimensional figure such as Guanyin or Guangdi, or a Datuk spirit, or even a sacred or magical object. The common feature among all of these is the presence of a form spiritual efficacy based on tradition or reputation. Permeating Chinese Folk Religion is the idea that gods exist within a vast yet unified polity that is both inclusive and hierarchical (Hui 2007: 201).

23.1 Spirit-Mediums as the Ritual Experts of Chinese Folk Religion

Spirit mediums are generally considered the expert practitioners or ritual specialists of Chinese Folk Religion. In Singkawang there are hundreds of spirit mediums, each with their own temple or altar, regular clientele, and followers. While they employ a wide array of idiosyncratic practices and unique divining/healing techniques, the cosmological basis of their mediumship conforms to the general logics of possession common to the practice of Chinese spirit-mediumship throughout Southeast Asia, as described by Lee (1986) and DeBernardi (2006). Spirit mediums practice year-round in Singkawang, not merely during Cap Go Meh, and the consultations that take place at non-holiday times provide an important laboratory for understanding how spirit-mediumship is conceived of locally without the spotlight of out of town and international tourists, journalists and photographers evident during Cap Go Meh.

When spirit mediums are possessed their behavior is altered. Their patron deities sometimes decide to make spontaneous movements, demanding to dismount a palanquin, or remount it very quickly. Mediums often walk in long, exaggerated, and stylized steps, carrying banners, swords, and knives as props and implements for feats of strength and self-mortification. People must quickly move out of the way if the patron deities quickly morph from one to another and undergo sudden and concomitant changes in their character, manners and movement. The behavior of the mediums is dramatic, erratic, and unusual, and it is not uncommon, especially for younger, less experienced spirit mediums, to enter into frenzied or hysterical states, in which they perform
spontaneous acts of self-mortification, inflicting danger on themselves and others. Dancing to rhythmic drum music, sometimes on top of glass, sometimes with knives in hands or large snakes around their necks is common for spirit-mediums, especially those possessed by Datuk spirits. These acts are seen as authentication of spirit-possession and expressions of the power of the possessing gods. They are also the acts that make Singkawang’s Cap Go Meh ritual extraordinary and are frequently described in tourism brochures and newspaper articles as irrational, awesome, and magical.

Locals are accustomed to the behavior of spirit-mediums undergoing possession because spirit-mediums are common social figures. They are abundant, visible, and visited for consultation and healing by a large subsection of the population who believe in the efficacy of this type of divination and healing. In Singkawang, spirit-mediums are treated seriously, with a mixture of awe, respect, and fear, as well as some amount of suspicion and disbelief. Regardless of people’s personal opinions and explanations, spirit-mediums are given space and permission to practice freely, particularly during Cap Go Meh, in which their participation is not only allowed, but also promoted and supported financially and logistically by the local government and private associations.

24 A Short History of Cap Go Meh in Singkawang

The inaugural year of the Cap Go Meh ritual is unknown, but it is believed to have started during the Lanfang Republic\(^7\), prior to expansion of Dutch colonial authority in the region. It is said to have originated as a purification ritual in response to a small pox epidemic. In the 1850s the Dutch went to war with the mining confederacies in order to establish greater control in West Borneo. After their victory they posted Dutch officials in Sambas, Singkawang, and Pontianak and introduced the Chinese Capitan system, in which an appointed leader of the Chinese

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\(^7\) The Lanfang Republic was a confederacy of Chinese Mining Kongsi established by a Hakka Mining leader named Lou Fangbo in West Borneo, and lasted between 1777 and 1884. For a detailed history of the Lanfang Republic see Yuan 2000.
community was assigned to oversee the affairs of the Chinese population in relative autonomy, but under authority to the resident Dutch official (Blusse 1988; Heidhues 2003; Yuan 2000). During this period, Cap Go Meh was seen as an unthreatening religious affair of the Chinese community and was permitted to take place each year. World War II and the Japanese occupation of Borneo was a turbulent and violent period for the Chinese communities in West Kalimantan, and although reliable records are absent, it is unlikely that Cap Go Meh was held in any large-scale or public way during that time. By the time of Indonesian independence (1945–1949) and Sukarno’s presidency (1945–1967), the Cap Go Meh ritual in Singkawang resumed and was strengthened by concerted efforts from a leader in the community, Bong A Hiong, who helped to organize local spirit-mediums (Sean 2013).

For several years Cap Go Meh was actively celebrated. However, this situation changed dramatically during the Suharto era when public celebrations of Chinese religious and cultural events became prohibited. At this time, the list of officially recognized state-sanctioned monotheisms was updated and no longer included Confucianism (Ind. Kong Hu Chu). Consequently, practitioners of Chinese Folk Religion were forced to change their official identification (found on all government documents, hospital admission forms, school records, etc.) to another religion, most chose Buddhism, Catholicism or Protestantism whether or not any actual or meaningful conversion took place. Meanwhile Chinese Folk Religion temples were converted to Buddhist temples (Ind. Vihara) by the addition of Indonesian signs overtop of the original Mandarin language signs, and the inclusion of statues of Buddha and Guan Yin. During this repressive period, Cap Go Meh in Singkawang, as elsewhere in Indonesia, was forced to go underground. Rather than a large public procession through town, the ritual was performed in secret in individual temples and temple grounds, and it was common for practitioners to be harassed by officials and police. This repressive atmosphere lasted until the late 1980s, at which time a few politically affiliated leaders in the Chinese community started to organize once again and began making negotiations. The two newly formed and permitted Chinese organizations, the Three Dharmas (Ind. Tri Dharma) and Ethnic Chinese Communication Forum (Ind. FOKET-
Forum Komunikasi Etnis Tionghoa\(^{98}\), consulted with the local politicians from the Party of Functional Groups, known as Golkar (Ind. Partai Golongan Karya) and the Indonesian Democratic Party, known as PDI (Ind. Partai Demokrasi Indonesia), in order to create a larger and freer physical and social space for the Cap Go Meh ritual to take place (Sean 2013). The outcome of these negotiations varied from year to year depending on broader national politics and whether or not it was an election year. However, by 1993, a large area around a temple in the outskirts of the city had been secured and was officially permitted as the site to hold the Cap Go Meh ritual. Local accounts suggest that Cap Go Meh continued to be held there in the following years, as well as in private in small temples throughout the city. In 2000, after the fall of Suharto, the assimilation laws began to be dismantled by President Abdurrahman Wahid. This is when Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh started to reemerge as large, public celebrations throughout Indonesia (see also Chan 2009; Hoon 2009; Hui 2007).

25 Advent of the Cap Go Meh Committee

Since the prohibitions were lifted, Cap Go Meh in Singkawang has rapidly grown in size and scale. In 2008, a particularly important change to the organization of the event precipitated further developments as well as new kinds of conflicts. During previous eras, including the Sukarno years and the period between 1993 and 2000, it was the responsibility of each individual spirit-medium to collect monetary donations from members of the community in the catchment area of their altar or pakkung miao\(^{99}\). These donations paid for the construction or upkeep of the to khiau (Hak. ceremonial sedan chair) as well as the wages of the eight or more sedan chair bearers needed to take part in the Cap Go Meh parade. As recently as 2007, spirit-mediums would physically walk door-to-door asking for donations, which would then be recorded in a donation book. People who donated money were thought to receive some social or spiritual benefit (i.e. nonmaterial goods), including luck, propitiousness, and a general sense of goodwill

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\(^{98}\) Tri Dharma means the Three Ways, which refers to Buddhism, Confucianism and Chinese Folk Religion respectively, whereas FOKET stands for Ethnic Chinese Communication Forum.

\(^{99}\) Pakkung miao is a temple dedicated to a locality god. Miao is the word used to describe a Taoists or Chinese Folk Religious temple, and is distinguished from Buddhist temples (Hak. fut thong; Ind. vihara).
from having directly supported the ritual specialist who would do the work of cleansing the streets of malicious spirits. As Cap Go Meh grew in the Reformasi period, a committee was formed to help coordinate spirit-mediums and the various temple groups involved in the event. This committee known as the Panitia Cap Go Meh (Cap Go Meh Committee; hereafter called Panitia) remained small and had merely a supportive role until 2008 when its leader asserted a dominant role in organizing and funding the event. This resulted in several critical changes to the size, scale, and profile of the event, and it has also generated conflicts and contestations. The ascent of the Panitia also coincided with the promotion of Singkawang’s first ethnically Chinese mayoral candidate, which marked the moment when Cap Go Meh began to be used explicitly as a platform in local politics.

Figure 24: Verification and Registration of Spirit-Mediums, Singkawang, 2015

25.1 Eroding Local Control

The advent of the Panitia shifted what was previously local, informal organizing to control by a more centralized, Jakarta-based group of committee members. These members are predominantly successful businessmen who now live in Jakarta but maintain networks of friends and relatives in their hometown. They are known by name and have a reputation among predominantly lower-middle class locals because of the wealth and social status they have
achieved. This is the same group of hometown returnees I introduced in the previous chapter. In addition to these Jakarta “bosses”\textsuperscript{100} there are also a few prominent local government staff and representatives of the Chinese organizations on the \textit{Panitia}. Despite token efforts to be inclusive, the \textit{Panitia}, like other Chinese voluntary associations, does not operate on a democratic basis. Membership and division of duties is based on one's relationships among business partners, friends, and cronies, and is largely determined by one’s ability to gather and command resources. Thus, people without the necessary connections are easily left out, and people with the necessary connections and funding but perhaps lacking the necessary skills, insights or local knowledge, can hold positions of power and decision-making. Sometimes the two come together, but not always. This \textit{guanxi}\textsuperscript{101}-based system, although an ongoing source of friction, is also increasingly the model upon which Chinese Indonesian participation in politics is taking place. Issues debated in the public sphere, including the details about Cap Go Meh, are often framed in ways that mask rather than make transparent these \textit{guanxi} politics, despite the fact that stakeholders are cognizant of them.

The response from the local community to the ascent of the \textit{Panitia} has generally been positive. People recognize and express gratitude for the sizable monetary and logistical support that the \textit{Panitia} invests in Cap Go Meh each year. However, there are also those who publicly contest the ascent of the \textit{Panitia} and question the grounds upon which one group has the right to declare itself the only legitimate authority to organize the event. One of the most vocal opponents is a leader of a local Chinese religious organization. In addition to talking to me, he has also been interviewed by several newspapers describing the problems that he sees with the new form of management of the event. The \textit{Panitia}, he argues, is undemocratic and too secular a group to host Cap Go Meh, which, according to him, is first and foremost a Taoist ritual. He opposes what he sees as an appropriation of this ritual for the purposes of tourism development and would

\textsuperscript{100} These people are locally nicknamed “bosses”, indicating that they have successfully entered into a class of people who own their own businesses.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Guanxi} is a Mandarin word meaning connections or relationships (Man.: 关系\textit{Guānxì}). There is a large literature theorizing the role of \textit{guanxi} in various aspects of Chinese societies and cultures (for some of the best anthropological discussions see Kipnis 1997 and 2002). The most common and popular logic about \textit{guanxi} states that if one has many connections and maintains them in socially appropriate ways, these connections have the potential to lead to or create opportunities, often for business purposes, in the future. Therefore, having many connections, and being seen as someone who has many connections is socially valued.
prefer Cap Go Meh was recognized explicitly as a ritual rather than treated as a multicultural “festival”, which, in his view, has the effect of secularizing the event.

His critique is valid. However, there are some other factors to consider which may be motivating his protests. The shift from local to nonlocal organization, the social class bias (Panitia members are predominantly middle-class businesspeople who now reside in Jakarta) and the guanxi-based structure of the Panitia all serve to marginalize some individuals who previously held more substantive roles in putting on Cap Go Meh each year. Personal exclusion and lacking the necessary connections for more central involvement are major factors behind the protests against the new organizational structure. I looked deeper into this issue and found that the social exclusion of this individual was rationalized by Panitia members based on allegations of graft, mismanagement and lack of accountability over previous years Cap Go Meh funds. Thus contestation of the ascent of the Panitia, while framed in terms of concrete criticisms related to the ritual nature of the event, is also fueled by personal guanxi problems and allegations of misconduct. As Cap Go Meh has grown in size, organizing the event has become increasingly complicated and emerged as a major a site of power struggles. Not all people who want to be included are included and there are conflicts and disagreements about the way things should be done and will be done each year. One of the reasons the organizing has become controversial is that the stakes in the event are increasingly high as Cap Go Meh emerges as a period of increased economic potential and a platform to develop a political career.

25.2 Regulating, Standardizing and Funding

Along with the shift from local and informal organization to central and hegemonic organization by the Panitia, a procedure to standardize and regulate Cap Go Meh participation has been introduced, including new rules surrounding the administration of funding. Individual spirit-mediums are no longer permitted to go door-to-door seeking donations. Instead the Panitia provides funds to them directly. In order to receive funding, participants must register and
provide paperwork to prove their status as spirit-mediums. Their equipment must also be registered and *to khiau*, miniature *pakkung miao* and spirit divination baskets (Hakka: *choi lam sin*; Indonesian: *jelangkung*) which will join the parade are given license plates or stickers with a registration number. The rates paid by the *Panitia* to spirit mediums in the CGM parade are standardized and grow roughly 20% each year.

Table 1: Cap Go Meh Funding

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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirit-medium Waling <em>(Tathung jalan kaki)</em></td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit-Medium with Palanquin <em>(Tathung kak to khiau)</em></td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
<td>4,500,000</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miniature Temple Palanquin <em>(Pakkung Miao)</em></td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>1,750,000</td>
<td>2,700,000</td>
<td>2,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion Dance Troupe <em>(Barongsai)</em></td>
<td>360,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit-Basket Divination and Palanquin <em>(Choi Lam Sin)</em></td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>750,000</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon Dance Troupe <em>(Liong)</em></td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>750,000</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Spirit-medium have responded very positively to the introduction of guaranteed and standardized funding; they express relief at not having to go door-to-door in search of donations and agree that the funding from the *Panitia* has guaranteed their participation in Cap Go Meh.

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102 There is ongoing debate about whether stricter more “empirical” ways of testing the validity of the spirit-mediums should be introduced.
and allowed them to focus on the task of preparing for their possession. Furthermore, they widely acknowledge that the Panitia (because of the wealth, social status, and connections of its membership) is capable of generating more money than any spirit-medium could obtain from the poor locals in the catchment areas of their temples. Despite this, however, there are those who express nostalgia for the old system in which one could choose to give donations to the spirit-medium of one’s choice; where ordinary folks could personally and directly benefit (through a sense of goodwill and the auspiciousness that comes from supporting a religious specialist) from their small donations. The new funding structure largely excludes participation by the poorer local population. Only a small handful of successful businesses in Singkawang are able to donate funds on a scale large enough to be counted and recorded for posterity. While this loss of agency on the part of the local population is considered a small and reasonable trade-off next to the comparatively large investment of money and labor made by the members of the Panitia, there is little disagreement that the new structure of organizing the event erodes the level of local control and is changing the nature of the event.

103 In order to prepare for the extended possession needed to take place in the Cap Go Meh ritual, spirit-mediums undergo periods of self-discipline, which include fasting, meditation and abstinence. These practices are widely variable, with each spirit-medium choosing how long to prepare and what constitutes fasting. For some fasting means abstaining from eating meat, for others fasting means abstaining from all foods, and still for others fasting means abstaining from all foods except white rice and water (Hakka: sit cai). The length of the preparation varies from a few days to a few weeks. However, there is consensus among spirit-mediums of the imperative to prepare in this way in order to make themselves spiritual clean enough to undergo their possession. It is understood that acts of self-mortification can only be successfully achieved with this level of spiritual readiness and "unsuccessful" acts of self-mortification (for example, those that lead to feeling pain, bleeding, fainting, or lose of possession) signify a lack of spiritual cleanliness (Hakka: mat to) attributed to poor preparation.

104 The Panitia generates most of its money from large donations from business partners in Jakarta, but they also have local field volunteers in Singkawang who are supposed to go door-to-door collecting money on behalf of the Panitia. However, local reports suggest that Singkawang is not systematically canvassed by these field volunteers.
25.3 More and More Spirit-Mediums

The monopolization of Cap Go Meh funding by the Panitia had the immediate effect of rapidly increasing the number of spirit-mediums taking part in the event. In 2001, only a couple hundred spirit-mediums joined the parade, whereas in 2011 there were 410 and in 2012 there were a record 765 spirit-mediums and over 20,000 spectators. This rise in numbers is first and foremost the result of having guaranteed funding; those who previously could not afford to join the procession now can do so due to the funding provided by the Panitia. In addition, as memories of the discrimination of the Suharto era recede into the past, and more evidence supports the fact that Cap Go Meh and other Chinese cultural events will not be met with prohibition or anger in Singkawang and throughout Indonesia, more Chinese spirit-mediums feel free to participate. In this safer environment more people, especially young people, are either learning how to be spirit-mediums, or embracing to an existing ability or propensity to be possessed by gods or spirits. Being a spirit-medium is afforded a special kind of social status in some circles and young people are increasingly drawn toward spirit-possession for the prestige (Ind. *gengsi*) it entails in local circles. The increase in spirit-mediums is part of the reemergence into the public sphere of Chinese Folk Religious activities. It is part of a larger revival of many forms of Chinese cultural
expression, including puppetry, folk and traditional music, kung fu, *barongsai*, *liong*, acrobatics, paper-cutting, lantern-making, and traditional wedding attire. Despite this revival, however, scholars caution against making the assumption that the multiple visible forms of cultural revival are indicative of a new acceptance of the social category of Chinese Indonesians by non–Chinese Indonesians (Hoon 2009; Chan 2009). What it means to be Chinese in Indonesia is indeed changing significantly and rapidly, but remains fraught terrain (Chan 2009). It carries the legacy of both colonial and post-colonial ethnic labels and stereotypes that continue to figure in the national imaginary, and play out at the local level.

Tourism promoters have welcomed the rapid increase in the number of spirit-mediums, and recognize that it adds to the potential of Singkawang’s Cap Go Meh parade for boosting tourism, local economic development, and building a unique civic identity. However, this rapid increase is also generating skepticism and questions about the authenticity of both the spirit-mediums and the gods and spirits that they channel. Some locals argue that the new group of younger less experienced mediums are not being possessed by “real gods” but rather by malevolent spirits, or devils. They further assume that these mediums are motivated by a desire for money and prestige. The practice of sacrificing small animals and eating the raw flesh and blood, as well as extreme forms of self-mortification (done while in a trance state) are now frequently cited as evidence of the presence of these Satan-type spirits. Even officials in government agencies who partner with the *Panitia* acknowledge that there is something suspect about the rapid increase in spirit-mediums. They admit the possibility that some of the new participants are motivated by money rather than solely their ritual involvement. This is problematic and unsettling because it suggests a self-interestedness, although usually denied, at odds with the idea of authenticity. Economic motivation is considered a disingenuous motivation for participation in the ritual of Cap Go Meh and the practice of Chinese spirit-mediumship in general. Doubting the motivations and authenticity of spirit-mediums does not take the form of doubting whether or not

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105 Lee (1986) also identifies the social prestige that goes along with being a spirit-medium, mentioning how prestige counter balances the potential pain of feats of strength and trance and is a motivation for working class young recruits or apprentices.

106 According to one of the prevailing logics individuals who possess great spiritual power do so because they are living “a straight life” (Ind. *kidup jalan lurus*). A straight life includes proper conduct and refraining from anger, gambling, prostitution, and actions based on self-interested motivations. To participate as a spirit-medium in Cap Go Meh for the money is considered a self-interested motivation that can reduce ones spiritual power.
an individual is in fact possessed (Ind. *Kerasukan*; Hakka: *Lok Thung*) or has the ability to be possessed. That fact is rarely called into question because practitioners of Chinese Folk Religion share general logics about spirit-mediumship. Instead, questioning shifts to the nature of the possessing spirits. Who are the gods that are being channeled by new spirit-mediums? Are they Satans? Are they wandering ghosts? Are they “real” gods? If they are not legitimate gods, how can they effectively clean the streets of malicious spirits, the stated purposes of the Cap Go Meh procession?

Many of the young people who become spirit-mediums also *merantau* to Jakarta and overseas or plan to in the future. The conditions of life in the villages around Singkawang and the poorer neighbourhoods in the city simultaneously compel people to leave in search of more lucrative opportunities, and keep them connected to the *kampung halaman* through relationships with the gods of this locality. Spirit-medium participation, like physical *merantau*, may be a way to transcend the limitations of the local environment. It can be seen as a strategy of becoming something more than oneself. Like the act of *merantau* and playing the lottery, spirit possession is a way to playing with the possibilities of one’s fate. It can also be considered a way of travelling, in a spiritual and experiential dimension, before physically leaving the *kampung halaman* is logistically possible. Like *merantau*, spirit possession is a cycle involving transitions between changing states of being. Young spirit-mediums must undergo a period of self-discipline and training in order to achieve the trance state needed to call the spirit into their body. Migrants, similarly, must build the confidence, save enough money and organize the logistics of their trips prior to embarking. Once in the *rantau*, which, in this analogy, is synonymous with a state of possession, they have the potential to transform their life circumstances into something better. The result, in both cases, is a change in status. To return to the *kampung halaman* able to start a small business, is an expression of having been successful in moving into an ideal form of adulthood. Likewise, to undergo spirit-possession during Cap Go Meh, and to come out of the possession unharmed, may be an expression of one’s spiritual potential, an important form of local power. However, the increasing number of young spirit-mediums has also created competition. Displays of spiritual power are no longer as rare as they once were and individuals often seek to differential themselves in new ways.
The problem of the quality and origin of the spirits has increased as the number of spirit-mediums has grown although these questions are not new. They reflect debates that stem from the heterogeneity of spirit-medium practice within Chinese Folk Religion. There have always been debates among local ritual experts concerning the nature of the possessing gods or spirits, and the methods used by spirit mediums. It is not simply a question of the motivation for money and prestige, but also the fact that there are so many young people joining in the spirit-medium procession. Some of the other questions now being asked are: Are the new participants experienced? Do they have proper techniques for trance and possession? Are they following proper etiquette? Where and how have they gained their ritual expertise? How do they come to know the gods and spirits that possess them?\footnote{These are the same questions that spirit mediums ask of each other's methods and ritual practices.} Aware of these questions, and in response to this problem of authenticity, the Panitia has introduced a registration system in which each individual spirit-medium who wants to join the procession and received funding from the Panitia must be able to authenticate their ability to be possessed and verify their status as a spirit-medium\footnote{This is done through letters of reference in which one person vouches on behalf of a spirit medium, verifying their ability. All spirit mediums who want to register and receive funding from the Panitia are also now required to have certificates of membership with Tri Dharma and the Kementerian Agama (Ind. Ministry of Religion).}. While this does not necessarily answer questions about the new, younger, and less experienced spirit mediums, it constitutes an acknowledgment of the situation, an attempt to monitor quality, promote authenticity, and maintain the integrity of the ritual.

26 A Chinese Folk Religion Ritual for the Indonesian Government

The suspicion that some of the spirits channeled during Cap Go Meh are not real gods but are in fact malicious spirits or devils aggravates an existing anxiety about the implications of the engagement with these gods for Muslims and for Christians\footnote{Muslims in Singkawang are primarily ethnically Malay, Javanese, and Madurese, and Christians are ethnically Chinese, Dayak, and Batak.}. To play with these kinds of spirits, according to Islam, is religiously prohibited (Ind. haram) and strongly discouraged
among some Christian Protestants. The local government is aware of the sensitivity surrounding this event and has taken measures to reduce the potential conflicts that could arise if Muslims or Christians begin to protest the scale of Cap Go Meh in Singkawang or protest the fact that it is the central pillar of Singkawang’s economic development plan and burgeoning civic identity as “Indonesia’s Chinatown”. Attuned to the risks involved in heavily promoting the event of one religious or ethnic group over and above those of other groups, the local government has taken concrete steps to depict and promote Cap Go Meh as a more secular event. As such, Cap Go Meh (as it is practiced in Singkawang) is rebranded in such a way that displaces its meaning as an elaborate ritual from the Chinese Folk Religion tradition which includes a pantheon of gods, spirits and ancestors. The Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan (Ind. Tourism and Culture Agency) have rebranded Cap Go Meh as a local cultural tradition, the result of a hybridization of local Dayak and Chinese culture, said to have originated as a community response to a historic small pox outbreak.

This is an important and strategic recasting that allows Cap Go Meh to be protected from forces in the sensitive and often volatile interethnic and interreligious environment throughout Indonesia. This recasting transforms Cap Go Meh imaginatively and representationally (if not substantively) from a ritual to a festival; from something religious to something cultural, and from something purely Chinese (thus perceived as having foreign origins) to something both Chinese and Dayak (thus perceived as more local and indigenous). These steps exist to recast Cap Go Meh as a more secular, cultural festival of the post-Suharto era. It is particularly problematic for the government to fund Cap Go Meh because the polytheistic nature of Chinese Folk Religion (despite being officially permitted once again) is fundamentally at odds with the monotheism of Islam and Christianity, as well as the monotheistic principle outlined in the official state ideology. The fact that Cap Go Meh is primarily a Chinese (as opposed to Dayak) ritual further increases these tensions, because the position of the Chinese and the status of “Chineseness” in Indonesian society, while changing, remains sensitive. Being Chinese continues to be a problematic category and Chinese people are still targeted as scapegoats for social inequalities in some contexts. Government promoters cannot deny the great potential of

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110 According to the five principles (Ind. Pancasila) enshrined in the state guiding philosophy developed at the time of independence, all Indonesians must believe in “the one almighty god” (Ind. Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa).
Cap Go Meh (more so than any other annual holiday) for local tourism development—which is one the city’s few concrete economic development ideas—however, the need to proceed with sensitivity is based on a very real risk of disturbing the precarious interethnic and interreligious peace.

An incident that occurred in 2007 during Cap Go Meh in Pontianak, the provincial capital, exemplifies the scale of precarity and the risks involved\(^{111}\). In 2000, Cap Go Meh resumed in Pontianak and between 2000 and 2007 the event also steadily grew in size, in much of the same way that Chinese New Year celebrations throughout Indonesia had expanded during this period. However, in 2007, a disagreement between two individuals over damage to a parked car sparked a series of restrictions to Cap Go Meh. The damage and the disagreement about who was at fault quickly escalated as people began taking sides along ethnic lines\(^{112}\). A police resolution followed this fight, the outcome of which was that leaders of the Chinese community were made to apologize, and the spirit-medium parade was canceled indefinitely in Pontianak. Now only a lantern parade is permitted, and it is restricted to certain hours of the day and certain streets of the city. These restrictions constitute a reinstatement of the previous Suharto-era ban on public displays of Chinese folk religion, although no longer backed by official assimilationist laws. The justification of these new restrictions is framed by the police in terms of a need to maintain public safety and security\(^{113}\). It has also been argued that the ban is a response to pressure from members of the Muslim majority population who feel threatened by the amount of power some members of the Chinese population are gaining in regional politics (Chan 2009:134). As a further justification of the new restrictions, some key individuals have labeled the spirit-medium parade “sadist” and portrayed it as something from which the public must be protected, particularly children. Public debates about whether the extreme practices of spirit-media are sadist or not take place in local media, as well as among friends, and are linked to questions about what is *haram*, what is sacred and where acts conform to or deviate from locally

\(^{111}\) For more information about Cap Go Meh in Pontianak, including a longer description and analysis of this incident, see Chan 2009: 134.

\(^{112}\) Clashes and communal violence in Indonesia is often triggered by these kinds of incidents, which originate as conflicts between only a few people, but quickly take on greater magnitude as others join along ethnic or religious lines. Such conflicts are relatively common and often violent, and there are several recent examples from around the archipelago.

\(^{113}\) This year the dragon parade in Pontianak had 600 police officers standing by in order to maintain peace.
acceptable norms. Four hours north of Pontianak, in Singkawang, in direct response to this growing discourse on “sadism”, the local government tried to preemptively and explicitly reject the sadist label, explaining in the local governmental magazine Spetakuler that, “the attraction [Cap Go Meh] that happens is not an act of sadism. It is only a commemoration of embodied gratitude toward the Almighty. Of course it is only done by the experts, namely the tathung.”

In order to even out the sizable promotion of Cap Go Meh in Singkawang as a national and international event, the local government has also tried to angkat (Ind. raise up/promote) a few key annual events from other ethnic groups. Hui has written about this in his comparison of Cap Go Meh with Naik Dango and Mahurram (2007). Most recently, in 2014, the government in partnership with Ikatan Keluarga Besar Madura Kalimantan Barat (Ind. West Kalimantan's Large Family of Madurese) hosted Karapan Sapi, (Madurese Bull-Racing) which is scheduled to become another annual event, and is part of the provinces promotion of harmony via an ideology of Triculturalism (Hui 2007). The notion of 'Triculturalism' is problematic in many ways, but most notable in this case is the fact that the sizeable and long-standing Madurese communities in the province are gaining official recognition, via Karapan Sapi in a system of ethnic representation in which they are already erased symbolically and linguistically. The Madurese population in the city of Singkawang is in fact now larger than the Dayak population; however, Dayak ethnicity is afforded greater representation and recognition based on its integrity and originality (Ind. asli). While Malay, Dayak and Chinese are considered the three main ethnic pillars of the province, with the Chinese having gained recognition only recently. After decades of discrimination, violence and historical erasure, the Madurese and other communities (such as Javanese and Bugis), are still considered less significant minorities. This is one of the ways that the politics of belonging are playing out locally which I began discussing in Chapter 1. It relates to the perceived degrees of originality and autochthony associated with each ethnic group and their real imagined kampung halaman. The Chinese in West Kalimantan are increasingly able to construct and perform their own autochthony, expressing their emotional connections to villages of birth in Indonesia in ways that meaningfully employ the Indonesian territorial metaphor of home, the kampung halaman. Through performances of autochthony, of which Cap Go Meh is a prime example, the concepts of “foreigner”, “other” and “stranger” which have been stamped upon them at various times in history are gradually fading away (Hui 2007).
The promotion and development of Cap Go Meh into a major international tourist attraction is clearly in the material and strategic interests of multiple stakeholders invested in the event. Jakarta businessmen, local government officials, hotel owners, tour operators, and shopkeepers all recognize the tourism potential of Cap Go Meh stemming from its extraordinary character. Locals residents are proud of Cap Go Meh and increasingly identify with it as the defining civic event and a unique local, cultural event that makes their small city famous. The most extreme aspects of the ritual—the acts of self-mortification—in particular attract tourists who specifically seek out extraordinary phenomenon. Locals express pride in the fact that Cap Go Meh in Singkawang is unique in Indonesia and the world. As a large, intense, and awesome spectacle, it has great appeal to tourists and spectators. However, it is precisely the characteristics which make Cap Go Meh an intense spectacle to witness (things that have been described as “unbelievable”, “magical”, “horrific”, “extreme” and “extraordinary”) that also make it dangerous and subject to being labeled sadist. These are the aspects that are frequently at the center of public debates concerning what constitutes proper ritual practice, what is sacred, and what is haram and for whom, and what poses risks to public safety and hygiene. For example, in 2009, Majelis Ulama Indonesia, the largest Muslim clerical body in Indonesia, issued a reminder to Muslims that Cap Go Meh is haram and urged members of the religious community to boycott the event. Police directives and local government statements, such as a press announcement by Singkawang’s new mayor in Tribune Pontianak, seek to dissuade spirit-mediums from engaging in some of the more extreme practices such as animal sacrifice. Ultimately, as the government of a Muslim majority country, supporting a polytheistic Chinese Folk Religion ritual involves risks (both intrinsic to Islam and intrinsic to state ideology, Pancasila) which need to be constantly mediated and managed with great sensitivity.
27 The Panitia (Ind. Committee) as a Platform for Politics

After asserting a monopoly on organizing Cap Go Meh, the Panitia began working directly with the government; with the police who provide security and determine the route of the spirit-medium parade; with the mayor who determines how much money will be directed from the local budget to government agencies before being given over to the Panitia; and with the government staff in charge of tourism and cultural promotion. It is important to note that over the past 12 years, Cap Go Meh has gone from being officially and publicly banned in Indonesia to being promoted and partially funded by government monies, a change that embodies some of the dramatic transformations under way in Indonesian national and local politics. In 2005, Hasan Karman was elected as the first Chinese mayor of the city (and the first Chinese mayor in Indonesia). Since then, more and more Chinese Indonesians in Singkawang are getting involved in politics after a long period of exclusion. This engenders local political competition with a new interethnic dimension that was largely absent during the Suharto era and must be negotiated delicately in order to avoid conflicts. Cap Go Meh, as a large public display of ethnic and

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114 Government contributions to Cap Go Meh have increased quickly and significantly over the last 12 years and far exceed those made for other annual events including the Islamic New Year, Muharram, Idul Fitri or the Dayak harvest festival, Naik Dango.
religious “Chineseness”, has quickly become implicated in these broader politics and the sensitive handling that they require.

The *Panitia* Cap Go Meh has now developed into a political arena where hopeful candidates can build connections needed to run for office and for political aspirations to be realized. This is in part because the *Panitia* works so closely with government and because it is comprised of the people who have acquired the name, reputation, and connections that are required for both the practice of politics in Indonesia, along with status in the Chinese society in Singkawang. When the time comes to convene a campaign team (Ind. *tim sukses*) for local elections, prominent individuals who are members of the *Panitia* are called upon to go around to local neighborhoods and villages promoting their preferred candidate (Ind. *sosilisasi*). In fact, it is now becoming apparent that those who lead the *Panitia* often have aspirations for future mayoral or parliamentary elections. As head of the *Panitia* they can innovate and develop initiatives based on personal or private donations, donations which have the potential to contribute to a political campaign down the road, raising one’s public profile, and providing evidence of leadership qualities. This position allows them to simultaneously display their creativity, innovation, and ability to gather and command resources of various kinds from their social network. When this started in 2007, a major supporter and organizer of Cap Go Meh and other individuals in his social network used the event explicitly to introduce a new mayoral candidate, Hasan Karman, who they had collectively decided to back in the mayoral race. Hasan Karman, a native Hakka Singkawang who was living in Jakarta running his various businesses, returned to Singkawang along with the individuals who formed his *tim sukses*. He was introduced to the local population and his to intent to run for mayor was communicated at the village and neighborhood levels. During that campaign, he had a major public appearance during Cap Go Meh, along with members of his *tim sukses*, who were also the main members of the *Panitia*. Since then the connection between the *Panitia* Cap Go Meh and mayoral politics has become entrenched. The subsequent mayor, Awang Ishak, a Malay/Tambi\(^\text{115}\) man, also used the high-profile moment to display his status, connections and support for the Chinese community, as well as promote the civic goals of multi-ethnic harmony and tourism development.

\(^{115}\) Tambi is the local Malay word for people of mixed Indian ancestry.
The connection between the Panitia and local politics is another area fraught with conflict as evidenced by several recent power plays. In 2012, during the lead up to Cap Go Meh and the subsequent mayoral election, a prominent Jakarta businessman, philanthropist, and promoter of Cap Go Meh, known to have political ambitions in competition with the then mayor Hasan Karman, was poised to become the head of the Panitia Cap Go Meh. However, at the last moment, he was denied that position, despite the personally-funded promotion projects he sponsored throughout the previous year. The position was given, instead, to a well-known local hotel owner, who was also the Hasan Karman’s campaign financier. This political maneuvering is understandable given the fact that it ultimately rests on mayor to convene the Panitia each year and decide who will take up leadership positions, all of which are formalized into an official government surat keputusan (Ind. decision letter). After the mayoral election in 2013, these politics and the scale of conflict increased further due to intense political competition between two of the three ethnic Chinese candidates who ran in the mayoral race.

Cap Go Meh is now routinely being used as a springboard to enter politics by ambitious candidates who are aware of how influential this position can be based on the politics they have witnessed during previous election campaigns. Not only leaders, but members of the Panitia as well, have the opportunity to prove their leadership ability, increase their social network, and make connections, all of which they hope will translate into leadership ability, increase their social network, and make connections, all of which they hope will translate into contracts and business opportunities down the road. Cap Go Meh is being used strategically as a way to both develop the city of Singkawang and build one’s name and reputation among the local community. For those who come home annually from Jakarta and overseas for Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh, but have no specific political interests, their participation as Panitia members is conceived of as a)

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116 One example is the making of the song “Singkawang Sebuah harmony” by famous Indonesian musician Katon Bagaskara during the promotional campaign Cap Go Meh Singkawang for Indonesia. However, there have been many others as well, including art exhibitions and books of photography, and mega projects like the eight horse chariot constructed for Imlek and Cap Go Meh 2014.

117 Positions on the Panitia can translate directly and indirectly into contracts for services rendered, although not all of these contracts hold financial incentive for Panitia members, whose work is mostly voluntary. For example, the contract for printing banners and flags to decorate the city of Singkawang during Cap Go Meh may go to one of the prominent members of the Panitia who owns a printing business. The costs of the printing, however, may not all be covered by Panitia funds; he may be making a donation of his services, but one, it is hoped, which will not be forgotten, and will thus turn into more business opportunities later. This is also the case for the donations of clothing to be worn by event participants and the donation of pigs for the sacrifice, etc. These practices could be labeled a form of neopatrimonialism (Barker and van Klinken 2009).
form of charity to their *kampung halaman*. Many are explicit about the love that they have for Singkawang and the desire they have, especially as they get older, to actively participate in holding Cap Go Meh. An act which they consider to function as a kind of cultural heritage preservation and a form of local economic development (Hui 2007: 310). From their positions as donors of supplies and altar objects, and VIPs in the Cap Go Meh auction who can out bid local participants, this moment provides an opportunity to *cari nama* (Ind. make a reputation), to build and display one’s wealth, prestige and social connections as successful *perantau* (Ind. sojourners). Their continued love and investment in their hometown also demonstrates that they are morally upstanding. Like the forms of sharing of wealth with one's poorer peers and relatives in Singkawang, this kind of public hometown support through charity is a socially valued way of being wealthy and helps people to establish their name in positive as opposed to negative ways (i.e. the problem of being considered *pelit* or *sombong*).

It is not only those with political aspirations, or Jakarta returnees, who have stakes in the economy of name and reputation that play out during Cap Go Meh each year. The ritual specialists—the spirit-mediums—also have considerable stakes, which, like those of members of the *Panitia*, reveal important intersections of symbolic, social, and material forms of capital. For spirit-mediums this annual event is an opportunity to publically demonstrate their spiritual power and ritual expertise that begins with the preparatory period of fasting, meditating, and avoiding ritually unclean and unlucky things. This period is open for public view by followers and neighbors of local spirit-mediums. People continue to consult them for healing which makes their activities of ritual expertise (fasting, meditating, praying, preparing materials) both visible and social. Prior to Cap Go Meh, spirit-mediums will have already recruited people from within their social network—friends, neighbors, and regular clients—to work as their palanquin bearers and assistants. This is a serious and paid position that people are usually honored to be asked to do. During the parade, these palanquin bearers become a physical manifestation of the spirit-medium’s social network and their ability to call on their social network for critical support. It is
also the way that the majority of non-Chinese locals (Dayak, Malay, Madurese, Javanese, etc.) find a way to participate in the event.\footnote{It is particularly a way for Malay youth to participate and make money. I have spoken to numerous young Malay men who have participated in Cap Go Meh for several years as palanquin bearers, many of whom return to join the entourage of the same spirit-medium each year. While some of these young men are familiar with the patron deity of the spirit-medium they are carrying, others are not fully aware. Still others are embarrassed or uncomfortable to been seen participating in the parade and even go as far as to wear head masks to protect their identities. This relates back to the fact that according to Islam involvement with the spirits present during Cap Go Meh is considered religious prohibited (Ind. haram).}

While it is generally understood that participation in Cap Go Meh is decided by the gods who choose that day to come down, possess the bodies of spirit-mediums, and celebrate their annual holiday together, there is now also a new aspect of self-promotion on the part of the spirit-mediums themselves who are increasingly using Cap Go Meh as a time to spread information about their healing services. Among the hundreds of video clips of Cap Go Meh posted on YouTube since around 2007, there are now several promotional videos. One in particular depicts Cong Jau Hin\footnote{See the link \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYNKFXPGc9U&index=8&list=PL9B7F74AP90F3AAD1}, accessed May 2016.}, a spirit-medium from Singkawang who has a Pakkung in Jembatan Lima, a Singkawang Chinese-dominated neighborhood of Jakarta. The video lists the name of the spirit-mediums patron deity, Thien Shie Fap Thong, the name, address, and phone number of the pakkung miao where this spirit-medium practices and the kinds of conditions and illnesses for which healing may be sought. The video documents his preparations for Cap Go Meh in Singkawang, including his prayers, self-mortifications, and procession atop his bladed palanquin. This video acts like an electronic business card, providing contact information but also visual proof of his spiritual strength and ritual expertise, in the hopes of generating further consultation and healing seekers. This can be seen as a strategy for social mobility, which is part of the system of social reproduction in Singkawang. By turning spirit-medium practice into an enterprise, mediums who market themselves in this way can tap into the values associated with entrepreneurship, which as I have shown, are central to the system of Hakka Singkawang mobilities.

Consultations can be a significant revenue-generating activity for spirit-mediums. It is their work. It is how they sustain themselves and their families. It is also potentially (although not
always) lucrative\textsuperscript{120}, both in terms of direct payments for consultations as well as the ongoing donations received from people who have had successful healing or efficacious consultations with them in the past. Whether or not a spirit-medium can make money from their practice is determined largely by their reputation; the perceived magical efficacy of their services; the economic characteristics of their clients; the extent of their social network; the structure of the annual birthday party celebration of their possessing god (Hakka: \textit{sinminsang}); and the way they organize and accept donations and payments. Being a spirit-medium in Singkawang, while associated with a relative lack of material capital, is nonetheless associated with spiritual power which is transformed into a kind of prestige value that can create forms of material capital. One of the most common ways this transformation of capital works is via Singkawang people who are \textit{sudah sukses} and \textit{sudah menjadi bos} in Jakarta or overseas and yet continue to maintain close relationships based on charity and exchange with the ritual specialist(s) and the patron deities they have consulted in the \textit{kampung halaman}, prior to their \textit{merantau}.

I have attended numerous \textit{sinminsang} (Hak. birthday parties for gods) in which businessmen from Jakarta, Batam, Singapore, etc. return home for the occasion to participate. On these occasions, they will have their talisman reactivated and perhaps have a consultation with the spirit-medium. They may ask for lucky numbers for a lottery, or they may request a new amulet for another purpose. In exchange for receiving these spiritual goods, Jakarta returnees may donate to the spirit-medium in the form of \textit{ang pao} (Hak. red envelopes), sponsor temple reconstruction or renovation projects (Hui 2007: 319), donate objects to the auction that takes place during the birthday celebration, and participate energetically in the auction. These wealthier out of town 'bosses' frequently perform competitive bidding wars during the birthday celebration auction which can be seen as a multidimensional strategy of 1) supporting their spirit-medium (and their patron deity) 2) investing in the temple, 3) building up their name and reputation in the local community and recording it for posterity (particularly important for those with political ambitions), 4) promoting cultural heritage preservation and 5) giving back in a charitable sense to the \textit{kampung halaman}.

\textsuperscript{120}Lee (1986) makes an important observation that in cases where spirit-medium practice does not generate revenue, the value and reliance of the prestige associated with the status of being a ritual expert increases. Hui (2007: 218) also notes that the success of a spirit-medium is often based on their reputation and group of followers.
At the heart of this dynamic between a spirit-medium and a wealthy client is a chronology of events in which the spirit-medium (and their patron deity) has helped that person in some instrumental way, such as by providing a successful lucky number for a lottery, or providing a*pho* (Hak. talisman) of protection, or a ceremony to remove unluckiness, or an amulet to promote prosperity through business, or a *feng shui* adjustment to *tolak bala* (Ind. prevent disaster). It is in part a sense of indebtedness and gratefulness for that initial instrumental help which inspires that person to return to that temple and that same spirit-medium year after year. This follows the logics of the obligations inherent in gift exchange (Mauss 1925). These charitable acts during returns trips home are not only a way of expressing respect for what has already happened, but also potentially a way to promote continued prosperity in the future.

Participation as a member of the *Panitia* during Cap Go Meh, or simply as a spectator or a buyer in the auction follows the same kinds of logic as participation in *sinminsang* (of which there are hundreds that take place throughout the year). The same individuals who participate in the Cap Go Meh auction also *pulang kampung* at other times of year to participate in the *sinminsang*. Because this is a moment when people return home to celebrate, including out of town clients, it is an important moment for spirit-mediums to perform the possession by their patron deities and perform acts of self-mortification in order verify their spiritual strength. The more whole-hearted these performances are, the stronger the relationship between spirit-mediums, patron deities and their followers, including both local residents and hometown returnees. The more whole-hearted these performances are, the more "exotic" and "impressive the visible effect" (Hui 2007: 307), the more easily they are exploited for cultural tourism (Ind. *wisata budaya*), including new forms of capitalization (Hui 2007:310).

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121 The same observations about the connection between wealthy Jakarta returnees, temple reconstruction and charitable pursuits has been made by Hui who also explains the necessity to return to the tutelary gods of the locality, who are themselves imagined to be the keepers of the records of the residents in their constituencies (2007:320).

122 The *Panitia* sells tickets for seats in the stands, and is creating tourism packages. Locals are making t-shirts, and small handicrafts for sale and vendors use Cap Go Meh to sell drinks and snacks. Chan (2009) has also observed that Cap Go Meh runs the risk of being appropriated and commodified for tourism purposes.
28 Conclusion

Two other scholars have written about Cap Go Meh and Chinese Folk Religion in Singkawang, and both arrive at conclusions that highlight the significance of place and the relationship between the people and the locality. Margaret Chan interprets the spirit-medium parade as an expression of a commitment to Indonesia as the homeland (2009). She argues that the event is wrapped up in inter-ethnic politics, which ultimately affirm a patriotic Chinese Indonesian identity. Similarly, Hui (2007) argues that people’s involvement in territorial cults with Dabogong (Hak. Thai Pak Kung) or Datuk (Hak. latok) deities (represented by the spirit-mediums in the Cap Go Meh ritual and parade) are part of a set of religions practices which "introduce a provisional homeliness into everyday life where estrangement is the condition of existence" (197). I partly agree with Chan and Hui’s interpretations of the way that tutelary gods of locality are often imagined as primordial pioneers, and how they are mobilized through everyday practices in order to "resolve that which threatens the flow of everyday life," (Hui 2007: 196) as well as "impose order over wayward spirits" (Hui 2007: 220). Indeed, Chinese Folk Religion in Singkawang is interwoven in many banal activities of everyday life, many of which have exorcistic dimensions. That Cap Go Meh is imagined to be an exorcistic rite is clear. It is explained by former mayor Hasan Karman and other locals alike as such, and stems from, among other things, the general preoccupation within Chinese Folk Religious practice to live in peaceful relationships with both potentially harmful and potentially helpful gods, ghosts and ancestors (Wolf 1978). The continual “presencing” of the gods, through spirit-medium worship, sinminsang and Cap Go Meh (as well as kaci, hungry ghost-feeding and kociat) can be interpreted as acts of territorialization in which space is transformed into place by being imbued with significance and meaning. In this case claims to space are based on the presence of the gods. This is directly linked to the ongoing politics of belonging in Indonesia, the imagined multicultural composition of the nation and the territorial definition and division of peoples according to physical geography or kampung halaman. I prefer to view these continual acts of the presencing of gods as expressions of ethnic identity that help to construct a narrative of autochthony, which as I have argued, is a key aspect of gaining recognition for one’s legitimacy to belong in that place. It is the experience of feeling at home in a place and a social space, which
is being articulated, and not, as Hui has posited, the opposite of that, a feeling strangeness, of being alienated from self and estranged from place. While very similar to the conclusions of both Chan (2009) and Hui (2007), my interpretation is a much more modest one, based as it is on observation of social dynamics. All of the various forms of participation in Cap Go Meh, from spectators to spirit-mediums, Panitia members to palanquin bearers, are best seen as a collective articulation of feelings of love for, and attachment to, Singkawang as the kampung halaman. While this kampung halaman is in Indonesia, it is not quite a sense of Indonesian patriotism that is being expressed, as Chan has suggested. Neither is it a sense of loss or estrangement, which demands constant refutation or deferment, as Hui has suggested. Cap Go Meh, and the other acts of presencing the gods, are moments of articulating a shared ethnic and cultural identity that is territorially bound up in the local landscape. For the majority of local people, this is an expression of their relationship with their hometown which is less burdened by an existential problematic than that which has been posited by Hui and other scholars.
Conclusion

I was sitting at my desk in the Department of Anthropology, at the University of Toronto when I heard the ping sound of an announcement on Facebook. I switched over to the browser window to read the message. It was from one of my informants from Singkawang, a not uncommon event as I regularly communicate with many of my former research participants via social media. However, this particular message came as a surprise to me.

“Emily, I am in a small town in Florida. I’m working in a Chinese restaurant. It is very bad here. Can you help me?” from Vincent.

“You are in Florida?” I exclaimed. “Florida is a long way from Toronto. What’s going on?”

Vincent had not left Singkawang directly after high school unlike most of his peers. Instead, he had stayed at home in Singkawang and studied law and English at the local post-secondary college. When I first met him he was working in his family’s shop during the day and teaching an English course out of his house at night. He wanted to become a lawyer because he wanted to learn how to fight an inheritance problem in his family. Vincent was one of the few young people I had met who had expressed interest in developing a professional career rather than starting a business. I found his perspective useful in comparison to so many other young people who expressed business aspirations.

The last time I saw Vincent he told me that he had stopped studying and that he was working as an informal agent connecting buyers from Jakarta with real estate for sale in Singkawang. Judging by his family’s property—a tidy two story house with a garden—the motorcycle he drove and the claims he made about his real estate dealings I did not anticipate that he would consider seeking employment overseas, particularly not as an illegal migrant worker.

“I used a tourist visa to get here. Now I need to change it and get a work permit. Do you know how to do that?” He asked me in our Facebook chat.
“No, I don’t know how,” I replied

“I think I need a lawyer, but I don’t have enough money for a lawyer yet, so I have to work illegally until I can get the money for the lawyer to get a work permit or a green card.”

I was still in disbelief that he was in America; I had not realized that he wanted to go there. I had so many questions that I wanted to ask him.

Vincent entered the United States on a tourist visa and went first to North Dakota to work in a Chinese restaurant that he heard about from a friend. But it was too cold for him so he moved to another Chinese restaurant within the same network in a small town in Florida. He lives in the house of his boss, but does not like him. He works 12 hours a day and makes $100, but he says it’s not enough to save money fast. He wants to find a better paying job, but it is difficult because he is an illegal worker. He feels trapped. He says his life has become “an khu” (Hak. very bitter). When I ask him why he decided to go there, he says that it was “time to make money” and time to “look for a better life”, a repetition of the explanations I had heard so many times before.

This new development in his life made me think back to one evening in Singkawang when I had met Vincent and his friends in a coffee shop where they would hang out every night. We went as a group to visit a spirit-medium to request lucky numbers to use in the lottery, something which they did often. That night Vincent played the number that he was given. The results were announced the following day but he did not win. Later, he claimed that he had had a dream the night before in which the winning lottery numbers had appeared like a vision, not the same number given to him by the spirit-medium. “Bad luck,” he had said. “I should have trusted my dream, rather than the spirit-medium.” He smiled and laughed. While he never talked about plans to go overseas, thinking back I realized that Vincent was playing the lottery as a way of testing out his luck. He was playing with the possibilities of his life and this new migration is an extension of that albeit a riskier and more long-range gamble. I thought about how Vincent had spent several years perfecting his English, studying law, teaching, and working as an agent, trying to create his own social mobility in Singkawang. Through each of these activities he was
developing his confidence to go overseas. Now, like the others I have interviewed, he is engaged in a process of *khaomiang suí* (Hak. testing his fate) in the *rantau*, the space of migration (Lindquist 2009: 10).

“What’s your plan? When are you going back?” I asked him during that first conversation.

“I don’t know. Maybe I can stay here. Maybe I can get a green card.” He replied.

His statement is ambitious but not impossible. However, I doubt that this will happen. I see his expression of a desire for permanent emigration mostly as a productive fantasy, as an act of playing with the possibilities of his life, and his destiny. He is allowing possibilities to be explored through transnational mobility, he is engaging them fully by being there right now. However, he is already expressing disappointments and complaints. There are already reasons why small town Florida is not as nice as home. What is happening for Vincent, is similar to what happened to the other people I interviewed throughout this research. There is a recalibration of the self in the context of mobility. He is learning about himself and his home town by being away. His perspectives about places are changing as his transnational fantasies undergo transformation during his experience living as an illegal migrant worker overseas. Things which did not seem as important before leaving, begin to take on a greater significance while away. These are often expressed as a desire to be close to family, friends, and familiar places in his hometown. In our next chat over Facebook, Vincent lists the food for home that he misses and says he can’t wait to see his family again. He is already planning his return to Singkawang. He imagines it will take him three years to save enough money for a successful return.

The longing for home that develops in the *rantau* is an expression of a need for a sense of belonging in the world; it is a craving for a social space in which one’s cultural logics of the world are understood, valued and shared amongst of a group of people. In this dissertation I have shown how the experience of the changing self in the context of mobility exerts a powerful influence on people’s sense of belonging in the world. As the self undergoes changes during the experiences of mobility, one’s perspectives about the places that one is coming from, going to and then returning to, also undergo transformation. This is not unique to Hakka people from
Singkawang; This is a broader phenomenon inherent in the process of developing a sense of belonging in the world in the context of transnational mobility (Basch, Schiller and Blanc 2005). However, in the case of Hakka Singkawang mobilities, the experiences of the changing self as people move from home to away and back again (whether to Jakarta or to other countries), fuels the construction of a powerful imaginary of Singkawang as the *kampung halaman*, and Hakka culture in Singkawang as distinctive.

The changing sense of self that emerges through the experience of transnational mobility are brought back to the hometown and transform the hometown (Gardner 1993). Migrants are continuously trying to position themselves in relation to their conceptualization of “home” and “away” only to find that those places have in fact been changed by their being there or by their being “away”. As they come to experience these places in new ways, part of their experiences is learning about how they have changed. What emerges is a dialectic between the changes in the self and the changes to the various places where people carry out their lives. In this way, people are active agents in the constitution of space and place. They create it through their movements, presence, daily activities, and imaginaries. However, the lives of the participants in this research also reveals that the ways that being in those places feels is never quite how people imagine it will be. The realities of who one is and what is possible for one to do in those places appears to always exist just beyond a horizon of understanding. As a result, people have a distinct experience of having to play catch up with the changing composition of their categories of home and away. This can feel unexpected and disorienting, and frequently leads to the decision to move again, to another place, or to return home. This experience of having to constantly recalibrate the self in relation to home and away, in turn, propels further mobility.

The changes in the self that people experience involve a complex interplay of factors, not limited to experiences living overseas. Age, gender, position in the Chinese family and socio-economic background all play a role. An individual’s particularly trajectory, their position in the cycle of *merantau*, and experiences of trying to ‘test their fate’ through a challenging rite of passage, all contribute to the ways they grow and change as people. There is also the poignant experience of living in states of marginality overseas and the affective connections to the *kampung halaman* that they discover and cultivate during their sojourns. In this dissertation I have shown how
mobile individuals are embedded in a series of scales: personal, local, national and international. As individuals work on their lives using mobility to generate social mobility, they are continuously positioning themselves in relations to a set of imaginaries which includes the family, the ethnic group, the kampung halaman, the nation, the middle class and the transnational.

One of the most meaningful sources of identification is an elaboration of the ethnic community, which I have called Hakka Singkawang in line with how my research participants self-identify. This culture is presented as traditional and kuno, imagined as an inheritance brought from China and preserved in the Indonesian context. It is described as being territorially bounded and rooted within the local community in Singkawang. The elaboration of this idea of Hakka Chinese culture contributes to the conceptualization of the concept of home, which, in Indonesia is based on a territorial metaphor of the kampung halaman (Ind. home; lit. village front yard). The concept of the kampung halaman is conflated with the Chinese concept of ancestral village (Man. 祖乡 zǔ xiāng).

Many of the practices which take place in Chinese villages—return visits for Chinese New Year, ancestor worship, grave cleaning, temple (re)construction, philanthropic initiatives, and hometown associations—also take place in Singkawang. These practices constitute processes of place-making and, help to strengthen Chinese claims to legitimate belonging in the context of a politics of belonging in Indonesia. This politics of belonging is defined by a politics of indigeneity and the discourse of ancient traditional culture, and the practices which ground Chinese Folk Religious identity in specific places (i.e. Datuk cults and earth gods, grave rituals and Cap Go Meh) contribute to an imaginary in which the local Chinese community have autochthonous origins. The prevalence of these practices, the majority Chinese population of the town and the rise of Chinese in local politics all contribute to my characterization of Singkawang as the quintessential Chinatown of Indonesia.

This dissertation explored the uncanny push and pull of this particular kampung halaman—the simultaneous desire to leave and the desire to stay or return. This is usually framed in terms of a question of wealth, with two seemingly contradictory statements repeated by many individuals:
“anyone with money will leave Singkawang and go overseas to find a better life” and “anyone who has money doesn’t need to leave Singkawang to find a better life”. The tension between these two statements reveals the intersection of mobility and social mobility. The pursuit of upward social mobility compels people to go to Jakarta and overseas to access more lucrative labour markets, (mobility which would be unnecessary if they were already wealthy). However, the social status changes that go along with this social mobility are primarily experienced at home, in relationships with friends, family, and neighbours. To work overseas and save money carries with it a certain cosmopolitan status, but to receive recognition of that status requires returning to the community where the meanings of that mobility originate and make sense.

In this dissertation I have explained how the cultural ideal of ‘becoming a boss’ plays out in the lives of young people who use long and short range mobility to create social mobility back home. A boss, particularly a “big boss”, is a high status position, imbued with value, which is central to a system of social reproduction. I have argued that the pursuit of this ideal, the pursuit of the status that goes along with being a “boss” is a powerful force driving mobility. I have also shown how becoming a boss is not merely about developing a business, but is also about developing oneself and trying to achieve a kind of ideal adulthood. Being able to become a boss is seen as a benchmark of success and of the ability to manifest the potentialities of one’s fate in positive ways. This is not an easy process, as is evident in the ways people describe this as a “struggle” and recount the bitterness that they had to endure to achieve their eventual success. This resembles the well-documented Chinese ideology of hard work and self-sacrifice (Loyalka 2012).

The idea of struggle and self-sacrifice for social mobility is most poignant in the lives of women who marry men in Taiwan and Hong Kong via arranged cross-border marriages that are increasingly commercialized. This gendered form of mobility is also described by locals as a process of “looking for a better life” and the women who choose this route are often valorized for their bravery and their willingness to self-sacrifice for improvements to the material conditions of the family. In this research I discovered that these women, despite having emigrated to Hong and Taiwan, have a deep desire to pulang kampung to Singkawang, which never ceases to be considered their kampung halaman. An inability to merge cross-cultural
difference, bad marriages, and the achievement of a change in the material conditions of the family back home, all contribute to high rates of divorce, which often result in women returning to Singkawang later in their lives. For younger generations, cross-border marriage of this form is a less appealing option than going overseas as students or workers. A discourse framing this type of marriage as a form of human trafficking, as well as reports of bad living conditions by previous marriage migrants, increased economic development in Singkawang, and changes in the international marriage market in Taiwan and Hong Kong have all contributed to a gradual reduction in cross-border marriage in Singkawang.

Whether *merantau* is to Jakarta to work with relatives, or overseas as labour migrants, international students or marriage migrants, Hakka Singkawang mobilities are characterized by a struggle. The struggle is framed in terms of the individual having to overcome challenges in the pursuit of a better life. These explanations speak to an inherent tension that exists in the cultural logic of Hakka Singkawang mobility and subjectivity. On the one hand, the pursuit of enterprise is highly valued and inculcated in youth, n the other hand, the conditions within which people pursue enterprise are fundamentally limited by multiple forms of poverty and marginality. The low socio-economic status of the community overall, the geographic remoteness of the town and the absence of developed industries constitute structural limitations. The inability to develop the flexibility and tolerance needed to transform temporary working arrangements overseas into more long-lasting international careers is another limitation. In this dissertation I have documented the experiences of going through this kind of struggle and explained how people adjust their expectation and change their plans according to the ways things feel while undergoing short and long range mobility. The idea that enterprise has inherent value, underpins the pursuit of a particular kind of social mobility (i.e. becoming a boss). The ability to play with the possibilities of one’s life in pursuit of this goal becomes intimately intertwined with one’s sense of belonging in the world.
Bibliography


Appendix 1: “Singkawang” Song

San Kheu Jong

Thi fong ho het San Kheu Jong  
Jiu lui mo lui che ka tu he jit jong  
Nyi mo khon sui ngai, ngai han jiu hi mong  
Ngai pok Pak Kung cin cin oi to long . . .

Thi fong ho het San Kheu Jong  
Jiu lui mo lui thai se tu he jit jong  
Nyi mo khon sui ki, ki han jiu hi mong  
Asal Pak Kung cin cin oi to long . . .

Theu lu cho jit hong, jan buk chin he hong  
Nya kai lui chiu nak loi, nyun hong piong  
Pak Kung oi lin lin, po fu thai ka nyin  
Phin phin on on mo mai jiu si chin . . .

Singkawang is a nice place to live  
Have money, don’t have money it’s the same  
Don’t look at the despicable me, I still have hope  
I hope Pak Kung is precise and gives a good number

Singkawang is a nice place to live.  
Have money, don’t have money, big, small, it’s the same  
Don’t look at him with disgust, he still has hope  
Reason being Pak Kung is precise and always right

Venture forth, continuously build swallow houses  
Put your money in the bank  
Pak kung must be exact, protect everyone  
Healthy and prosperous no problem

Appendix 2: Women’s Hardship Song

Amoi Kai Thung Khu¹²⁴

Khon to nyit teu moi ci nyin
Ja he an choi ko
Jit cak ko jit cak a nyong pun nyin ka kiung to
Mien to phen jiu tai nyi loi hiau kai sau nyi co
Mang ti loi teu thi fong li nyi jang loi chi to
Jit nyit ko jit nyit muk cip a nyong liu ten ha
Siong oi li khoi kia chin chit han jang choi buk kha
Sia sin con hi phien ja oii kong kau to theu ka
Ki tung ti kia moi ci ho un co ciu pa

Ngai chong li thiau ko pun nyi teu si oii he nyi teu ho
Hi mong nyi teu hiau pien sin
ng moi a nyong co
Nyi teu si oii ti nyin sang to kin kiu boi kin lo
Ng mau co teu ng ki tet sin ka ja mau tet to

Thian cu cang pun nyit thiau lu
nyi oi hang chiu loi
Ng mau hang teu pan lu hi boi fan to con loi . . .
Sui jan sang to jit cak nyin ja ng me an koi
Kok sa co kok sa ja mang hiau ti to chian choi

Women’s Hardship

If you look at you group of women
There is also sadness
One by one you are lied to by people
Brought by a friend who introduces work to you
You don’t realize until you get there that it is like this
Every day tears fall from your eyes
You think about leaving this family, but you keep staying in the house
You write a letter to your family lying that you have married a rich boss
They don’t know that their daughter has become a hostess in a bar.

I am singing this song for the good of you all
Hope you can change your hearts
And not do this kind of work anymore
You must know that as time goes by people get olders
Don’t work till you are delirious, and in the end still not have anything to show for it

¹²⁴ Amoi Kai Thung Khu performed by Obeng,
God has decided a way for you
You must go that way to the end
Don’t go half way and then return home
Even if becoming someone is not easy
Each of us also does not know when our fortune will come.